

JAHANGIR KHAN

555



THE UNTOLD STORY BEHIND
SQUASH'S INVINCIBLE CHAMPION
AND SPORT'S GREATEST
UNBEATEN RUN

BY ROD GILMOUR AND ALAN THATCHER

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Chapter 1

From sickly child to conqueror of the world

THERE can be few, if any, sporting dynasties to rival the accomplishments of the Khan family. Dominating the world of squash for several generations, they brought glory to the newly born nation of Pakistan when the legendary Hashim Khan won his first British Open title in 1951.

Thirty years later, it was the turn of his great nephew, Jahangir, to begin an astonishing period of domination. This is the story of how the 17-year-old Jahangir conquered illness and tragedy to become the greatest player in the history of the sport, creating an extraordinary unbeaten run that lasted for five and a half years.

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Unbeaten sequences are bookended by defeats. Jahangir's phenomenal reign began after he lost to Australian Geoff Hunt in his first appearance in the final of the British Open in Bromley in March 1981 and ended when he was beaten by New Zealander Ross Norman in the final of the world championship in Toulouse in November 1986. They were tumultuous occasions, with the veteran Hunt's victory over the young pretender earning him an eighth British Open title, overtaking the previous record set by Jahangir's great uncle, Hashim Khan.

While Hunt's victory at Bromley was a final, rousing hurrah to crown a magnificent career, Norman's victory was entirely unexpected. Despite the New Zealander being ranked two in the world, by that time Jahangir was regarded as being so far ahead of his challengers that he was simply unbeatable.

A perfectionist, or a pedant, might say that Jahangir's unbeaten record should have extended well beyond six years, because, on form, he should have won both of those matches. He had already shown that he had the measure of Hunt, who had been rated the fittest man in the game until the young JK came along. Jahangir had left him bent double with exhaustion in the final of the Chichester Festival, two weeks before that Bromley showdown. As for Norman, he had lost to Jahangir 30 times before that fateful night in France. He never beat him again, and it was to be almost a year before Jahangir suffered another defeat.

Jahangir set records galore, winning one major final without dropping a point, and he featured in the longest

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match in history while claiming another tournament trophy. Along the way, he became a ruthless machine who crushed most of his opponents for very few points, and rarely dropped a game. As well as his lengthy unbeaten spell, Jahangir also went on to win the British Open ten years in a row, sealing his place as arguably the most successful sportsman of all time. Along with his courage, commitment and consistency, he always displayed courtesy, respect and honesty. Although a quiet, humble man, he was a great champion, a superb ambassador for a troubled nation and was respected all over the world.

It was a trophy-laden, peerless journey for any athlete. Given the difficulties he endured in his early life, it would have been impossible to forecast such a phenomenal future record of achievements.

A shy boy, he was hampered by a childhood hernia and appeared to suffer from learning difficulties. Having overcome these handicaps, he began playing regularly and, after winning several junior tournaments, he showed signs of becoming another leading light in the Khan squash kingdom. By the age of 12, Jahangir's father was sufficiently impressed by his son's progress that he predicted that he would one day become a world champion.

At the age of 14, Jahangir moved to England to train with his elder brother, Torsam, and his father's prediction came true when Jahangir won the world amateur championship at the age of 15. But tragedy struck weeks later when Torsam died. Jahangir was devastated. A light went out in his life and he considered giving up the game.

Discussions about the young prodigy's future extended beyond his squash-loving family. Because Jahangir's achievements brought such pride and prestige to the country, the Pakistani government and military figures were also involved.

Jahangir was under pressure to return home to train in Pakistan, but his cousin Rahmat, who was based in London, offered to take over the challenge from Torsam. After much soul searching, Jahangir's father, Roshan, himself a former British Open champion, relented and agreed to Rahmat's proposals. Their partnership produced unparalleled success as Jahangir dedicated his career to Torsam's memory.

This seemingly weak child developed into one of the fittest athletes on the planet. A punishing training regime, overseen by Rahmat, allowed him to cope with the pressures of one of the most physically demanding sports ever invented. He developed a simple but brutal style, striking the ball with power, pace and precision to crush his opponents.

Squash, at the highest level, is a mixture of skill, speed and tactical awareness, and requires a wide range of shots incorporating power and touch, using each when called for. Players need to possess the nimbleness of a dancer to master difficult footwork patterns around the court, the fitness and stamina of a marathon runner and the ability of a boxer to soak up the punishment and push through the pain barrier in matches that can often last more than two hours. To achieve all this requires hours of training every day.

Jahangir had a simple but all-consuming motivation. Honouring the promise he made to his family in memory

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of his late brother, he was prepared to put in more work than any other squash player in history. Everything he did, he dedicated to Torsam. He willingly absorbed the workload as he learned how to master every challenge thrown his way. Although still a teenager, Jahangir bestrode the game of squash like a colossus, living up to the name bestowed upon him at birth. Its translation? Conqueror of the world.

* * * *

Jahangir Khan's sporting lineage dates back to the pomp of the Indian Raj. Abdul Majeed was born in 1862, three years before Rudyard Kipling, the poet laureate of the Northern Frontier, and progressed from ball boy to professional at the Peshawar Club.

Squash's journey to the Khyber Pass from its birthplace in England was an intriguing one. Squash had been invented, bizarrely, in London's Fleet Prison, where inmates passed the time away by hitting a rubber ball against the courtyard walls, thereby developing a game that came to be known as rackets. One has to assume that balls were in short supply, for they carried on using them even when they burst. These balls were slower, and so the players invented a new game, which they called 'squash' because the balls changed shape and squashed on impact.

The Fleet jail was a debtors' prison, and many of the guests were merchants who had been incarcerated for failure to pay their bills. It was the equivalent of today's open prison, and the residents enjoyed a fairly leisurely lifestyle. Many were wealthy businessmen who had fallen

on hard times, and who chose to carry on playing rackets and squash once they had served their sentences. They were well connected, had friends who moved in elite circles, and it was no surprise when some of England's poshest public schools adopted these pastimes to keep their pupils fit and healthy. Readers in other parts of the world may be confused by the term 'public schools' because they were, of course, expensive and private.

The first dedicated squash courts were built at Harrow School, on the outskirts of London, in 1864. Other schools followed suit, and courts were also built at gentlemen's clubs in central London, many of which still thrive today. In the following decades, the sport of squash was transported overseas to provide recreation for the British army officers and embassy staff who had played the game at school. Courts were built in various parts of the empire, many during the reign of Queen Victoria and the decades that followed.

The courts built in India were usually of an open-air construction and locals were employed as ball boys to recover errant shots. The ball boys looked on and took to the courts themselves to try their hand at the game when the officers retired to the mess for a refreshing end to the evening. The ball boys eventually became extremely talented players and their transition from servants to masters was a rapid one.

Hashim Khan was born into a Pashtun family at Nawa Kalay, near Peshawar, close to the border with Afghanistan. The name means New Village and is often spelt as Nawakille. Hashim never had a birth certificate and although no one is sure of his exact date of birth, his

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family believes that he was born on 1 July 1914, in the early days of World War One.

His introduction to squash is a perfect illustration of attitudes and activities in the British Empire at that time, although within three decades India was to undergo the pains of separation and independence, with the creation of Muslim-led states in Pakistan and East Bengal (later to be renamed Bangladesh).

Except for in the big cities in Pakistan, there were few squash courts in the country. By the late Forties, squash was a little-known sport and one which was played by a minority of *sahibs*, namely 'masters' who could afford to play and pay squash markers.

Experts also argued that only one per cent of the nation played the game, let alone understood the rules or complexities of the sport.

Hashim's father, Abdullah, was the chief steward at an officers' club in Peshawar. Hashim earned tips by retrieving balls hit out of the roofless squash court. He was only 11 when his father died in a car accident, after which Hashim left school to become a fully paid ball boy and court sweeper, earning less than five rupees a month. Hashim told the *New York Times* in 1957: 'For sweeping the place, they paid me four annas a day. One anna is a 16th part of a rupee. Five rupees equal one American dollar.'

After Abdullah's death, Majeed became the guardian of Hashim, his brother Azam and their sister. In their family trees, the names of the women are omitted because the Khan family said it was against tradition to publish them. Majeed's descendants became experts in squash and

Hashim, Azam and his sister's son, Mohibullah, all went on to become world champions.

In 1942, Hashim became a squash coach at a British Air Force officers' mess. In 1944, he won the first All-India squash championship in Bombay and successfully defended this title for the next two years. When Pakistan became an independent state, he was appointed a squash professional at the Pakistan Air Force and won the first national championship in 1949, beating Roshan Khan in the final. Roshan and his brother, Nazrullah, were sons of Faizullah, who was Hashim's first cousin. Although usually playing second fiddle to Hashim on court, Roshan would later father squash-playing sons called Torsam and Jahangir, who took the Khan kingdom to new heights.

Abdul Bari was also one of the leading players in India in the 1940s, although Hashim beat him in several competitions. After India became independent, Bari was sponsored to travel to England to compete in the British Open, where he finished runner-up in 1950. Bari was distantly related to Hashim and Azam and the new nation of Pakistan was looking for a national sporting hero of its own. Hashim was therefore nominated to travel to England to compete the following year, with strong support from the Pakistan Air Force. Permission had to be granted by the authorities and letters were exchanged between Pakistan's High Commissioner in London and the authorities in Karachi. With Bari having again been invited, Pakistan had a point to prove.

When approval was finally given, Khan travelled to London with hardly any money in his pockets and certainly ill equipped to meet the demands of the English

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weather. It is well documented that the secretary of the Squash Rackets Association bought a coat for Hashim to keep warm. It was also the first time that Hashim had worn shoes to play squash.

Enormous national pride was at stake, with the title being in the hands of the sleek, charming Egyptian Mahmoud El Karim, who had won the British Open four years in a row after the tournament reconvened following the Second World War.

Hashim, who by now was in his late thirties and had quite a sizeable belly hanging over the top of his shorts, surprised his elegant opponents with his non-stop running. In a 16-man draw, Hashim powered through the field, winning every match in straight games. With his new plimsolls squeaking on the wooden floors of the Lansdowne Club, he beat El Karim 9-5, 9-0, 9-0 in the final to collect the first of his seven British Open titles. The Egyptian clearly had no answer to the speed and skill of his opponent.

The British Open was the de facto world championship at the time. The new nation of Pakistan was justifiably proud. They had their first national sporting hero. Hashim and his family continued to create sporting heroes for three decades, with Jahangir the greatest of them all.

He had never before seen a player like El Karim, a gangling figure standing more than six feet tall whom he described as 'like I see a dancer in ballet, you never hear his feet on the floor'.

From a humble ball boy, playing squash in bare feet, Hashim was now considered a world champion and was

soon shaking hands with royalty. The *Daily Telegraph* obituary recorded an amusing exchange between Hashim and Prince Philip, the husband of the Queen.

When Hashim won his penultimate British Open in 1956, he was presented with the trophy by the Duke of Edinburgh, who told him that, although there was a court at Buckingham Palace, he had decided he was too old to play the game when he reached 35. 'Too old?' responded Khan. 'I am over 40.' The Duke countered: 'Yes, you are pretty old and you have quite a tummy there – I am surprised you won today.'

This period was the beginning of the Khan squash dynasty. Hashim's younger brother, Azam, was working as a tennis professional, with no background in squash, but Hashim asked him to become his practice partner in London. He trained the younger man for five months, and by 1954 they were playing against each other in the British Open final.

Azam finished runner-up three times before winning his first British title in 1959, beating the young Mohibullah. The following year, he beat Roshan for the loss of just one point and repeated his victories over Mohibullah in 1961 and 1962.

Roshan, having finished runner-up to Hashim at the inaugural Pakistan Open in 1949, went on to win that title three times in a row between 1951 and 1953.

In 1956, Roshan lost to Hashim in the final of the British Open but when they met again the following year this time he won 6-9, 9-5, 9-2, 9-1 to end Hashim's six-year reign as champion. Roshan made a third British Open final appearance in 1960, when he lost to Azam 9-1, 9-0, 9-0.

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In the 1960s Hashim moved to Detroit, where he coached squash at the Uptown Athletic Club. He later took up a similar position in Denver, having decided that the Colorado climate would be better for his wife's rheumatoid arthritis. He continued to play into his nineties and died in 2014, aged a reported 100.

* * * *

The younger Jahangir wasn't physically fit to play squash. He had two hernia operations, aged five and 12. His sporting dreams, too, may not even have started had his father not been squash pro at the Fleet Club. As Roshan was technically in the navy, it meant that Jahangir was afforded treatment in the naval hospital.

Still, doctors told Jahangir, who started talking aged eight but had trouble listening and learning, that he wouldn't be able to play squash at all.

But he had a ball and racket to play with at home, his father giving him the latter with a cut-down shaft on the premise he could play once a week on the advice of the doctors.

Month by month, Jahangir grew healthier and stronger. Little did Roshan know that Jahangir was learning and taking in the game on an almost daily basis.

The Khans' family home was located in Karachi's Abyssinia Lines, an area of tight narrow streets and poor housing. According to one close associate, the Khans lived 'in an expensive tin hut'.

It was in Abyssinia Lines that Roshan gave Jahangir his first racket as an eight-year-old. Aged 12, following his second operation, Jahangir took part in a national

tournament and came through qualifying to reach the semi-finals against players five years older.

He had beaten the number one seed during his run and when he saw his picture in the local newspapers the next day, his confidence surged.

One visitor to the Khan household at that time was English squash referee Graham Dixon. He was later to officiate at many of Jahangir's most important matches but when he visited Pakistan to lead a teaching course for referees, he was not aware of the young prodigy. He recalled: 'I spent one month with Roshan in April 1976 when Jahangir was 12 and a half years old. I asked how good Torsam would become and Roshan said that he was a very good player (he was ranked seven in the world) but that he would never become world champion.

'I then asked him about his second son and he said that although being a fairly good player (world ranked in the twenties) he had not got the ability to get any higher. He then said he had a younger son, Jahangir, who would become world champion. I was left with the impression there was no doubt. It was a statement of fact but was not said in a boastful way. That was not Roshan's way. He was a humble, lovely man, generous of spirit and someone I had the honour of knowing, although only too briefly.

'It was an honour and a privilege to be invited over in such a golden era for the sport, with Pakistan leading the sport for an incredible 30-year period thanks to the trailblazing achievements of Hashim Khan in the early 1950s. I was grateful for the opportunity to get on court with Roshan during that trip, but never managed to win a single point!'

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Hiddy Jahan, a Pakistani professional who was to play a helping hand in the early successes of Jahangir, remembers playing at the Fleet Club.

‘We used to come off the court, sweating buckets thanks to the weather. Jahangir would go on court as a 12-year-old and come off court without any sweat. He would put water on himself and say “ahh, look, I’m also sweating.” We all used to laugh at him for that.’

Jahangir’s first salvos into the sport were largely conducted in secret. ‘I was very keen on squash then,’ he recalled. ‘My father used to go to sleep in the afternoon. Normally everybody goes to sleep in the afternoon because it’s so hot. I’d go and play squash without telling anybody.’

He also used to play and imagine what it would be like to be a great player. Even then, he would think of hitting the ball hard, to length, or playing a smart boast. He would do his thinking on the toilet and make the noise of the ball thudding against the front wall with his mouth. Later, during his tour heights, he would lock himself away in the toilet just to get away from everyone at tournaments, to give himself some peace.

The virtues of Western training methods were beginning to be ingrained into Jahangir’s game, too. He also had an upper hand at such an early stage.

‘I was a member of the Khan family,’ he wrote in his book, *Winning Squash*. ‘Some of them I never saw, but no matter. I certainly heard about them and this created seeds which grew in my mind. People think the first lesson begins when you go on to the court, but that is not so. The first lesson is hearing from others what can be achieved. I

heard more in my family in a short time than many people hear throughout a whole career.'

Torsam, who played with as much skill and flair as he did in his regular contretemps with referees, was still seen as the brother who would earn squash plaudits. The house was a more sombre place when Torsam went away to compete in tournaments. Jahangir longed to hear from him, waiting impatiently for letters or newspaper cuttings of his results.

But, already an accomplished player in technique, gifted from Roshan, regarded as the real stylist among the Khans, Jahangir soon became Pakistan's junior champion aged 14. The doctors must have been left dumbfounded. Jahangir was supposed to leave rigorous exercise well alone.

Karachi was hardly conducive to squash training due to its oppressive heat, so the decision was taken for Jahangir to hone his talents in England.

He was entered into the Drysdale Cup in both 1978 and 1979, when he lost in both finals to Australian Glen Brumby, a player over three years older but who was to later state on tour that Jahangir just won 'too quickly'. Brumby added: 'He gives you no time to attack. I just try to stay in the rally.' Watching from the gallery, Torsam, 12 years older than Jahangir, was adamant that he was watching a future squash genius.

Elder son Torsam's mind began to wander. Sure, he was a good player, good enough to tour and earn a living, but never a world title-winning contender. His ambition was to climb to the top of the game, but with Jahangir as his charge.

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There was certainly room for improvement. He was seen as a relatively conservative player, despite having grown up in the unique position of being able to study so many superb stroke-makers.

Although Jahangir bent his knees and got down well enough to the ball in these early days, he wasn't quite in the same mould as his father.

Without Torsam's input he may well have inherited those genes, but the coach knew the landscape of the modern game; this was a stayer's game rather than a sprinter's.

Back in Pakistan, Torsam, who had been living in London since 1972, persuaded his parents to let Jahangir travel back with him to live and train in Sutton, south of London, during the spring of 1979. They relented and soon Jahangir's eyes were further widened when he was taken to Wembley Squash Centre to play round robin games with Rahmat Khan, Jahangir's first cousin and the son of Nazrullah, and Jahan, sometimes joined by Englishman Geoff Williams and Ricky Hill of Australia.

It was a far cry from the difficulties faced by his father, who had previously arrived in a snowy Britain wearing tennis shoes, a large coat and with just five pounds in his pocket. Decades later, Jahangir had the support that allowed him to succeed so young and he was remembering it.

The first instance of Jahangir making the UK media came in 1979 thanks to a magazine article in *Squash Player*. Jahan was being featured in a coaching series and on the day of the interview, Jahangir also happened to be at the club, getting match-ready ahead of the Pakistan trials for the world amateur championships in Australia.

Jahan told the photographer: 'Take this guy's picture. He is the dark horse at the amateur championship.' The reporter responded that Jahangir couldn't get in the team. 'You take the picture. I will put anything on it, he will win it.'

Once Jahangir went back to Pakistan, he was soon to discover that he wasn't going to be picked for the team to Australia. He had strained his back during a training session, had recovered in time but was still omitted from Pakistan's small team for the championships.

Yet he was still able to travel with the squad and a berth in the individual tournament became available when a Nigerian player withdrew. The record books were shortly to be altered.

Generous sponsorship from the chairman of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) handed Jahangir the chance to go to Australia. 'He wanted to make sure that my talent wasn't lost in other hands,' reveals Jahangir. 'He made the commitment to Rahmat and my father. Whatever the requirements, the PIA were going to be there.'

Having come through qualifying, wildcard Jahangir met the impressive Swede Lars Kvant in the first round. Kvant was ranked in the top five in the world and had beaten everyone to win an event in Sydney the week before, but had a distaste for training.

Jahangir went two games behind and 2-5 down in the third but remarkably came back to win in five. This was the turning point for the teenager. He hadn't realised how good he could be before this.

'I had practised with Torsam, Hiddy and Rahmat and they told me I was good but I thought they were encouraging me because I was a junior,' he said. Unbeknown

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to Jahangir, when he was practising back in England he would be sent to Croydon by Torsam to play with Jahan so that he might 'put him in his place'.

'Every day I was playing in Australia, Torsam used to call me and told me how to play each player. The coaching gave me a lot of confidence and his positive thoughts ("you can do this, easy") spurred me on.

'Beating Kvant gave me confidence and the belief that I could do it. I had been thinking about the plate competition. I thought that maybe I could win it. After beating Kvant, I thought maybe I could get to the quarters but I just concentrated on playing my game. It gave me strength every day but I was surprised to win.'

So was the world of squash. A 15-year-old, dubbed the 'Pakistani Whizz Kid' by the Australian media, had beaten the top amateurs in the sport, including England's Phil Kenyon – reckoned to be the leading amateur in the world – in the final.

Jahan's prediction had rung true. Having played Jahangir at Wembley, he knew his ability was light years ahead of an amateur. Indeed, Jahangir became the last player to win the amateur championships, with the sport going 'open' soon afterwards.

Meanwhile Kenyon, who went on to play alongside Jahangir throughout the Eighties, was left devastated by his loss Down Under.

'I trained for two years to win that title,' he revealed from his home in Portugal. 'I had won the British, European and world under-23 titles. My next step was to win the world amateur, to turn professional and to prove to everybody that it was worth doing.'

Kenyon had coasted through to the semi-finals to set up a meeting with Atlas Khan, the Pakistan number one who had beaten young Kiwi Ross Norman in the last eight.

It then took Kenyon over two hours to snaffle the Pakistani, while shortly afterwards Australia's top-ranked amateur, Frank Donnelly, took on the lesser-known Khan in the other semi-final.

The Australian came off court after around 30 minutes, losing 9-4, 9-4, 9-3, with a bemused Kenyon asking Donnelly about the one-way defeat. 'Frank told me that there was no point trying as he knew he wasn't going to win. I said to him, "Well, you could have made an effort. I have just spent two hours trying to beat Khan and you have given this guy a free card through to the final as fresh as a daisy!"

Kenyon and Jahangir had around 18 hours to prepare for the final, the Englishman admitting that his energy reserves, depleted by such a difficult semi-final, were not going to be enough to see him through to the title.

Fatigue came to fruition in the second game of the final, Rahmat noticing Kenyon's increasing tiredness after taking the opener 9-2. Jahangir came off court, replaced the shirt he had been handed by the sponsors to wear and slipped on the Pakistan team shirt, complete with national flag.

It was the turning point. For Kenyon, it was the 'most disappointing and upsetting defeat' of his career. The image of the two players – Kenyon looking drained leaning against the back wall for the trophy presentation, Jahangir looking a touch fragile, but with the trophy by his feet – told the story.

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'I knew at the time that I was the best amateur player in the world,' Kenyon recalls. 'I knew that I could beat Jahangir three-love before he went to great heights. He obviously got all the publicity, and people asked me why I was so upset. I told them that I simply hadn't won the tournament and that I had wanted to win.'

Kenyon said that there was never a thought that Jahangir was to go on and be so dominant in the sport. The advantage, he reasoned, was having Rahmat in his corner as full-time coach, mentor and manager from so early on.

Back home in Karachi, emotions began to take effect. In the book *Jahangir and the Khan Dynasty*, author Keith Miles recalls how Roshan found out about his youngest son's win.

'Roshan could not believe the announcement on the radio. He rang up the station in Karachi and asked for confirmation.

'Please. What you say about world squash championship. Repeat it.'

'Who is this?' asked a voice.

'I am Roshan Khan, the father of Jahangir Khan.'

'Well, Roshan Khan, your son has just won the world amateur title in Melbourne.'

'This is true?'

'Yes, sir. Congratulations.'

* * * *

With the game now becoming global, the travelling continued in earnest for the Khans. Jahangir had returned from his Melbourne triumph only to see Torsam,

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ranked 13th in the world, pack his bags for a stint on the Australian pro circuit. First stop Adelaide.

Jahan was travelling with Torsam at the Australian Championships when tragedy struck, one month after Jahangir's surprise victory.

Torsam had been born with an enlarged heart and occasionally experienced dizziness when he came off court during his career. However, he never sought medical guidance for fear of being told to stop playing the game he loved.

Furthermore, his articulate and gentlemanly nature saw him become president of the players' association and he was keen to help the lower-ranked professionals feel more at home on the circuit, at the same time growing his own game.

In Adelaide, there were early signs that all was not well. In an exhibition match four days before the start of the event, he halted play after first experiencing dizzy spells. Following his opening-round victory, he then asked local photographers not to take his picture in the minutes following his win. He looked exhausted and in pain.

Seventeen minutes into an already tempestuous match with the New Zealand number one, Neven Barbour, he complained of feeling unwell, slumped to his knees and collapsed on court.

Spasms of pain had hit Torsam, who briefly asked what had happened. Jahan told him not to worry. With two doctors on court alongside his compatriot, Torsam's body was now shaking. The spectators watching on remained static.

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He was taken to an intensive care unit but as the night wore on it was clear that his condition had worsened. He had suffered another heart attack and incurred massive brain damage. Telephone calls were placed to London and Pakistan.

Roshan had been contacted and permission was soon given to switch off life support, 24 hours after Torsam's collapse. Jahan, Gogi Alauddin and Geoff Hunt, the eventual champion, were by his side. The tournament sponsors, soft drinks company Schweppes, then earned plaudits when they announced that they would provide a Torsam Khan Trophy for the winner.

The day after Torsam's death, Jahangir and Rahmat flew to Pakistan to be with the family. By Muslim tradition, the body was taken home, washed and, with prayers from the Koran, taken to the cemetery.

Shortly before his death, Torsam, who had experienced health issues on court before, had spoken to Doug Gillon, the Scottish sportswriter who had been closely monitoring the early career of Jahangir.

The pair discussed Torsam's hedonistic philosophy, which he summed up in the words of the Muslim poet, Iqbal. 'Lovely, Oh Lord, this fleeting world'. Months later, this was to prove a tragic epitaph.

Torsam had planned to buy a 50 per cent share in the Dunnings Mill Squash Club in East Grinstead, Sussex. This is where he was planning to coach Jahangir to world champion status. 'It was such a sad thing that Torsam didn't get the chance to see Jahangir's rise,' said Jahan, who had arranged to bring the body back to Pakistan.

Torsam's death also had a profound effect on his younger brother. He had been a mentor to Jahangir and meant everything to him. Jahangir didn't pick up a racket for four months in Pakistan. But, day by day, his family began to instil messages in Jahangir that he could fulfil Torsam's dream.

Rahmat soon took over looking after Jahangir. The decision was taken to once again travel back to London to stay with Rahmat and his English wife, Josephine, who had been a receptionist at the Wembley Squash Centre, in their three-bedroomed Wembley flat.

The detractors were quick to raise their voices against the decision. Jahangir's world amateur win had opened the doors to what was achievable at the highest level, and Pakistan was crying out for a world champion.

Jahangir was adamant that he wanted to live and train in the UK, even though he was to be offered a house with servants to stay in Pakistan. It was an incentive any other wide-eyed teenager might well have accepted.

There was, however, one further bridge to cross before Jahangir's trip back to north London. Air Marshal Noor Khan, the retired chief of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), was at the time a leading figure in the sport, promoting squash by providing facilities, better remuneration and free air travel in service aircraft to up-and-coming professionals.

In 1966, Khan had constructed the squash training centre at the PAF officers' mess in Peshawar, with three modern courts available, and his financial contributions had been vital in Pakistan's early forays into the international game.

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He was also a key and much-needed benefactor for Jahangir. Yet he too was against his trip to England. 'He warned that if we failed, we would be answerable to the nation. A massive responsibility had descended on our shoulders,' Jahangir admitted at the time.

The second problem concerned political unrest in Pakistan at the time. As family and sponsors decided on Jahangir's future, Miles outlined the state of affairs at the time in his book.

'If Jahangir went to London, he was in danger of being corrupted by Western values. There had been further political changes in Pakistan: Mr Bhutto was executed in April 1979, to be succeeded by General Zia-ul-Haq. The new dispensation was running everything with military thoroughness and there was a steady swing towards fundamentalist Islamic rule. Jahangir Khan was a Muslim. It would be wrong to subject him to the temptations of a more lax society like that of Britain.'

For Jahangir, the 'whole scenario' had changed. The young Pakistani had originally come to the UK to train and study. Going full-time was not part of the agenda. But the environment and Jahangir's way of thinking changed after Torsam's death.

'It made me stronger and more dedicated to the mission of doing this all for someone. It wasn't purely for myself. I was doing it for someone who I loved.'

Grief was a hurdle to overcome. Those early Wembley days were depressing times. Weeks went by with Jahangir still stricken by his brother's death. There were tears being away from his parents, living in a different home and culture. 'When I took the promise, there was only

one focus,' Jahangir remembered. 'Day and night up until my first world championship title, it was all about this. Nothing else.'

Slowly, just as his family did back in Pakistan, Rahmat convinced Jahangir of the importance of getting out and about and focusing on the task ahead.

Rahmat recalled those early days in London. 'Yes, it was a bad time. JK lived with Torsam in Sutton, in Surrey, for about six months as Torsam trained him ahead of Jahangir becoming the youngest player to win the world amateur title in Australia. I used to live in Wembley and coached at the Wembley Squash Centre, which was one of the best squash facilities anywhere in the world, let alone London.

'After Torsam's death, when I took JK back to Pakistan, Roshan did not want him to continue playing squash. He said, "I have lost one son playing squash, I don't want to lose another."

'JK was just a young kid and did not know what would happen to his future. I thought to myself that Torsam and myself had wanted to train this young family member to be a great squash player. Now that Torsam is not alive, I will continue with the same plan. It needed me to retire from competitive squash and concentrate on JK, and so I offered my services to Uncle Roshan. All the government officials in Pakistan said to Roshan that JK should live and train in Pakistan, but Roshan said "No, JK will go with my nephew Rahmat."

'Noor Khan then said, "OK, but if Rahmat does not get the results you will have to answer to the nation." Having this responsibility, I brought JK back to London

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to live with my wife, Josie, and daughter Natasha in our flat. The address was on Wembley High Street. It was 500 yards away from Wembley Squash Centre, and behind my flat was a big school playing field, which was ideal for running and training.

‘Jahangir was made very welcome by my wife. He had his own room. It was a nice, luxury three-bedroomed flat. Now those flats and Wembley Squash Centre have both been demolished, leaving behind a great history and some lovely memories of victories and lessons for the world showing how the unity of two people, plus a lot of hard work, can give the results.’

Wembley Squash Centre was certainly to prove the catalyst. It was a world away from the pressures of boardrooms in Karachi, where Jahangir’s future was being laid out by the integrated hierarchy comprising figures from the military, the national airline and the Pakistan Squash Federation.

Naturally, an eager press soon began to ask how this young rising star could win the world amateurs with so few matches under his belt. Few believed that the talent belonged with Jahangir alone. Rahmat knew otherwise.

His six-day training programme was a tough one, even for a 16-year-old. He was awake and out of bed at 6am, running ten miles before breakfast. An hour on court alone at Wembley honing his drills and skills was followed by a rest at home before afternoon practice with Rahmat.

There were a few differences once Rahmat and Jahangir started to instigate their regime. Jahan was now seen as an opponent, not a sparring partner, in Rahmat’s eyes.

When Jahangir turned professional, Jahan was soon to beat him in five games in his debut tournament at the 1980 ISPA Championship, held on a theatre stage in Southampton. Jahangir had taken 26 points off the elder statesman, a significant achievement which led Jahan to admit that his opponent would become world champion within two years.

Gawain Briars, an England professional, also took a notable scalp as the new decade took shape. Kenyon and Briars were the two up-and-comers at the time but, along with Ian Robinson, hadn't travelled to Australia in 1979 after turning pro slightly earlier.

Briars first came across Jahangir at the Stockton Open soon afterwards. He had never seen him play but even so expectations were all placed on the wonderkid's shoulders.

Briars ended up beating Jahangir 10-8 in the fourth at a recreational complex in Durham and Cleveland. 'That shocked a few people,' remembered Briars. 'And it quite surprised me too. So I got the win in and he only lost to two more players before setting himself up behind Geoff Hunt.'

What stood out for Briars was the intensity of the match, even more so playing an opponent so young. 'I, in my own modest way, was supposed to be beating a path up the rankings as a rising player, but he had already seemed to have shot past us with him bursting on to the scene in Australia.'

The Englishman played well, having taking stock of coaching advice. In those early throes of Jahangir's career, he rarely played short, but when he did the Pakistani put in a straight backhand drop shot with plenty of cut.

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Whenever he shaped up for it, Briars was told to get moving and try to hammer it past him.

‘He was getting mechanised quite early on. He wasn’t showing you the drop and then playing another shot. He didn’t adapt to what I was doing and it was tactical from my part, which perhaps he didn’t quite twig. I think Rahmat twiggged and was obviously quite frustrated afterwards.’

With the win under his belt, Briars happened to glance through the small window of the gym where Rahmat was already with Jahangir, moments after defeat. The Englishman knew what was going to happen and carried on to the changing room.

For Rahmat made him simulate a fifth game, entailing squat thrusts, star jumps and skipping for the next 30 minutes non-stop. ‘It was hard and fast and it was clearly a sign of intent,’ Briars said. ‘As if we didn’t need to know, for clearly he was to become the most amazing squash machine with flair we had ever seen.’

Jahangir smiles when recalling this episode. He notes that he was still coming to terms with Torsam’s death, how his training was evolving and the realisation that the amateur and professional circuit were worlds apart. He knew he had to work, even if that came in the aftermath of defeat.

‘Playing with these guys, it was like a dream coming true. Losing to most of the guys in the first round gave me loads of experience aged 16. The start was there and it made me realise how much further I had to go.’

Still, Briars had claimed a win over ‘JK’ and not many players could attest to that. ‘I must have played him

another dozen times thereafter and it was never close. There was always clear blue water.'

One man keeping a close eye on developments was Geoff Hunt. He recalled: 'I saw Jahangir win the world amateurs in Melbourne. I was coach to the Australian team by then and I remember being impressed by the way Jahangir beat Lars Kvant in the first round and Phil Kenyon in the final. At that time he was a very good, basic player hitting the ball up and down the sidewalls at that stage.

'It's a long time ago but I remember having a conversation with Qamar Zaman and he said he thought Jahangir still had a fair way to go to be one of Pakistan's top players. But within 12 months, he was beating them all.

'In terms of strength in depth that was probably Pakistan's finest era, but Zaman and Mohibullah had dropped off a little and suddenly Jahangir was beating them all. At that time, it did not take him very long to catch up and overtake them.

'I could also see his patterns of play developing. He was not just hitting it up and down the wall but added a very aggressive volley and a decent drop shot.'

Lengthy spells on the road honing his skills and accumulating tournament matches both laid the foundations for Rahmat's global plan. Apart from defeats to Briars and Jahan, Jahangir suffered further losses to Egypt's Ali Aziz, Jonah Barrington, the legendary Anglo-Irishman and multiple British Open champion, and Alauddin.

Rahmat and his teenage pupil had a plan, sticking to training and readying themselves for their entrance

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into the big time. Squash is like boxing. You have to learn to ride the punches and hit back harder with counter-punches, Rahmat would tell Jahangir. The only difference is that the bruises are on the inside.