



**I**N THE background a Mozart concerto created the mood. On court, relaxed by the gentle cadences, the man they have called alternatively a freak, fanatic and madman played a session of finely tuned drop shots—as subtle as the music and as skilfully executed.

Suddenly, the accompaniment was pop; the crescendos greater; the movement faster. In turn, Jonah Barrington, OBE, at 30 the world's greatest squash player, sped and spun about the court with the grace and aggression of a jungle animal. "I enjoy both kinds of music," explained this rebel who has revolutionised the game, "but essentially squash is very much an animal game. It's very primitive in its movement—crouching, jumping, stamping, lunging. That's not like a normal human being. It's more akin to an animal."

That's one side of Barrington, the most magnetic, mercurial, masterful personality to grace the world's squash courts. The long hair, the moustache, and the wild shirts are the image of the rebel he has been. And perhaps the revolutionary he currently is.

He has subjected the game's conventions to a searching reappraisal. He was, and is, a paradox—a practical

visionary. He is perceptive in identifying barriers and imaginative in breaking through them.

Off court you recognise him as one of those fast-talking Celts who enjoy a scrap. And you remember the first time you saw those instincts—when he won his first British open title in 1966. To get through he had to beat Abou Taleb, champion for three successive years. They fought out one of the most punishing matches ever seen. It made the blood run cold simply to watch. And when Barrington came off court, the victor, he was suffering from four bad bruises.

He is no sporting robot, though. He is an inspiring disciple of the game whose enthusiasm inspires all around him, and he is inexhaustibly articulate. This, plus his skill, knowledge and sense of fun, cast him perfectly for the role he plays at his famous one-man squash clinics.

The sense of fun, and the feeling, come through when he talks about them. . . "My full clinic is a two-hour business with an exhibition at the end. I've spent four years working on this—after a shell shock of a start in Johannesburg in October, 1967.

"From that moment on, I decided that I wasn't going to spend hours coaching

individually; I was going to fill a gallery with 150 people. Financially, this was obviously going to provide a far better return. It would also relieve the boredom of individual coaching. And it appealed to the extrovert side of my nature. I love putting on an act (which is why I'd like to be a fit Abou Taleb). This does give me an opportunity to capitalise on my Irish background!"

NOW he is reaping the rewards of the pain and personal sacrifice it took to get to the top. He has been a professional since 1969 and now, added to the talents he displays cruelly and crushingly on court, is the shrewdness and intelligence of the businessman.

"I'm trying to expand my business interests in Britain," he says. "The big problem has always been that I have never earned my bread and butter from squash in the usual way, by coaching. But there's a substantial return from endorsements—a glove, clothing, shoes, a racket. I'm also moving into beer advertising."

So Jonah Barrington is still looking round for new challenges. No one scoffs now. Watching him, the controlled aggression, the animal cunning, the flamboyant manner, it is difficult to imagine why they ever did.