

MY GAME JOELLE KING

Rod Gilmour talks to the New Zealander about her return to the world's top 10 after falling out of the top 50 following six months on the sidelines after rupturing her Achilles tendon

How have you adapted your game after your lengthy injury break ?

With the change to a lower tin and coming back on tour, all of a sudden I am seeing the game differently. There is a huge difference and you have to be a lot more attacking. Before my injury my biggest strengths were power and physicality. Now, you can't rely on them and where I was before has no relevance, because the game has changed. It is more explosive.

How have you changed your training?

In condition games we play a game where the server can only play long and the receiver can only go short. You have to attack a lot more from the back, which was never a strength of mine. The condition also means that you have to volley short. The Kiwi culture has always been to be physical: length, length, length and push your opponent back. That isn't how the game is played any more. The Egyptians go short from anywhere – and with confidence.

Can you give an example of how you practise for this?

Perhaps my coach, Paul Hornsby, will feed me some balls and I will try to develop a hold [to give myself different options] and then push short or set up for a drive and then take it in short. These are subtleties in my game that I am now working on. Getting familiar with them, with repetitive balls, is the key.

As you've got older, how has your practice changed?

There's certainly more quality in my training and more target practice. To improve, your accuracy has to get better and that's where my practice has gone. I try to vary things and I do a lot of solo work. I believe you learn a lot by doing this; you get the feel and touch of the ball on the strings, and

the angles of the court. A classic routine is to have three targets down each side for a dying length, a containing length and a straight-lob length. I might hit to those 20 times each in turn and then vary it by making a decision on which one to aim for. If I don't hit the target, it doesn't count.

How committed are you in your solo sessions?

You have to be honest with yourself and that's where the dedication and mental strength come in. After all, there's no one judging you. My sports psychologist likes to call it "my little honey-badger sessions", where at the end of a long pressure session I will do the target practice, even though I am hungry, tired or want to get off the court. In your own mind it's about doing everything you can to be ready for the next day.

What is your favourite shot?

I love a straight forehand kill when I have time, with a ball sitting up that you can cut down and put power on. I'd love to say it was a nick, though!

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FACTFILE

World ranking: 9 (August 2016)

Lives: Cambridge, New Zealand

Clubs: Cambridge and Hamilton

Racket: Head Cyano 135

Shoes: Asics

Sponsors: Ashaway, Asics, Head, Honda NZ, Sport NZ, Squash NZ, Usana.

What is your current off-court fitness like?

Here's one for you: a 1km run on the treadmill, get straight on the bike and do 90 calories as fast as you can. It's all about the higher the load, the faster you get it down. Working down, it's then back for an 800m run on the machine and a 70-calorie bike ride, 600m run, 50-calorie bike ride etc. It's continuous and your time is the total time it takes to do both. After the 10-calorie bike ride, you finish off with a brutal 1km run. In all, it's a shade under 30 minutes of hell. The feeling on the legs doing both is quite squash-specific and mirrors the endurance and 'jelly legs' you sometimes get in matches.