



Simon Redfern talks to Diego Elias, the first British Junior Open champion from Peru

# THE FEARLESS PERUVIAN TEENAGER

With Egypt holding the world junior men's team and individual titles, and possessing a seemingly endless production line of talented teenagers, you would have thought the prospect of facing three in quick succession would be terrifying. Not for Diego Elias, though.

The 16-year-old from Peru knew he had nothing to lose when he took on top seed Omar Elatmas in the quarter-finals of the Tecnifibre British Junior Under-17 Open in Sheffield, joint third seed Youssef Aboul Makarim in the semis and second seed Mohamed El Gawarhy in the final.

Sure enough, his confidence was justified as he defeated all three 3/2 to become the first BJO champion from his country.

"I knew that I had trained well and therefore had a great chance of beating them," he said. "My goal has never been – and never will be – to finish second, but I was definitely surprised by the other players' quality at the British Junior Open. This tournament was both mentally and physically challenging for me."

It was his never-say-die attitude that impressed the most as his victories over

the Egyptians respectively took 106, 92 and 63 minutes – and he attributes that quality to his father, Jose Manuel.

"I have to thank my dad, because he taught me how to believe in myself and to never give up, no matter how difficult things may look," said the Lima teenager.

Indeed, it is his father, the Peruvian national coach, who has played a major part in his career as Diego explained.

"When I was a baby, my mom used to take me to watch my dad's matches and when a match finished, he always played with me. Then, when I was six years old, I started training with him," he said.

"At first I used to play both tennis and squash, but after a while my dad asked me to pick one of them and I chose squash because I was constantly attending squash events. He has always been my coach, my partner and my friend during this long process."

Diego began competing in junior tournaments in Peru at the age of eight and he has won every age category in the South American country.

A year later he was playing in South American junior events and he has now

won five of those, along with a Pan American junior title, two Canadian and US Junior Opens, the Pioneer Junior Open, Dutch Junior Open, Scottish Junior Open and BJO.

It was in Scotland that Australian master Geoff Hunt likened Diego to Pakistan great Jansher Khan. The teenager was stunned by the comment, saying: "I was very surprised to receive such a compliment because I never thought that I would be compared with that legend. I felt honoured!"

His next targets are the under-19 Pioneer and Dutch Junior Opens, in addition to "doing well" in the World Junior Championships this year.

No wonder he is a home-school student, with all his lessons sent to him via the internet. Indeed, he predicts that next year he will "have to" move from his base at the Club Terrazas Miraflores to another country.

That will mean less time for going out with his friends and playing football and tennis, but may be more for his hobbies of reading, watching movies and surfing the net – and, of course, emulating his idol, former world champion and no.1 Jonathon Power.



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