

By MIKE DICKSON

HAVING been put through her compulsory training in the Israeli military, you would assume that the prospect of winning a few tennis matches should not be too scary for Shahar Pe'er. So for the 21-year-old from Jerusalem, who today plays No 3 seed Elena Dementieva, this week must represent a fantastic opportunity to go where she has never gone before in a Grand Slam.

She is one of 16 left in the women's singles and not for a long time has it looked so open for an outsider to seize the moment and achieve the previously unimaginable.

As unexpectedly high proportions of the bigger names have suffered upsets, as happened at the recent French Open, The Williams sisters are still there without looking utterly convinced of their own invincibility.

Another survivor, Jelena Jankovic is another survivor, although she was walking yesterday with her head bowed to play over her tender left knee.

There are two theories about why the women are not taking a less predictable turn, one of them semi official and the other a little more hushed.

The more official version is that there is greater depth in the women's games than before with players fitter than ever and the hunger levels raised by the influx from eastern Europe.

Another opinion is that the women's top 10 in the world, including the Williams girls arrived here in the Wimbledon era and Monica Seles were not the powers they once were.

A fair bit of moral correctness possibly adds many in the pines from saying that publicly, but it is the one of the more outrageous sexist comments from former player and ATP Tour coach John Gimblest last week. The truth is that the situation has arisen through probably a combination of better players lower down and less fading in the top.

It is exacerbated this fortnight by the fact that this is the

# No fear for Pe'er in year of the upset

**Soldier of fortune: Pe'er has Dementieva in her sights**

four-weeks-per-year grass season, and the fact that the top women were either unable or unwilling to play warm-up events leading into Wimbledon.

Jankovic, who could become world No 1 if she makes the semi-final, said: "The ball sides and you sometimes have bad bounces, it's a very specific surface. If you lose your focus or your timing it is very hard to come back into the match and get your rhythm again."

"On grass everything is happening so fast, you don't hit so many balls. So if you have some problem technically it's very hard to fix it."

The liverwre Stee, who needed three sets on Saturday to beat Caroline Wozniacki, added: "On other surfaces, if you start playing badly you can get back into the match and start playing well again."

Jankovic will have her work cut out today against Thailand's Tamarine Tanasugarn, and then she would be due to meet Venus Williams, the defending champion.

The Williams sisters must still be favourites to meet each other in the final owing to the fact that they know how to win and will feel most comfortable at the very sharp end of the tournament.



Picture: REUTERS

But even they do not look bankable and some smart money is going on Poland's Agnieszka Radwanska, this year's Eastbourne winner, who is due to meet Serena in the last eight. Radwanska has lost only 12 games in the tournament so far, the fewest of any player, and is on a nine-match winning streak.

Those looking for a British connection should follow the progress of Nicole Pietrangeli, who is emerging from a dreadful form slump under the tutelage of David Pelegre, Tim Henman's former coach.

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look for the player's box, Judy Murray opted for a faded denim jacket which may have been more than a fashion statement. Any, her boy does good. She was not even submit, but the guy who chose the music for the match between Andy Murray and Scott Murray, who was a sex including a sexually explicit lyric (which was excluded) by American R&B singer Kelly Rowland, might have spilled a tea cup, says the All England committee room had they been known. They do now. The title certainly seemed to shock

Henman and even McEnroe. It was supposed to convey the bad-tempered, racket and tantrum throwing reputations of Murray and Haas. Both behaved well, but apart from a couple of Germanic screams and code violation for the neutral loser to being a ball out of the court.

The BBC are taking Murray extremely seriously and doing everything in their power to generate a neutral loser to being a ball out of the court. The BBC's News, no less, was shifted to BBC2 as the match could reach its conclusion without

requiring viewers to change channel. A brave call. That would test Middle England's interest in the Scotman. The Weekend Link met the same fate as the contest continued past 6 o'clock into peak Saturday evening viewing. There will have been people across the land, to paraphrase Keats, hating the BBC so much at that point. The tennis coverage was, by and large, excellent, led by principal commentator Andrew Castle, whose only mistake was to suggest that the level of play had been moderate. Henman grew into his role

during the first week, having initially been clearly overwhelmed by the presence of McEnroe, who talks as good a game as he used to play. The pair have begun to gel. But three in the commentary box is unnecessary. One commentator and a sidkick expert analyst (with as many as you like in the studio) is sufficient for most sports. I don't know why it has to be any different for tennis, a sport where mercifully nothing needs to be said during the action. Less is more, not a maxim ever followed by BBC producers.



## Wimbledon 2008 75

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There will be questions asked again about owner Mike Ashley's long-term commitment to Newcastle following his benching of Tony Jimenez being sent to Dubai to search for potential investors.

Jimenez, a property developer by trade but in charge of player recruitment in Ashley's unusual Premier League set-up, would hardly be in the United Arab Emirates to look for playing talent. But Dubai is the first port of call for those wanting to sell a share of, or a whole, football club. Newcastle have already sought out Dubai International Capital, the investment arm of the royal family, about taking a stake. They made a move shortly after Ashley's takeover last June, but DIC turned them down, wanting full control themselves. DIC have seem committed to waiting until Liverpool's cash-strapped American owners, Tom Hicks and George Gillett, have no alternative but to sell.

It has never been clear how long billionaire Ashley, who built his real fortune in Sports Direct by unorthodox methods, would remain in charge at St James' Park. He had originally intended to share the load of buying Newcastle. Now it remains to be seen if he is still looking for a partner or wants to sell out at the right price.

ANDY MURRAY didn't put a foot wrong on or off the court in a highly impressive first week of Wimbledon before he was edged out of a video promoting the World Four Final to be staged at London's G2 arena in 2009.

The ATP organisers of the event have been entertaining guests throughout the Championships to raise awareness about the big tennis attraction coming to London. Part of the bill has been a video featuring Murray being interviewed at his most morose. So much so that the ATP executive chairman, Billie Jean King, was vocally critical about Murray's filmed contribution, which begs the question why they included it in the first place.

ROOGER DEARHEAD, believed the chief executive of the Lawn Tennis Association, didn't help himself on Five Live's Sportsweek yesterday. He again distanced himself from personal targets - British players in the top 100 and juniors playing tennis - that his president, David Whitelock, set him in 2006. (pictured) said they were "wrong targets in the first place... set by a previous regime." Hardly. It was Smith who had set the targets in the first place and mentioned him specifically when stating the LTA ambitions.

ANDREW HINDLE, well known leading trader in the secondary ticket market, before agreeing official contracts with the RFU and Yorkshire, has claimed Wimbledon's Centre Court is the worst in the world. An astonishing 150ne-plus in a year. Tennis fan Hindle, whose weight had ballooned to more than 30st due to love of good food and Guinness, was concerned he wouldn't fit into a seat on his beloved Centre Court this year unless he lost weight. An Alzheimer Theory diet has seen him shrink to an unrecognisable 15st.

## Seem reaches No 10

DAVID O'LEARY and Peter Ridsdale, who as former manager and chairman of Leeds United have seen each other for the way their ambitions for the club disintegrated so spectacularly, show no signs of ending one of football's major feuds six years on.

Ridsdale, now chairman of FA Cup finalists Cambridge City, has been invited to join the Football Managers' Association, were guests at a 10 Downing Street reception for the Show Racism The Red Card campaign, but neither exchanged so much as a glance.

DISGRACED fraudster Roger Levitt, who bankrolled former world heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis before escaping to the United States after his massive debts were unravelled, will be making a rare appearance in Europe on Saturday when Randy Griffin, the American boxer he managed, fights for the WBC world middleweight title in Hamburg.

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