

## COMMENT

Points on playing and coaching from Squash Player editor Ian McKenzie

### COACHING OVERLOAD

It's all easy from the gallery. If only our player, the one we are supporting or advising, did this or that, we think they could just turn this match around. So we stroll in between games with complete confidence and dispense advice – and how rarely the ungrateful players follow our instructions. Superficially, it is simple, but in practice it is fraught with difficulty. Not that the advice is necessarily wrong – usually there is just too much of it – but we can't stop ourselves. Maybe we think we will restrict ourselves to a word on the mental aspects first, something motivational or positive. If our player's confidence is sagging, it is not the place for a lecture on the intricacies of technique – or if they are getting tense and distracted in their relationship with the

referee, there is little point in being elaborate on their deceptive game.

It is useful to know your pupil's personality and what they will respond to. The mental game is a consideration in trying to influence your player's behaviour. Awareness of a player's mental performance is something easily overlooked. I would refer readers to Peter Nicol's insightful article in last year's Issue 6 for one example of this.

Then there is analysis of the game's tactics. The number one tactic is length. Interestingly, Nicol commends Jonathon Power, an iconic attacking player, for his great length (see page 28) and who better to point that out?

Is there much point in continuing with more elaborate advice if a player has not got length? You could ask: "When was the last time your opponent took the ball off the back wall?" First, though, you may want to listen to the pupil's assessment of their own problems by asking: "How's it going?" Then select the key thing that is relevant to them. They may need to get a better length, hit harder, play faster or slower, volley to apply pressure, move their opponent more or attack more.

Ideally, if you work with them, you will have practised different parts of their games – different rallies, game types and speeds. It is no good saying "lob" – if your player has never practised lobbing or slowing a game down.

There may also be particular areas where the player is being caught out and their opponent keeps taking advantage.

There is often not much wrong with the advice; it is the player's ability to take it in and process it that is the problem. When they just want a breather, to refocus, remotivate and head into battle positively, their head is left spinning with advice. We often say too much. Remember, less is better. Probably one piece of advice

will do. Remember to listen, invite comment, be positive, be aware of the mental performance and keep it simple. All the other stuff can go into your debrief – you are debriefing, aren't you?

### IPHONE EDGE

At the Qatar PSA World Championship I was observing Borja Golan and was most impressed by his approach. He took the first game off Peter Barker and was obviously pleased, and seemed to be texting someone. Slightly premature, I thought, and remarkably nonchalant in the middle of a World Championship match.

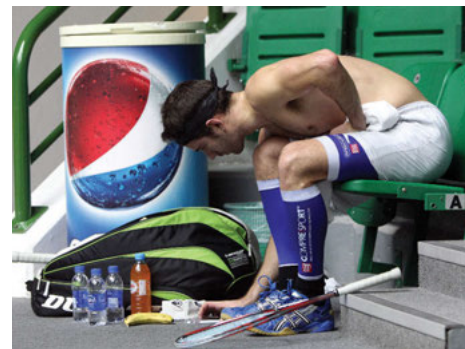
Golan lost his length in the next game, going short too much as Barker found his form. Back in his corner after the game, the Spaniard was checking his messages again. "Be more patient", they said. "Wait until the right time before you attack."

Golan did just that and the match turned. He built a 6-0 lead as Barker tried to carry on attacking, but, frustrated, the Englishman lost his cool completely. His Wilson racket flew down the court, smashing against the wall. It survived, but Barker didn't as Golan saw out that

game 11-3. "Keep cool," said the iPhone message. "Peter is struggling with his movement. Keep it hard."

Golan's long, skimming strides chased down Barker's fine shots as the Englishman pulled up in his movement. Golan won it 11-3 to go through to the quarter-finals, his best ever result.

It was the first time he



Borja Golan checks his iPhone during his Qatar PSA World Championship match with Peter Barker

had received text advice on his iPhone between games. "I can't afford to have a coach here with me," he said. "I was being advised by the Spanish player, Carlos Cornes, who was watching on TV in Spain. I didn't feel alone."

Interesting, isn't it? Interesting also that the player was in control of the advice he received.

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## Coaching Conference

Sixty-five coaches attended a productive two-day ESR Coaching Conference recently.

Workshops included 'leadership and coaching', 'developing squash in schools', 'increasing female participation', 'building a squash and racketball community', and 'finance, funding and fundraising'.

During the conference the ESR Coaching Awards – a unique opportunity to

celebrate the achievements of squash and racketball coaches around the country, plus the contribution they make – were announced.

The following coaches were recognised for their dedication and tireless commitment: Young Coach of the Year – Daniel McGinn (Cambridgeshire); Participation Coach of the Year – Linda Taylor (Leicestershire); Club Coach of the Year – Steve Townsend (Warwickshire); Elite Coach of the Year – Tim Vail (Hampshire); Special Recognition Award – Graham Stevenson (Sussex), who is pictured left receiving his award from ESR's Gayle Pink.

