

# The keys to free Stosur

## How Sam can banish her Aussie woes

MICHAEL KELLY

THE television broadcast was tough to watch. Sam Stosur was playing China's Zheng Jie at the 2013 Australian Open, leading 5-2 in the third and deciding set.

And then she mentally melted, losing the set 7-5 and the match, double-faulting on match point.

There is no doubt that Stosur is a talented tennis player. Yet there is significant doubt that she has the mental grit to not, once again, self-destruct at this month's Australian Open.

Stosur displays significant self-doubt about her tennis game, which is evident through her body language and stroke play in matches, in her body language and speaking at post-match press conferences, and in her print media comments.

In December 2012 and January 2013, and from December 1, 2013, to the present, I've analysed Stosur's body language and speech.

Examples of her self-doubt include:

Repeatedly using qualifier words and phrases when referring to her performances. Her commentary included: "So hopefully I can really pick up and play well." (A desperate, wishful statement — hoping something would be conjured up, magically, to improve her form.)

Stunned and defensive facial expressions, and defensive body language, at post-match press conferences.

In press conferences at the Apia and Brisbane tournaments (leading up to the 2013 Australian Open), Stosur displayed: pained eyes at the start of the Apia conference, conveying the loss had inflicted a deep, emotional wound on her; several instances of pressed lips, conveying disapproval and defensiveness; defensively fixing arms in front of her body.

Overall, Stosur's manner disclosed she wanted a quick end to the conferences.

In match play, as pressure



Sam Stosur has struggled at the Australian Open.

increases, Stosur's rate of unforced errors increases.

She snaps at key moments in matches. An example of snapping was her three double-faults in one service game late in a recent Hopman Cup match against Flavia Pennetta.

Her panic causes Stosur to quicken and over-hit strokes, resulting in shanks and wild shots.

Between points, she moves and conducts her body in a hurried, metro-nomic trance.

She seems unable to break the trance, to take time to pause, and then assess the situation.

In the latter stages of matches, it seems Stosur foresees that losing is inevitable, and then produces stroke play that is complicit in achieving that result.

So where now for Stosur?

My recommendations for Stosur are these:

Find a new top-level sports psychologist to work with on her match-play mental strength.

Eliminate the following qualifier words/phrases when speaking about her tennis game — "hopefully, just, probably, try, maybe, seems, pretty, half-decent, reasonably happy, a little more/bit, kind of, in some ways, wasn't so bad".

Substitute definite words/phrases for the qualifying language.

For this month's Australian Open, changing how she talks about her tennis game from each-way bet language to definite speaking would be a positive, first step.

Michael Kelly is a body language and speech expert and director of Kelly Speech Communication

### SAM'S STRUGGLES

Stosur's Australian losses since 2010 French Open win  
PLAYED 20 WON 7 LOST 14



#### 2011 LOSSES

v 42 - J Gajdosova - R2 Brisbane Inter  
v 25 - S Kuznetsova - R2 Sydney Inter  
v 28 - P Kvitova - R3 Australian Open  
v 16 - F Pennetta - Fed Cup v Italy  
v 4 - F Schiavone - Fed Cup v Italy

#### 2012 LOSSES

v 54 - I Melzer - R2 Brisbane Inter  
v 11 - F Schiavone - R1 Sydney Inter  
v 59 - S Cirstea - R1 Australian Open

#### 2013 LOSSES

v 41 - S Arvidsson - R1 Brisbane Inter  
v 42 - J Zheng - R1 Sydney Inter  
v 40 - J Zheng - R2 Australian Open

#### 2014 LOSSES

v32 - E Bouchard - Hopman Cup  
v31 - F Pennetta - Hopman Cup  
v5 - A Radwanska - Hopman Cup

(prefix denotes opponent's rank)