

# The Marine's Corps



Former world champion David Palmer explains to Rod Gilmour how he has transformed the fortunes of South African Steve Coppinger and Colombia's Miguel Angel Rodriguez in his new role as a coach

**N**ot for nothing was David Palmer nicknamed 'The Marine'.

Now, two years after retiring, the Australian is offloading every ounce of energy he spent on court in his new role as coach to several current players. The results have been startling, not least with Steve Coppinger and Miguel Angel Rodriguez.

From his base in Orlando, Florida – he moved there from Boston in 2010 – Palmer's Academy works alongside his primary job of assisting two families' offspring, one of whom, 15-year-old Chloe Chemtob, was included in Canada's team for the World Junior Championships.

Luckily for Palmer, 37, the families are open to the Australian bringing in professionals. It means that he is often working 10-hour days at the impressive RDV Sportsplex Athletic Club in Florida, a centre that Palmer "wished I had in my career".

His coaching ethos is a four-pronged approach, split up into physical, mental, technical and tactical. "They are the basic areas of the game and things we worked on when I was coached first by Joe Shaw, then Shaun Moxham," said Palmer, who also has Australian Matthew Karwalski and Hong Kong's Max Lee under his wing, all intermittently.

Together with fitness guru Ryan McKenzie, who helped Palmer in the last two years of his career, the pair put the professionals through a series of tests when they first arrive, eking out where their strengths and weaknesses lie.

"I saw guys who were very good in practice and you'd think they can cope

with a top-20 place," Palmer said. "But come the PSA Tour and the matches that mattered, they found it tough under pressure.

"People say it's all in the head, but when I ask them what kind of mental training is being done, the usual answer is 'none'," explained Palmer, who says it accounts for 25 percent of the game.

Palmer is clearly instilling these 'win at all costs' methods that secured his two world titles. "There are positive affirmations to read, first thing in the morning and last thing at night," he revealed. "It is all aimed at trying to get past that block in your subconscious and make sure you can overcome physical exertions in training."

The mental side, he believes, is also the most under-developed part of the game. "It's what separates the top players, whereby they will hit winning shots under pressure more regularly than the lower-ranked player by not over-complicating matters."

Palmer and Moxham used to come up with sayings during his playing days to combat this. Remember his traits? Twiddling the strings or pulling his shoe tongues before a point? Well, they were mental actions he used, before taking a

fleeting moment to whisper positive sayings at crucial times.

In Orlando, Palmer lets his charges have a go at their own wording. "It's stuff that you wouldn't say out loud, as people will think you are boasting. 'I will be world champion' ... 'I will be the Colombian champion' ... 'I will make the quarter-finals'. If it is read or said over and over in pressure situations, then it can make a difference."

Palmer adds: "A lot of it harks back to the technical and tactical side, such as playing the right shot at the right time."

Then comes the physical side, based around aspects such as five, 15-minute periods of training, or 300 court sprints, five times in a row. "It is what is required to win these big tournaments and to be able to do it for five days," Palmer said.

At the club there is a 50-yard astro turf area where sprint training is conducted and the facilities are such that a cold plunge pool and jacuzzi can also be found in the locker rooms. "The guys take full advantage of it and so I try to give them as full a package as possible," he said.

The perfect venue, coupled with Palmer's expertise, clearly seems to be making a big difference so early in his tenure as a coach.

## WORLD TEAMS REPORT



David Palmer's comeback target at the World Team Championship was two-fold – to help Australia retain their funding and to see if he could still cut it at the top level. Both were accomplished in Mulhouse, although the Aussie stalwart was disappointed not to see off Egypt's Omar Mosaad in the semi-finals and make it five successive wins. Australia finished fourth.



David Palmer (right) passing on a few words of advice to protégé Stephen Coppinger