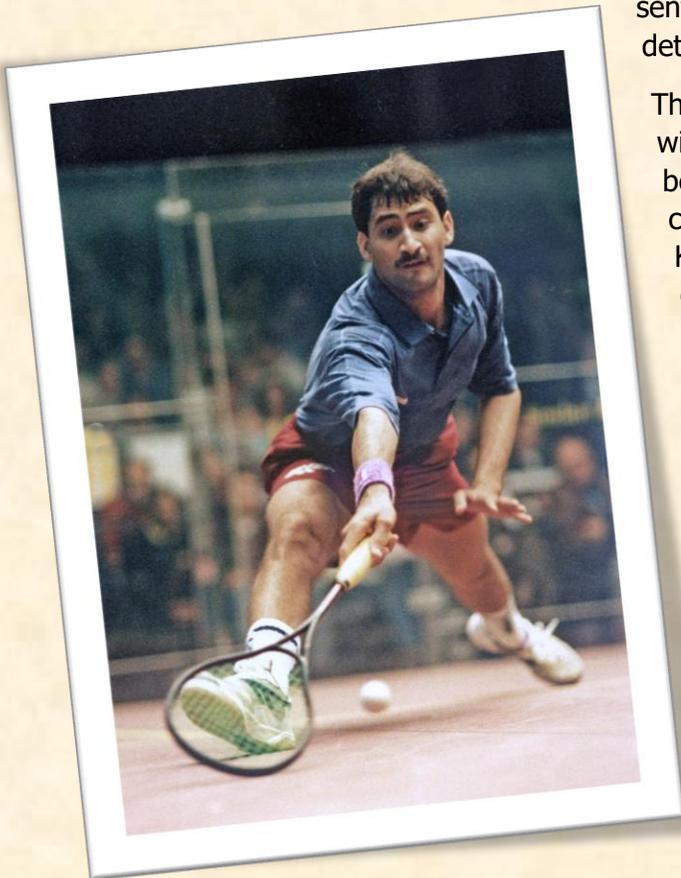


JANSHER KHAN – THE FASTEST MAN IN SQUASH

Jansher Khan, sometimes called “the fastest man in squash,” had two older brothers who achieved notable success in the sport, but as for Jansher, he was discouraged from playing because of concerns that he was too feeble to withstand the rigours of the game. But that sentiment just served to make him more determined....



The Khan family is a very prominent Pakistani clan with strong family ties who emerged from humble beginnings to become highly successful and gain considerable respect. The patriarch, Bahadar Khan, and matriarch, Husn Pari, had eleven children - five boys and six girls. Jansher is the third last offspring of the family.

Bahadar Khan was a storekeeper within the Peshawar Cantonment, a garrison under control of the Pakistan military. Being employed by the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) afforded the Khan family several tangible opportunities that would provide the means for the family to elevate their status. One such benefit was access to living quarters large enough for the entire family. Another was the unique opportunity for three of the brothers to play squash and gain coveted sponsorship by the PAF, which allowed them to progress in the game.

Mohibullah, the eldest sibling, was the first to be exposed to the game by invitation of a PAF officer, and it was not long after this exposure that his exceptional playing skills were discovered. There followed the opportunity for Mohibullah to represent PAF in competitions. Funding by the PAF was the genesis of Mohibullah’s professional squash career. Mohibullah lived up to his promise by winning the Australian Open at the age of 19, reaching the World Open final in 1976, along with three other semi-finals, and attaining his highest world ranking of two in 1976.

Atlas Khan was the second brother, and he too became involved at the championship level. Both brothers earned a host of gold medals, trophies and accolades.

Resolute ... and Fast

While Mohibullah and Atlas enjoyed early squash successes, Jansher was quietly looking on, making mental notes and yearning to have his time in the limelight.



"When I started playing squash, my parents and everyone else did not want me to play because they considered me to be too feeble to endure the constant demands of this fast-paced game. This did not deter me but instead made me more resolute to play competitively. I owe all my success to the generosity and support meted out to me by the PAF."

At the age of twelve, Jansher made his debut by capturing the first of what would be many junior squash titles. He demonstrated great agility and prowess on the court, and this, together with his fitness and diverse assortment of shots, drew the attention of coaches and team selectors. Jansher clearly had the makings of yet another phenomenal Pakistani squash player.

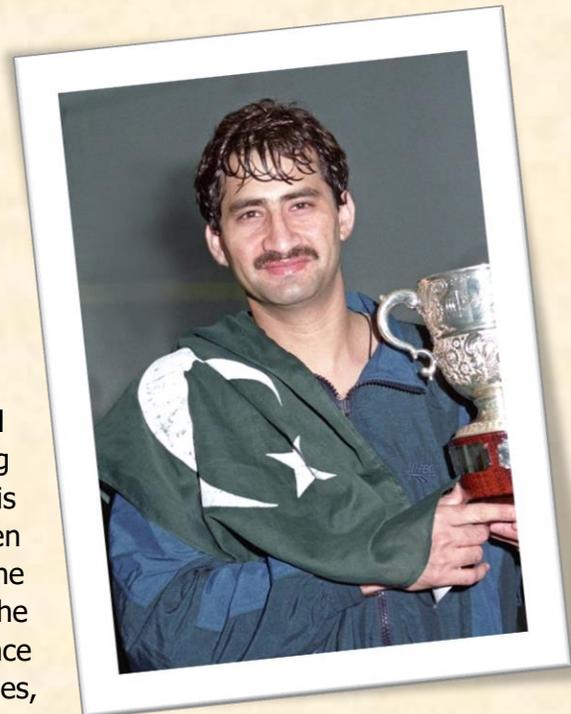
With all eyes on him, Jansher quickly rose in prominence. In an interview, he said, "I never focused on winning titles. I focused on winning matches. I knew that, God willing, I would win the World Open title and shatter

many other titles. My turn would come. In my career, I enjoyed every single match, and my winnings contributed to my success."

For him, squash is more than a game, it is a way of life. Jansher has an absolute passion for the game, and there is no other sport that he enjoys as thoroughly. For him, squash is part of his being; squash is everything to him. He did express one regret - that he did not pay more attention to his family while he was playing professionally. He advised that today's players must strike a balance between their professional and family lives.

Jansher can have little to regret about his career, though. Regarded as having one of the best all-round games of all time, his phenomenal speed generated from his tall wiry frame, lightning-fast reflexes and fluid movement. His successes on court saw him move out of the mighty shadow of his legendary countryman Jahangir Khan and dominate the sport himself for a decade.

Aged 17, he travelled to Brisbane, Australia, and went home with the World Junior trophy, beating favourite Rodney Eyles. In the years that followed his tally of 99 Tour victories included eight World Open titles – making him the most prolific winner of the World Championship. In the 9 World Open finals he played in, he won 4 times against Chris Dittmar, once against Peter Marshall, Del Harris and Rodney Eyles,



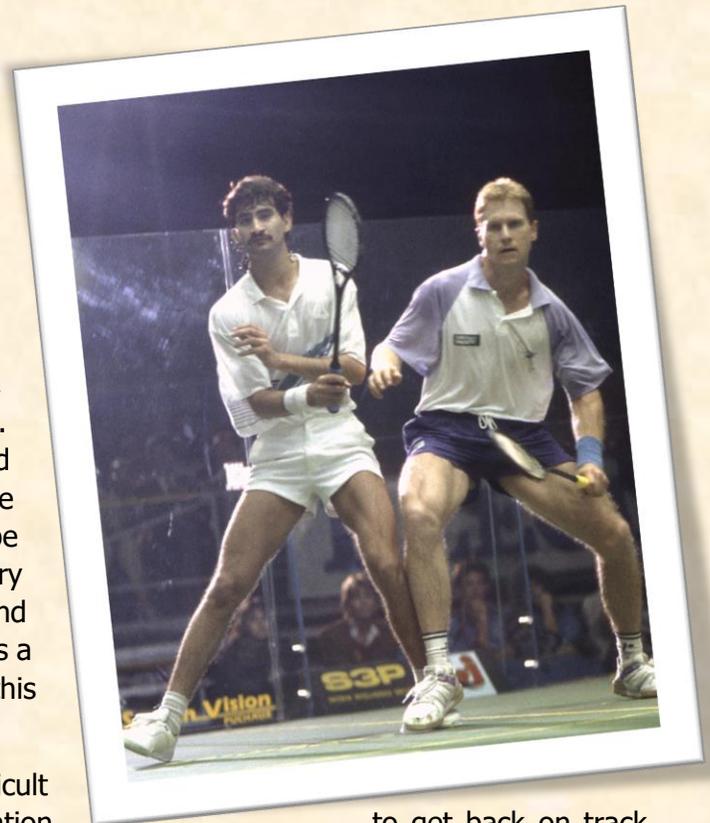
and once against Jahangir Khan, who had thrashed him a few years before, in his only other World Open final.

Jansher won 293 professional matches in his career, out of a total of 331, an astonishing winning percentage of 89%.

A regular comment among squash viewers was that Jansher didn't run around on the court like everybody else, he floated - so fast, but so light of tread. His movement and racketwork ensures that he will always be in any listing of 'legends of the game'.

It's Hard Work To Be the Best

Opponents who he mentioned included fellow Pakistani great Jahangir Khan, Rodney Martin and Chris Dittmar (*right*). He shared that, like these exemplars of the sport, aspiring professionals need to attain a mindset focused on hard work, discipline, resilience and dedication. Jansher spoke candidly about his on-court experiences and gave sound advice for up-and-coming professionals. "To become a world champion, you must be prepared to make sacrifices. Nowadays, players want to become world champions, but they do not want to put in the hard work on and off court. You must be prepared to dedicate six to eight hours every day and engage in high-intensity workouts and mental training to reach your goals: two hours a day will certainly not allow you to achieve this feat."

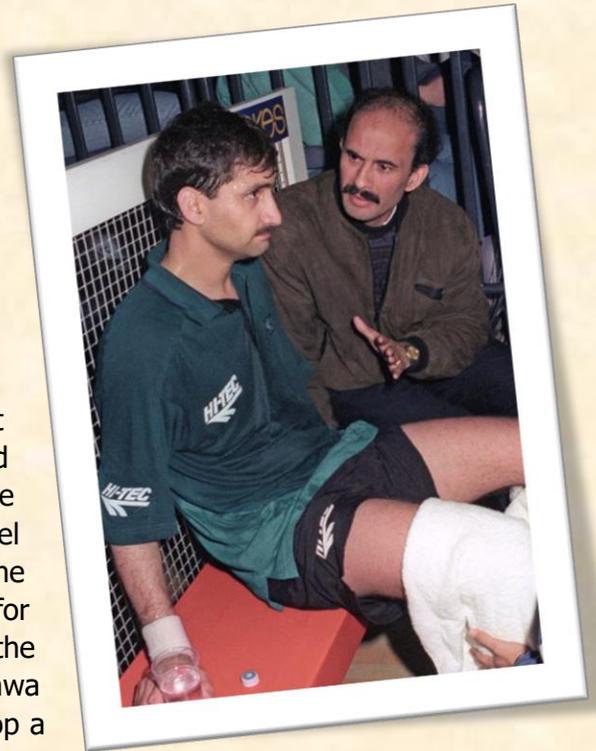


For players who may be experiencing a difficult time in their playing career and need motivation to get back on track, Jansher noted that he was not fortunate like others to have financial support to pursue his endeavours. His family could not afford to channel much-needed funds into his career, and so he faced many obstacles. These impediments did not deter him from achieving his goals; instead, he remained focused on his targets and played and worked hard to achieve them.

Stay Focused

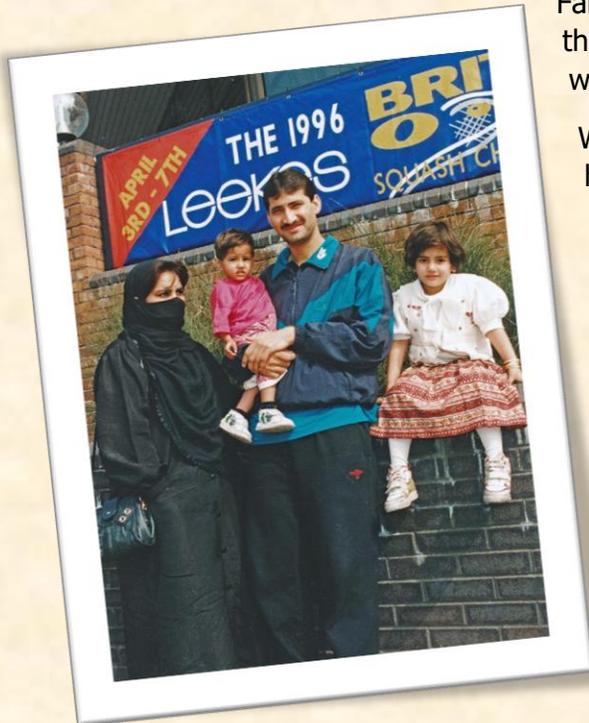
"Players who face obstacles in their careers: Do not despair, learn from my experiences, stay focused on your game, have confidence in your ability to be a success, and everything else will fall into place. I advise young colts to focus on their strategies for their games instead of wasting time: Progress in squash can only be achieved through hard work. I am committed to helping budding players achieve their true potential."

Quite reserved during his playing career, Jansher more recently has been outspoken on the dearth of players following in his footsteps. Lamenting this, he opined that Pakistan is blessed with a repository of squash players and maintained that every third child born in his country has the potential to become a champion. Success at such a high level has to commence with hard work, which should develop the players' core competencies in the sport and open avenues for them to progress to ever-higher heights. Jansher is now the head coach of Squash Sports Directorate Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and is hopeful that his academy will begin to develop a considerable number of competitive players in the near future.



Jansher with manager Satinder Bajwa

With respect to international squash players, he takes a keen interest in the performances of Ali Farag and Mohammed Elshorbagy, who at the time of this writing (2020) have been swapping the top two world squash rankings.



When asked about family members who followed in his footsteps playing squash, he mentioned his nephews Amjad Khan, Farhan Mehboob Khan and Aamir Atlas Khan, his son Ali SherKhan and his grandsons, Mustafa SherKhan and Adam SherKhan.

In closing, Jansher wanted to address his fans for their unyielding support over the years. "I would say thank you to all my fans, because they are like my winning team members, and in my professional career they kept me grounded and motivated. Whenever I thought I was losing a game, I was inspired by my fans not to give up. When I won a match, it was because of them."

Interview by Diane Julien.

Photos with thanks from Steve Line.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Jansher Khan (born June 15, 1969), retired in January 1999 after a remarkable career which included:

- winning 99 PSA World Tour titles in total
- six British Opens
- a record eight World Open titles.
- In January 1998, he topped the world rankings for the last time, marking a record 97 months as the men's World No.1.
- representing Pakistan in five (biennial) World Team Championships between 1987 and 1995, helping his country to the title on three occasions (in 1987, 1987 & 1993)

