



## SKILLS & TECHNIQUE

# Make Your Points



**The NRL's most successful kicker, HAZEM EL MASRI, on how to convert that try**

**T**hanks an all-powerful kick, Hazem El Masri is league's top points scorer. The current world record holder for most points scored in a career and in an individual season talks us through making those all-important conversions:

### GET FOCUSED QUICKLY

Even if I've scored the try, I'm not celebrating as much as the other guys. I'm thinking about the angle of the kick and the wind conditions. I throw grass in the air to check the wind, although it's difficult because in some stadiums the wind swirls around.

### PREPARATION IS YOUR ALLY

I still get nervous, especially because these days people expect me to score. I make sure I've put in enough hours in practice so I'm ready to deal with it.

### USE THE CROWD

I listen to the crowd and use what they're saying to help motivate me. The more they shout things at me, the more I like to prove them wrong.

### RHYTHM METHOD

I put the ball on the tee [to expose the sweet spot] a bit flatter than a lot of

kickers and visualise the kind of kick I want. Then I try to get into my usual rhythm; the same rhythm as all my practice kicks. I take five steps back and a couple to the side so you run up in an arc. When I kick the ball, I plant my left foot close to the ball and flow through with the right, keeping my weight forward. Some players check the kick, but it's best to follow right through. I keep my eyes there for a split second, before looking to see that the ball's gone where I wanted. I can tell straightaway if I've hit a good one.

### NOT TOO MUCH

I started off playing football, so kicking is a natural thing to me. Coaching clinics are a good idea, but it's important not to overdo it. I used to kick lots every day and just got worse and worse – and there's a chance you can get injured doing that as well. Now during the season, I don't do more than 20-30 kicks a week. In the off-season, when I get back off holiday, I look at videos of old matches to remind myself what I need to do.



## MENTAL STRENGTH LOUD AND CLEAR

**Gold Coast Titans coach JOHN CARTWRIGHT on the art of the team talk**

**O**nce you get to the ground and it's a couple of hours before kick-off, you know everything you can possibly do to win the game is done. The main thing with a team talk, especially if you're just about to take to the field, is you've got to be organised and really just have one or two points that you want to push. I talk about team and personal goals. If we achieve those, we win 95 per cent of the time.

### What state of mind do players need to be in for a game?

I like them to be relaxed. You've got to know your side. Some teams need to be revved up before they run out – they like the hype. But my guys like to be focused and relaxed.

### Do different teams have different characters?

Definitely. The only other factor is if the players have personal issues they don't talk to you about. Sometimes you never find out if that's the case – or only after a game. But if you've got three or four guys who are, for some reason, off their game, that can really affect a side and how it goes.

### What's a common mistake made in team talks?

You can try and put too much into it. Rugby league is a very fast game with not a lot of time to think. You've got to know what works for individual players, just keep things as brief and natural as possible. One mistake I make, and I'm sure other coaches do as well, is trying to jam too much into a talk. If you try to talk any longer than 10-15

minutes – there's a group of a minimum 17 guys – 10-15 minutes is pretty well max before you start to lose them. Keep it down to what you need to do well to win games, and you can normally get that down to about three points.

### At half-time, do you know what you're going to say?

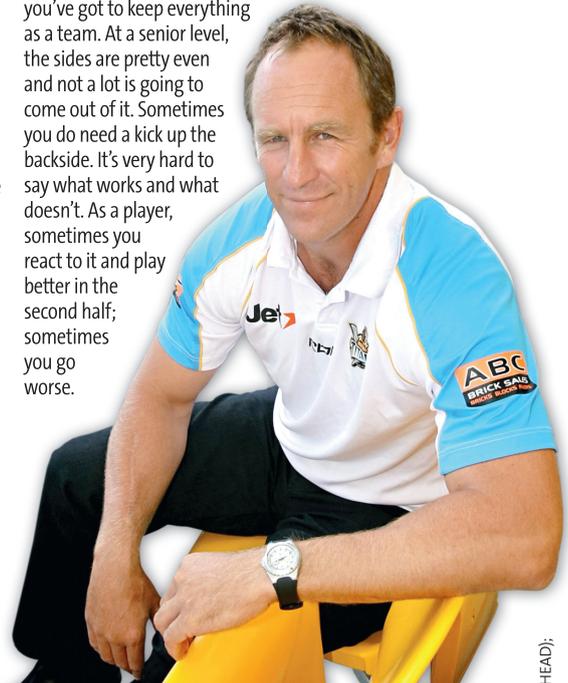
Half-time can be funny – it can be a bit more emotional than other times and you go in with a plan of what to say, where we've been good, where we've been bad and what we need to do to win. Sometimes your emotions can come into play a little bit. When that happens, it's a good thing, it's natural, but you can't get personal when you do a team talk; you've got to keep everything as a team. At a senior level, the sides are pretty even and not a lot is going to come out of it. Sometimes you do need a kick up the backside. It's very hard to say what works and what doesn't. As a player, sometimes you react to it and play better in the second half; sometimes you go worse.

### You don't single anyone out?

Very rarely. If an individual is not aiming up, I try to talk to him on his own. But, generally, at half-time you just want to make sure no-one's carrying any injuries. We look at the goals we set before the game: are we on track to achieve them? Do people have any issues in defence? Are they beating us down one side?

### How would you approach an amateur team talk?

You can never take the enjoyment out of the game. At an amateur level, that's very important, but even pro players have to enjoy it. I also like to break down games into very small parts and set goals, so it becomes measurable.



## INNOVATION

# KICK IT



**WHAT** Nike Total 90 Shoot II

**PRICE** \$100

**THEY SAY** "Designed for superior ball control and shooting accuracy, the Nike Total90 Shoot II indoor-court men's soccer shoe is the ultimate footwear for use on indoor surfaces."

**WE SAY** These are the best indoor football shoes we've ever seen: light and supple enough to allow the mobility and sharpness you need, with a sole like a squash shoe for better grip. They also have a reinforced leather upper like a boot, to help get power behind shots.

PHOTOGRAPHY: BRETT COSTELLO (MASRI KICK); MELANIE RUSSELL (MASRI HEAD); MICHAEL ROSS (CARTWRIGHT).