

Mohamed Elshorbagy, the youngest player in the world's top 10, discusses his game with *The Squash Player* in part one of a two-part article. He was the World Open runner-up in 2012 and has just won his first World Series event in Qatar, following it up with victory in the Sky Open in Cairo. An Egyptian, he is based in Bristol.

What is your favourite shot?

Forehand crosscourt volley into the nick. I think the other players know that.

When do you play this?

Sometimes it pops up, sometimes I try and set up the opportunity.

How would you set it up?

I think I will keep that to myself.

What is your favourite practice?

I like to do a lot of conditioning games, including fast ones with volleys. An example would be playing a backcourt game with a volley short. You can hit any ball to the back and the only ball you can hit short is the volley.

What does your practice session involve?

I do a lot of movement training in my court sessions. It is important for me. I'm a big guy and I need to keep doing my movement routines in every practice and do it well. I do a lot of tennis-ball feeding. It's a bit like I'm a football goalkeeper. The ball is thrown or bounced my way and I have to catch it or pick it up and return it. Sometimes the throw is slow, sometimes fast to test my reactions. I do this with Hadrian Stiff in Bristol and sometimes before matches. If I don't have my brother Marwan available, my mother does it for me. I also do the stuff with my racket like other players, simple stuff, straight drives and crosscourts. I practise front and back, and make sure my nicks are working well. Now it is more important what you do physically than in the squash session. In the squash session we can all hit drives and drop shots. The mental side of the game is also important. It's important to consider how you can improve that side of your game.

Who do you practise with?

I practise with my brother. He is my best training partner. We are on court twice a day, say, five days a week. I also work with Hadrian Stiff, my coach, and I talk to Jonah Barrington on the phone. When I train with another training partner, we just train. I can't really talk about tactics with them, but when I practise with my brother, we can talk about tactics. It is like two minds working together. We can trust each other.

Are there particular things you concentrate on in practice matches?

It depends. Often I concentrate on particular things. Perhaps I will volley more or just hit straight drives and when I get the opportunity, the straight drop. Sometimes I slow down the pace, sometimes I play at a fast pace. Sometimes when I am tired, I will try to play at a faster pace, so I can push myself mentally. It varies.

Do you practise setting up rallies?

Sometimes. Every player has his own style, although you learn from other players. I'm the youngest there, so I am learning more.

Are there things you want to improve?

Yes, I'm always trying to learn. And I have people to help me and tell me what I do wrong. Before the summer training I get a pen and paper out with my coaches and mother, and write down the stuff I did wrong in the season. This was my mother's idea.

Has your mother played squash?

No, she has never played, but she understands the game. When I was young, nine to 13 years old, I was coached by Gamal Awad. Whenever I was on court

with him, he would also take my mother on court. He would tell me what to do and at the same time he would tell my mother why he was telling me to do that. He was teaching both of us, me with the racket and my mother without a racket. That is why she understands the game. He used to always tell her "You are his manager, so you need to have understanding".

If you were advising a player on how to improve their game, what tips would you give them?

It depends on their age. If they were 11 or 12, I would say just go on court and go for your shots. Don't worry about a defensive attitude and the drives. They're not going to improve that much at that age. To improve at that age, go for your shots. You cannot improve your nicks and shots when you are 19 or 20 years of age. It is always harder then. Improving your length and crosscourt, and having a strong attitude and being patient can come when you are 18 and 19 and you are maturing. That's the way I did it.

