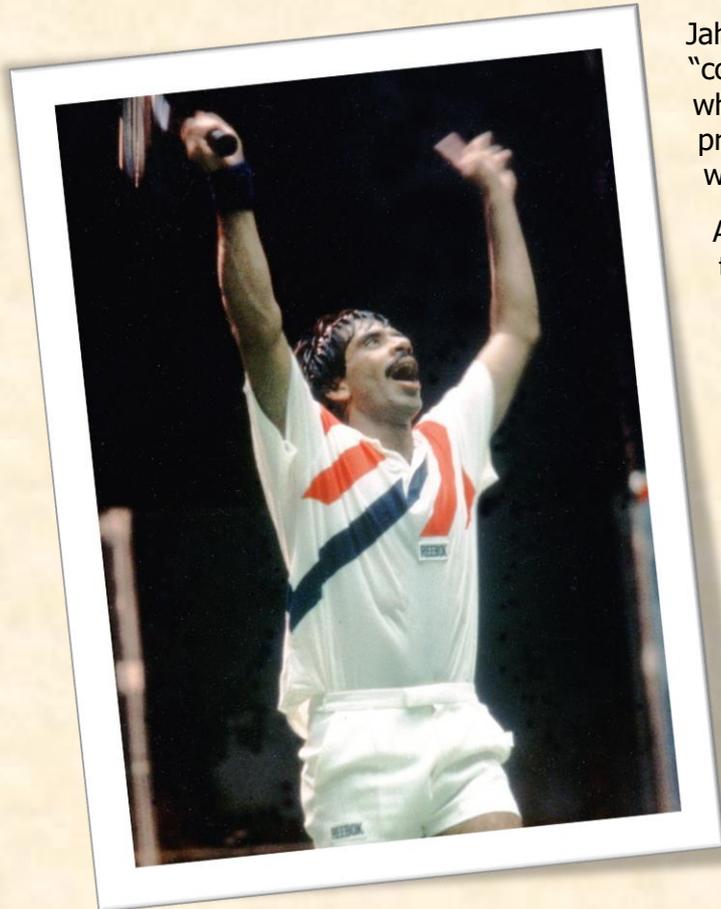


JAHANGIR KHAN – CONQUEROR OF THE WORLD!



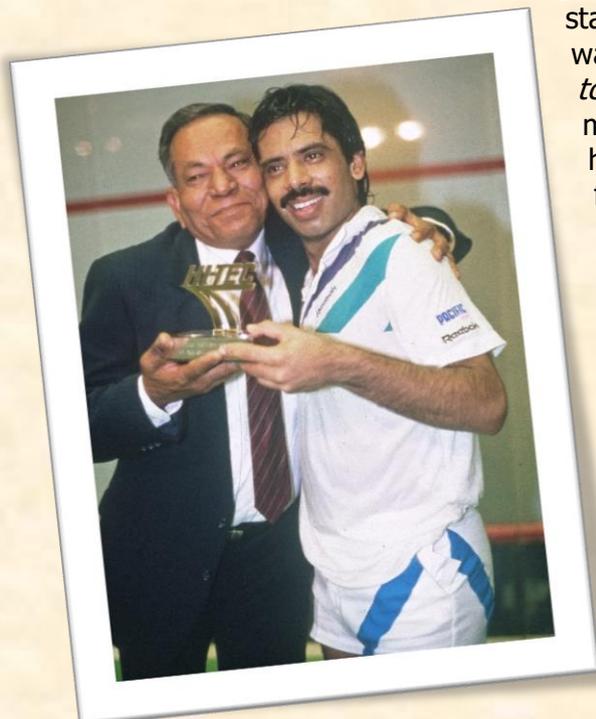
Let's just say his prognosis improved...

Jahangir Khan, whose first name means “conqueror of the world” in Urdu, and whose fitness and stamina would later prove to be legendary, was born very weak and with a hernia.

As Jahangir explained in an interview, the paediatrician knew the family was very competitive in the game of squash and the Khan dynasty dominated the squash scene. “He told my father that I was physically frail and unfortunately would not be able to endure the rigours of such a competitive sport. He cautioned my father—*keep him away from the courts!*”

“Under no circumstances should I be allowed to play squash, the doctor warned, as any attempt to play the sport would be detrimental to my health and well-being”.

Jahangir needed to have surgical intervention to correct his hernia, undergoing his first procedure at the age of five years. He had already started playing squash aged eight under the watchful eye of his father, Roshan Khan (*seen together, left*). Roshan was not only his coach and mentor, but a formidable player in his own right, having captured the 1957 British Open title. His father knew he had the potential and determination to succeed but paid very close attention to his health, regularly enquiring if he was experiencing any pain or discomfort. “At my age and size, it was a challenge for me to manage the racket, so my father customised the length of the handle to suit my body so that I was able to play.”



At age 12 Jahangir underwent another procedure, but this one would be his last: there would be no looking back. Young Jahangir's path to squash legend was now clear.

Jahangir dreamed of playing professionally and representing his home country, Pakistan. He started his career competing at the national level. At age fourteen he played for the national junior team at the number one position at the World Junior Championships, which was held in Sweden. The next year he qualified for inclusion in the World Amateur individual tournament, which he ended up winning, much to the surprise of everyone. Nonetheless he was not added to the squad for the team event, which followed immediately, because Pakistan didn't want to change their squad. He was the youngest victor ever of that championship, at just fifteen years of age. A stellar career dominated by almost unending victories had begun.

Pursuing Honour for a Lost Brother

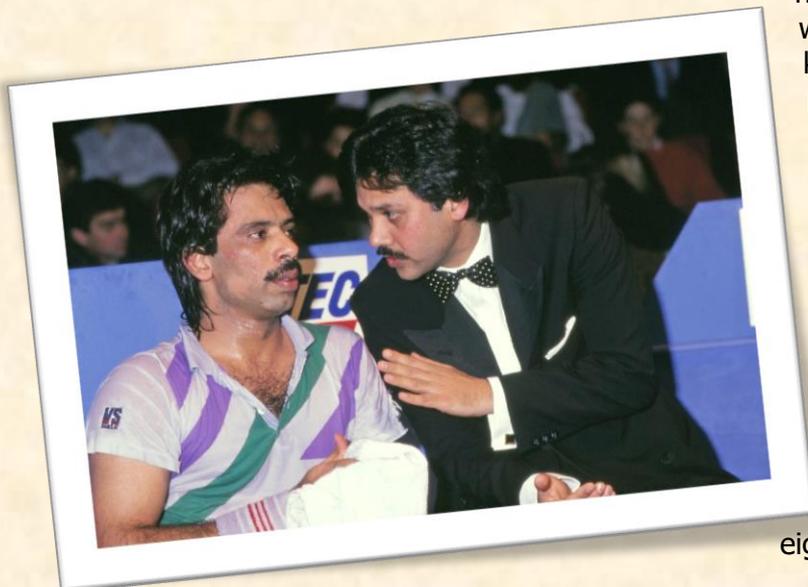
The Khan family had already made an enduring mark on the sport of squash for several decades, and its strong support encouraged Jahangir to pursue his dreams. Following his surprise World Amateur victory, Jahangir decided to move to London for six months to be coached by his elder brother, Torsam, who was playing on the professional circuit.

In November 1979, however, Jahangir was challenged by his greatest loss, the untimely passing of Torsam, who suffered a heart attack while on the court during a tournament in Australia. "This was a very difficult time for our family. It was shocking for us, and for me it was a time when I told myself I did not want to continue playing competitive squash." He was very disconsolate and lost his zeal. Three or four months would pass, during which he grieved deeply for his sibling and didn't train or play.

After much dialogue, encouragement and introspection, Jahangir would return to the courts to settle the unfinished business his brother had started: namely, striving to be the best player in the world, a task that he now took personally. This time his father Roshan passed coaching duties to his nephew, Rehmat.

The training was by no means easy, as it meant many personal sacrifices for such a young boy. Jahangir often longed to be close to his parents and family members, but time and space did not afford him this luxury. As a member of such a closely-knit family, being apart from them was very difficult, and the absence of Torsam made it even more challenging. "I was

hurting and so alone at times I would cry, but deep down inside I knew I had no other choice but to persevere for the honour of my brother."



His cousin Rehmat (*pictured here with Jahangir*) played an important role in Jahangir's success. He engaged in a gruelling training programme, which included seemingly unending drills, and tactical and physical training that included strenuous workouts at the gym—all of which lasted up to eight hours each day.

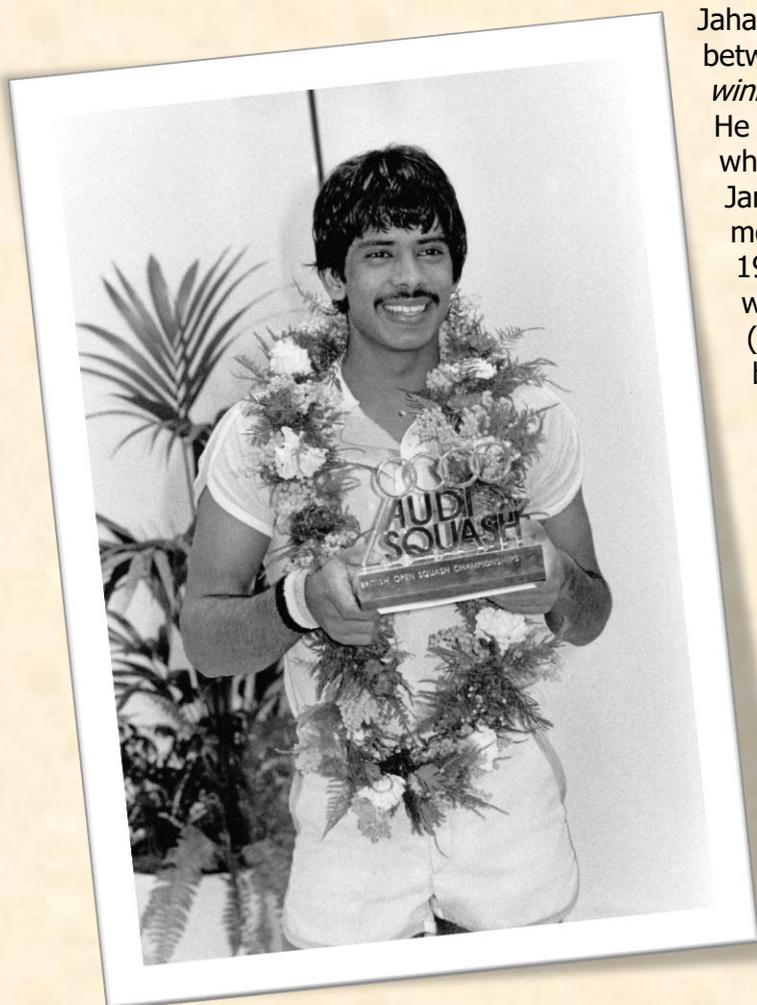
Jahangir's tenacity in honouring his brother's name would pay off. By pure coincidence, exactly two years after his brother's passing, in 1981, Jahangir would emerge victorious over his main early rival, Geoff Hunt, to win the World Open, a defeat that ended Hunt's world number one status and a win that was pivotal in Jahangir's career as a professional squash player. Jahangir had overcome his greatest challenges so far.

While Jahangir is both modest and self-effacing, he recognizes his success in terms of achieving his aim. "Looking back, the challenges I faced made me a better and stronger man and helped me achieve my personal goals.... I became more mature and focused on my endeavours. The challenges I overcame were well worth it. I was happy to honour my brother's name."

555: An Astonishing Run

He drew on prodigious mental and physical strength as much as panther-like movement and skills to overcome his opponents, to stay in the world number one slot. His extraordinary record of remaining unbeaten for five years seven months, and reputed string of 555 consecutive match wins, is thought to be unparalleled in professional sport in the world.

When questioned about how he maintained this phenomenal winning streak, which started with his 1981 win over Hunt, Jahangir said, "Hard work is the key to success. I always dreamed of being number one in the world when I first started to play squash. Having taken up the game at an early age was a blessing, and my continued hard work and dedication paid off."



Jahangir won ten successive British Opens, between 1982 and 1991 (*Photographed here winning his first*), which is a men's record. He also won 6 World Opens, the last of which was in 1988 against fellow Pakistani Jansher Khan, and was a finalist in three more. He lost his last World Open final, in 1993, to Jansher (*in action below*), who was undoubtedly his greatest rival. (Jansher would win 6 British Opens and be runner-up in three more, and would win eight World Opens.)

Jahangir attributes his long unbeaten spell to his innate ability to convert negative energy to positive energy, which would fuel his pursuit to overcome his opponents. The pressure of enduring a long unbeaten run was massaged by his strong mental discipline. He also spent an unprecedented number of hours practising tactical drills that increased his physical fitness and aptitude on court and improved his level of confidence.

Life Today

His advice to up-and-coming boys and girls who want to be on the professional circuit? "Please know that success is always possible. It is not an easy road to the top, but you must stay focused and be prepared to make a lot of sacrifices. You have to work hard, practice hard and give it your all."

Jahangir follows today's squash professional Tour and is very impressed by a number of the players. He singles out Egyptians Ali Farag, the world number one at the time of the interview, and Ramy Ashour, who has been plagued by injuries. Jahangir feels that both of them are extremely talented and demonstrate a high level of professionalism, prowess and sportsmanship on the court, and their distinctive styles and personalities have made them role models that others should emulate.



On his personal life, Jahangir is the father of five children of whom he is extremely proud. They have dabbled in the game, but thus far none seems to be interested in pursuing a career in squash. "Parents have to let their children choose the sport they want to pursue and support them. The child must want to play the sport, and it is no use forcing a child to play a game if he or she is uninterested." One of his sons has chosen to play competitive football for his

school, and Jahangir is very proud and supportive of him. His coach has said that he is a very talented player, and with his father's genes and further guidance one imagines he may have the makings of another Messi or Ronaldo.

Jahangir is committed to raising the bar when it comes to junior development in sports, especially squash, and encourages kids to become more involved in physical activities. He is in the process of constructing his own academy in his home city of Karachi, which will include squash, tennis and a gym. His benevolence is very apparent as he is focused on providing playing opportunities for children who are less fortunate, and he hopes to provide scholarships for those who demonstrate willingness and aptitude. He noted, "Children today are so comfortable on their PlayStations and computer games. We have to find avenues to profile sports and make them more appealing."

As Emeritus President of the WSF, one could not help but notice the immense disappointment and sadness Jahangir expressed when the discussion turned to the news that squash had once again been left out of the Olympics, set for Paris in 2024. "It is unfair that such a wonderful game, that is played everywhere in the world, on all continents, by players of all ages and skill levels, was not included in the last tranche of Olympic sports. There are so many other sports that are not as well known or do not have as much history that have been included in the Olympics." He appeared bewildered why his sport continues to be left out, especially given the fact that the WSF ensured it met all the criteria set by the International Olympic Committee and hosts Paris.

Nonetheless, Jahangir, who most consider the greatest male squash player in the history of the game, is hopeful that someday the sport will take its rightful place among the Olympic offerings.

Interview by Diane Julien, March 2019

Photos courtesy of Steve Line

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- At 15-year-old in 1979 when he became the youngest-ever winner of the World Amateur Individual Championship.
- In November 1981, he became the youngest World Open champion of all-time at 17, beating Australian favourite Geoff Hunt in the final.
- Went on to establish a remarkable 555-match unbeaten run over five and a half years (from April 81 until Nov 86).
- Titles included six World Open and a record ten British Open titles.
- Topped the world rankings for a total of 94 months between January 1982 and April 1992.
- A former Chairman of the Professional Squash Association, Jahangir retired from the sport in 1993 after helping Pakistan to win the World Team Championship in his home town Karachi.
- First elected Vice-President of the World Squash Federation in November 1998, Jahangir was President from 2002-2008.
- One of the greatest sportsmen Pakistan has ever produced, Jahangir was nominated as 'Sportsman of the Millennium' by the Government of Pakistan.