

MATCH POINTS

In part three of a new series, Egypt's Mohamed ElShorbagy continues to talk squash with Ian McKenzie



“Movement is always important to me.”

IM: *It seems to me that in your game you want to dominate immediately. You are not too bothered about hitting a good length, getting your opponent back and setting up rallies. Is that true?*

ME: Some matches I can't go out and dominate because my opponent is playing so well. Maybe you're at the back, doing the running, and your opponent is controlling you. That is where the mental strengths have to come into play, as you may be feeling more tired than your opponent. If you keep getting every ball back, your opponent will think 'Gosh, I have to hit this lower and lower'. But, to do that, you have to get one or two extra shots back every rally and it is tough to do that for a whole match.

IM: *When you want to put pressure on your opponent, deprive them of time and bustle them, what shots do you use?*

ME: You try to get as tight as possible and use different angles. You hold the ball and make your opponent do that extra movement. With most players, it is about who is going to hit to the back a lot, thus preventing your opponent from volleying and from making you run.

IM: *What do you do to stop your opponent volleying? Hit a lot of low shots?*

ME: Not necessarily. Maybe I'd play a high, tight shot. You don't have to use power; you can also use control and accuracy.

IM: *What are you trying to improve and develop in your game?*

ME: It is always small margins at the top of the game; they can have a huge effect. Movement is always important to me, because I'm not one of the smallest guys on court. If my movement is not good, I will lose a lot of my games.

I am now developing in the right direction. The important thing for me is taking the ball early. You can't get everything perfect, but in every match you have to try to find a way to win – that is what the best players in every sport do. They are not the best in their sport because they play all their matches when they are at their best; it is because they know how to win matches when they are not at their best. I think I do that better than anyone right now, but one day someone will do it better than me. I have won a lot of finals not because I was the best player, but because I was the player who stayed strong until the end when my opponent was playing better squash than me. There are moments when you have to use your experience and strengths to find a way to win.

IM: *Do you have a tip for the younger player?*

ME: Try to win every match. When I was coming through the ranks, I was always

trying to beat everyone I came up against. There is a difference between respecting a top player and giving too much respect. Perhaps I shouldn't say this, but I like to make things hard for myself. I enjoy my opponent trying to beat me and not giving me too much respect on court. I want them to go at me and make me work. I want to make sure that if they are going to beat me, they are going to have to work so hard for it. I am an athlete. I enjoy making it hard for myself. It is what I do.

IM: *And what tip would you give the club player?*

ME: I would tell them to enjoy the sport as long as they can, because one day their body is not going to let them. Try to take the most out of it. It is a great sport. You meet different people every day and play different players. We are all lucky to be part of it, whether you are a fan, club member or professional.

Parts one and two of Mohamed ElShorbagy's Match Points series are in issues SP192 and SP193 respectively, and are available on SP digital.