

# MATCH POINTS

*Egypt's Mohamed ElShorbagy talks squash with Ian McKenzie*



**IM: What is your favourite shot?**

**ME:** The forehand, crosscourt volley nick. I'd be a great doubles partner for Ramy [Ashour], as his favourite is the backhand one!

**IM: You would be unbeatable. In your game are there particular opportunities you look out for in playing this shot?**

**ME:** I think players know I play the ball fairly hard on the forehand and when I hit it straight, they sometimes have to lift it and then I get an opportunity to go for it. Really, you try to force a weak ball before attacking, but as it is my favourite shot, I have the confidence to go for it, even if I am not in a perfect position!

**IM: Generally, do you hit it from in front of the short line?**

**ME:** Yes and sometimes off the serve.

**IM: How do you set up opportunities to attack? Do they just pop up or can you read them early from a player's position?**

**ME:** I do look for the volley nick opportunities, but generally I concentrate on taking the ball early and unsettling my opponent.

However, to give you an example, there have been a number of 'lefties' on tour and generally you try to play to their backhands.

Over the years, I have learned to do this to Peter Barker and LJ [Anjema], and I tried to do it to Amr Shabana, but I couldn't control the ball and he always switched

me back to his forehand. He did this with all the players.

One of my shots is a straight kill length [a dying length]. So, when I get the ball on my forehand and play this shot straight, opponents have to get to it before it dies in the back of the court. Often they are forced to lift the ball and that is when I can go for the volley attack.

**IM: I saw you practising your forehand volley drop today in the middle of a match while you were waiting for a decision. Why did you do that?**

**ME:** That is because I was not happy with the length of my straight forehand. Sometimes, when there is a shot that is not working on the day, you want to do something different. I was just developing a little confidence on the volley by playing a few.

**IM: When you practise that shot, is it solo or with a partner?**

**ME:** Mainly I do it solo on that one.

**IM: Who do you practise with?**

**ME:** I mainly train in Bristol. I'm on court with my brother, Marwan, [coach] Hadrian [Stiff], Todd Harrity, Youssef Soliman, Peter Creed (who has now moved to Bristol) and quite a group of players. I like it there; it's a great city. I'll be there for a few years yet.

**IM: What would be an example of one of your favourite practices?**

**ME:** A simple one is where we practise

straight lengths and include a straight drop - drive, drive, drop. You can develop this further by allowing different shots from the drop. You can use a lob straight or crosscourt. The player coming in looks to volley drop, but has two options to cover.

**IM: How do you get advice on your game and plan for your matches?**

**ME:** David Palmer is advising me and we speak before every match. He watches my matches, even if they are at 3am. It is very important to have that support. Not every day is going to be great.

**IM: You are a strong hitter off a short swing. How did you learn to do that?**

**ME:** I'm not sure. It was just something I had when I was younger. Maybe it was from a lot of solo practices. It is nice to have an unorthodox technique; sometimes it is harder for the other players to read it, as long as it is not exposed as a weakness. Every player has something different. It is just their technique.

**IM: It is fast, but don't you have to time it right?**

**ME:** Well, even with a big swing you have to time it right. My swing is not big, but at the contact point I have an open racket face and I get it right.

**NEXT TIME:** Mohamed talks about tactics, reading an opponent's personality, studying video, developing game plans A, B and C, and how he is coping with the players providing a new threat.