

WORKSHOP



DREW'S Diagnosis

High Performance
Coach Lee Drew on
topical issues

EL SHERBINI'S AWARENESS

Nour El Sherbini keeps racking up titles and accolades. There is so much to wax lyrical about when you watch her play squash. She has a subtle hold in her swing, she constantly has the ball running away from the opponent, she conjures winners from anywhere on the court, and she can play her best squash in major finals. Here I am going to focus on another attribute; her awareness.

I am struck by El Sherbini's understanding of the situation. She knows when she is dominating and understands when she needs to adapt and change what she is doing.

When a ball is new and lively, or the court conditions are hot, you will see her play with measured accuracy, taking on drops only when in prime positions. When the ball loses its life, starts to die and is harder to get to the back, you see her respond immediately, using the kill and attacking to the front.



When she is struggling physically and the opponent is dominating, El Sherbini often attacks from unlikely positions, often yielding many points and getting her ahead in the game. Her ability to read the state of play is truly world class.

This awareness undoubtedly comes from years of experience, but there are many players of similar vintage who lack this understanding. Becoming aware of the state of play is a very difficult skill to learn because our natural inclination is to focus internally: what we are doing, how we are hitting the ball and how we are feeling. This distracts from thinking about our opponent's position, the space on the court and the best shot to hit in specific circumstances.

If we've looked after our preparation and position on the ball, it affords us crucial extra seconds to think tactically and improve our awareness of external factors which can positively influence our actions.

On court, notice if you are spending any time thinking about the following:

- What are the conditions like?
Is there life in the ball or not?
- What does your opponent struggle to deal with? Moving to the front, turning or slowing the ball down?
- Are you aware of your opponent's position?
- How often do you pick the best space to hit the ball into?