

The trouble with Ramy

Ramy Ashour talks exclusively to Squash Player about the hamstring problems which have blighted his recent tournaments

Ramy Ashour – the most talented squash player of his generation – has a worrying hamstring problem that is threatening his chances of regaining the world no.1 ranking in 2014.

Injuries have disrupted the Egyptian's career ever since he won his first world title back in 2008, but he seemed to have conquered them in 2012-13 as he went a year without defeat in major competition (the first time this has been achieved since Jansher Khan in the 1990s).

However, that magnificent run came to a grinding halt at the World Championship in Manchester, when he was forced to retire in the third game of his semi-final against eventual champion Nick Matthew.

Afterwards the devastated 26-year-old

top seed revealed the cause of his withdrawal as a hamstring injury which had also bothered him in his third-round match against Cameron Pilley.

He also revealed that he had been "getting fatigue" in his hamstrings "for quite a while" due to the alignment of his hips and had been trying to keep this at bay with "a lot of therapy", ice paths and pills "to relax the muscles".

Ashour immediately flew back to Qatar for further investigation, but when Squash Player contacted Ashour to see if the doctors there had been able to solve the problem, he disclosed they had been unable to.

"Actually neither I understand nor the doctors in Germany, Qatar or England know what the problem is," he said.

"They have all put forward lots of possibilities as to the cause and solutions. I have worked on these, but none of them have given me a definitive answer on the reasons for my injury.

"There is no magic bullet. What they unanimously agree on, though, is that I overuse my body and this leads to my injury. But again it's all possibilities.

"All I can do now and have been doing is to go with the exercises and routines they have given me and hope it won't come back again."

Squash Player asked physio Phil Newton, of the Lilleshall Clinic, if he could shed any light on Ashour's persistent hamstring problems.

"Pain in the hamstrings isn't always a consequence of a local muscle problem," he said. "Numerous issues can be at the root of recurrent 'hamstring' pain. These include back, pelvic and hip joint problems and in many cases there are a number of factors in play.

"The key starting point is to get a comprehensive programme of investigations completed. In most cases these investigations come back with a whole list of negatives. This isn't a bad thing, though, as it gives the rehab team a blank canvas and plenty of confidence to address any physical issues that have been thrown up by a thorough functional assessment.

"Such an assessment needs to be based not only on a physical examination, but also on the way that Ramy uses his body in everyday life, training and of course when at tournaments."

This opinion is echoed by Hadrian Stiff, coach to Mohamed Elshorbagy, movement expert and director of the Elite Squash school in Bristol.

"For me this appears to be a movement problem," he said. "Ramy functions unusually high on his toes, which engages his hamstrings even when waiting on the T. This combined with movement timing issues into and out of the shot causes more pushing off the toes and fatigue into the hamstring.

"His behaviour of foot contact being so toe-driven seems at the heart of the matter to me. Until this movement culture changes, I can't see the problem being unravelled, which is a sad prospect for the sport."

It seems almost inevitable then that unless the elusive cause to Ashour's persistent hamstring problem is diagnosed, he will be forced into trying to manage it, with the consequence being potential and unpredictable flare-ups, which would be a great shame.



A distraught Ramy Ashour attempts to explain to the press his injury problems after withdrawing from the World Championship