

“I line it up – bang,
straight in the nick”

MY GAME:

In the first of a three-part series, Australian no.1 Cameron Pilley talks about his game to Ian McKenzie

What is your favourite shot?

My favourite shot is when I force an opponent to hit off the back wall, a nice big loopy one, and it rebounds onto my forehand. Then, no fakes, no delay, I line it up – bang, crosscourt, straight

in the nick. Sometimes on the forehand, when an opponent has been forced to pop the ball up, you can play it as well. I've practised it that much that I rarely make a mistake on it.

What is your favourite practice?

I really like my solo practice, grooving a certain shot or technique. One thing leads to another and I end up working on a particular shot. I don't go on court with a



Cameron Pilley lines up his favourite shot, the crosscourt nick

premeditated plan.

Over the course of the whole solo session I cover most shots. If I'm not [for example] feeling the backhand drop, I may end up practising it for 20 minutes until I think: "OK, that's feeling good now."

So if it is working well you move on; if it is not, you spend more time on it?

Yes, that's it. I enjoy a lot of on-court stuff, practice matches and condition games.

If I'm playing a top 60 player, I will try and play the best I can, although there may be particular things I am working on. If I am playing someone ranked lower, I will put restrictions on myself, although I don't tell them!

For example, I may say to myself: "In this game every time you get a volley opportunity play a volley drop." The next game I may say: "You can only play straight; everything is straight unless it is an obvious cross winner."

Sometimes I may concentrate on trying to set up the opportunity. For example, after I've played a clinging length, I'll look to play a volley drop. When the opportunity occurs, I will move over to the side wall (because a crosscourt from my opponent is unlikely, I don't need to cover it) and go, bang, volley drop. Or I will consciously try to play a nice lob and look to pounce on a weak boast or flicked straight one, with a drop or volley drop.

In the last six months I've practised a lot of backhand crosscourt lobs from the back (like Nick Matthew does). I throw the ball high back over to the forehand, because that is where I am trying to create opportunities. If they lift it, I can get onto it with the volley.

What does your fitness training involve?

I've changed this over the last six months and been playing some of my best squash. I've switched to on-

court stuff, using tough on-court condition training. This uses squash-specific movement. I'm doing this over and over with a ball and racket as you would in a match. I'm not doing ghosting, but using squash restrictions, all with the ball.

If possible, I do it with the highest level of player I can find - there are quite a few in Den Haag - and with my coach as well. We have a good bunch of guys: Laurens Jan Anjema, the Aussie Steve Finitsis, and two other Dutch players, Pedro Schweertman and Sebastiaan Weenink. They are all top 80 players.

What would be an example of a condition game?

One basic example would be to alternate straight drives and then boast whenever you want to. There are no area restrictions, but you play as tight as you can, because if you hit a loose one, the other guy can volley boast.

When you have boasted, you can look to volley your

partner's return. I try to simulate a match situation. If it is tight, you wouldn't volley it; if it is loose, you can.

After that [extending this practice] you could add a drop shot off the boast. So now I would have to cover the drop and the drive.

We usually do this for a set time, say five or 10 minutes. The rallies are long and if someone makes an error, you just pop it up and go (there is no serve). It is tough.

After 10 minutes we would have a quick drink and add something, say a crosscourt off the boast, so now when you boast, you have three options to cover - the crosscourt deep, the straight deep and the drop. You follow up and look to cut off the drives with a volley.

NEXT ISSUE:

Cameron Pilley explains how he uses SquashTV to analyse opponents' games and provides tips for the ambitious player.

COACHES' CORNER

KEMP SEIZES ASPIRE CHANCE

When Geoff Hunt, head squash coach at the Aspire Sport Academy in Qatar, moved into a consultancy role last September and fellow Australian Stuart Boswell replaced him, leaving the assistant coach position vacant, it was the chance Jonathan Kemp was looking for, writes Rod Gilmour.

The former world no.20 was happy with his head coach position at Ipswich Squash Club, having been there since 2012, but it does not possess the world-class facilities that Aspire does and Kemp admits he might well now end up spending a decade in Qatar, having moved to Doha with his New Zealand wife Jaclyn and their young daughter.

"You look at things long term and where your career might be going and this was too good an opportunity to turn down," Kemp said.

"There's working with a legend such as Geoff and the facilities that are probably the best in the world with bio mechanics, nutrition and sports science."

Boswell and Kemp work with 11 pupils at Aspire five

days a week, including 20-year-old Abdulla Al Tamimi, the world no.74 in the July list.

This year there are two juniors on the programme (discovered by Aspire's school talent ID programme) who have never played squash before.

"It is a challenge," Kemp says. "You have to combine working with different standards and teaching styles.

"The culture is different and it takes nurturing. Some of the new recruits don't necessarily have the hunger when they start out at Aspire, whereas in England they are seeing top squash the whole time and the players are the idols. It is all about educating them and making them aware of the sport."

Given that he is essentially running a world-class high

performance centre, Kemp knows he now has a platform on which to build his own career.

The 34-year-old says: "I always knew that I was going to coach and I almost prefer it to playing. I get a lot of satisfaction from seeing someone improve. There is a buzz seeing the juniors here laughing and loving coming to training after initially reserving enthusiasm."

Top tips

- Listen and learn. Try to understand why a player has come to you. Then give them the technical guidance
- Don't be dictatorial. Any improvement should come more from the player than you. If you can show them something straightaway and they feel an improvement, it will hold them in better stead
- Steer away from anything that looks like it's going to impinge on a player's movement or ability to stay relaxed

