

THE PLATE COACH

Tara Mardigan, nutritionist to fast-rising American Amanda Sobhy, tells Mike Dale about the world no.7's new dietary regime



Tara Mardigan

become the first American-born finalist at a PSA World Series event, it had the look of a breakthrough moment.

After backing up that achievement in New York by winning the Greenwich International, she rose to a career-high world no.7. Aged only 22, her trajectory now

seems certain to continue upwards.

There are often many aspects to such rapid

accelerations in progress and one of the catalysts for Sobhy's is undoubtedly her recent partnership with nutritionist Tara Mardigan.

The pair only met just before Christmas, but they hit it off immediately and the dietary improvements she has made have paid immediate dividends.

The major changes have been when, as well as what, she eats, as Mardigan explains: "We paid greater attention to the timing relative to her matches and practice sessions. Now, rather than just eating at fairly regular mealtimes, she's being really intentional about eating when her body responds best.

"For her, that's four hours before a match. For others, it may be three or less. It's been about finding that sweet spot that works and, most importantly of all, hitting it consistently.

"The 30-45 minute window after a match is also critical. That may be the precise time when a player is meeting with the coach or speaking to the media, but the priority must also be getting in recovery nutrition, ideally some carbohydrate and a little bit of protein. A banana, a handful of nuts or chocolate milk is great; anything that digests quickly to replenish muscles efficiently.

"We've also been

When Amanda Sobhy scorched into the final of January's Tournament of Champions to



Powerful Plates

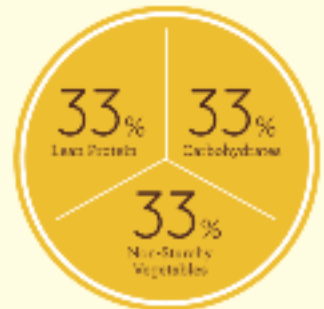
Checklist

- Slow your eating pace.
- Use healthy fats for cooking or on top of vegetables/salad. A little goes a long way.
- Hydrate with water.
- Flavor with spices, not excess salt.
- Need to gain weight? Have another plate, keep the same proportions.
- Need to lose weight? Try a smaller-sized salad plate. Add a full sized plate or big bowl of non-starchy vegetables alongside the salad plate.
- Corn, peas, potato, sweet potato, plantains, yuca and all starchy root vegetables count as carbohydrates, not vegetables.
- Choose high fiber (at least 4g per serving) carbohydrates unless right before or after intense exercise.
- Paint Your Plate. The more color the better.

Endurance



Strength + Endurance



Healthy Weight



Less Active



adjusting the amount she eats based on that day's activity. If she's had a day off, we minimise carbohydrates at dinner, but if she's been training intensively or at a tournament, she must get those carbohydrates in!"

colours on the plate, the better too; so plenty of vibrant fruit and vegetables, plus protein from different sources, higher fibre carbohydrates, healthy fats, hydration and even high-quality sweets, such as dark chocolate, in moderation."

Sobhy's coach, Thierry Lincou, who, as resident squash coach at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, occupied the next-door office to the basketball coach, Larry Anderson. As a client of Mardigan's, Anderson had

have an idea about the movement, energy expenditure, strength, stamina and agility involved." So can Sobhy's dietary changes account completely for her recent breakthrough on the PSA World Tour, even though they only began just

Amanda Sobhy (right) and her sister, Sabrina consult on their diet at the U.S. Open



Mardigan, who was nutritionist for the world champion Boston Red Sox baseball team for a decade before starting The Plate Coach, her own consultancy practice, advised Sobhy to reduce her reliance on energy bars, supplements and sports drinks.

"Although in moderation these products probably aren't a big deal, they are highly processed and may have ingredients that are pro-inflammatory, counter-productive to a high-level athlete diligently trying to keep the body strong," she said.

"Amanda certainly wasn't eating junk food before I met her, but we've switched emphasis to what I'd call 'real food'. The fewer ingredients the better; sweet potato, carrots and high-quality yoghurt. The more

Together they have drawn up a list of healthy, portable snacks, like trail mix for when Sobhy is away from home. She now sends Mardigan pictures of each meal using telehealth software called Fruit Street and Mardigan gives her feedback on her choices and timing.

"Amanda's fascinated by it all. She's my star pupil!" Mardigan says. "When we first met, she told me she wants to be world no.1 and would do anything to get there. She's incredibly ambitious.

"What I love about working with her is that she doesn't just say 'Tell me what to do.' She's inquisitive. We'll discuss the reasons why I suggest a particular food, and she'll rush off and try it that same night."

The pair met through

lost lots of weight. Her business card soon changed hands.

"It was never about weight for Amanda, though," she says. "Our biggest goal is upgrading to real, unprocessed, simple food and finding ways to eat it consistently, which is hard for travelling athletes who are often in hotels, restaurants and airports."

Mardigan recently co-authored an athletes' cookbook, *Real Fit Kitchen*, which discusses this focus on real food and simple preparations to fuel an active body.

Mardigan watched all Sobhy's matches at the ToC. Prior to this, she knew very little about squash, but found it hugely enjoyable and instructive.

"It was really helpful to watch," she said. "I now

before Christmas?

"Can it have such an immediate effect? I believe it can," says Mardigan. "But it's not just me saying that. People have commented that's she's looking stronger.

"But really I'm doing nothing more than supporting her incredible hard work in physical conditioning and preparation. Our goal is to decrease inflammation and increase energy, stamina and mental focus so she can be the strongest athlete she can possibly be."

REFERENCE

Telehealth website: www.fruitstreet.com

Book: *Real Fit Kitchen* Available on Amazon. ISBN: 978-1592336906

Tara's website: theplatecoach.com