

# MARVELLOUS MARTIN

*Ian McKenzie continues his talk with Rodney Martin with more on coaching, tactics, opponents and game plans*



Rodney Martin coaches his protégé Abdulla Al-Tamimi at September's Qatar Classic

**It was all my fault. I shouldn't have done it. In conversation with Aussie legend Rodney Martin, I gently introduced the topic of the PSA's ban on coaching players in the breaks between games. There was an explosion. He disappeared in a cloud of smoke. In amongst the loud invective, I caught the words 'ridiculous' and 'idiotic'.**

The smoke cleared a bit. I looked around to check for the emergency exits while the 57-year-old former World Open champion continued. "Every other sport except tennis, which is now changing, has coaching," he said (expletives removed). "We should be using this coaching angle more on TV and getting more opinions. It should be used to help people understand the sport."

Moving on, we discussed what a coach can achieve by talking to his or her players between games, hatching game plans and where players can get into trouble.

"There are certain areas from which a player controls the game," says Martin. "That is why they are good. If you can take that area away from them, they can become average because they are not used to not having that area."

Martin's strong feelings about in-game coaching stem from the fact he sees his

role as not just preparing players for competition but also being involved in the tactical confrontation.

We will now be able to see exactly how effective that input is for his players, because the PSA's 'no coaching policy' has been rescinded.

Martin's role is not just coaching and training someone up (although this is important), it is also about developing a clear game plan which is adapted for each opponent. This is reviewed post-match and honed for next time. It is an ongoing process.

"Many players don't analyse things like where they could get into trouble," Martin explains. "For example, an opponent is good at certain things – perhaps he is fast, or hits the ball hard or is a great volleyer. You need to understand that you have an opponent who is good in these areas. How are you going to keep

the ball away from where he can hurt you, but also expose his weaknesses? The coach has to work out how they are going to talk to their player before the match [and now during it] to develop this plan."

Last summer, Martin's top professionals Nouran Gohar (who returned to world no.1 in June), world no.6 Marwan ElShorbagy and Qatar's top player, Abdulla Al-Tamimi, put in three sessions a day at his New England training base.

After an early run and breakfast, they went on court for "drills, restricted stuff, feeding and coaching stuff". In the afternoon they played matches, restricted games or solo, drills work and gym sessions.

In his coaching, Martin has to adapt to individual needs and differences, but he likes to emphasise the fundamentals and get them right.

***"With Adulla, for example, we have worked on his movement to the ball, position at the ball, his technique on both sides and his preparation. He now has more options.***

"These are fundamentals of coaching but people have lost them because it is now easier to improvise [you couldn't improvise as easily with wooden rackets]."

"I thought Al-Tamimi needed to step away from Qatar a bit more. I have created a training environment here which is healthy for him to be a part of. I think it has worked. He has worked hard and has matured."

Martin would like to work with some Australians again. Several have previously based themselves with him in the USA, including his coaching partner Ryan Cuskelly. Martin misses the time of Australian dominance. "When I played, at one stage we had seven of the top 10 men," he laments.

He has now reacquainted himself with the Australian Institute of Sport where his old pupil Stewart Boswell is in charge. He says he "may get involved again."

"Unfortunately there is not the depth of player in Australia now, so they need to get away to grow as players," he adds. "They need to get on Tour and do their apprenticeship."

Martin's work with players is intensive and forensic. We look forward to getting a glimpse of his impact on professionals between games on the PSA World Tour now that their "\*\*\*\*\* ridiculous rules" have been relaxed.

*Part one of our interview with Rodney Martin was in 2023 Issue 1*