

By **MARTYN HALLE**

Fake bone that could replace hip operations

BRITAIN'S most famous squash player, Jonah Barrington, has been given a new lease of life with a pioneering operation.

The former world champion's face put the game on the map in this country in the Sixties and Seventies. But his desire to play on competitively was hit by a failing hip joint. For years he played and coached in pain until, three years ago, he was forced to give up altogether.

'It reached the stage where the pain and discomfort were so great that I couldn't carry on,' he says.

Barrington, 58, thought his days as a squash player were over.

'I knew I would need a hip replacement operation and the surgeon would advise me squash was not a good idea for someone with a hip replacement.'

'I was in my mid-50s and feeling pretty wretched. It had got to the stage where the pain was so bad I couldn't even manage light coaching.'

Barrington put up with his failing hip for nearly ten years before facing the inevitable. 'I hadn't played in competition for years and now, just getting around was an effort.'

Most men in their mid-50s would have gone for an operation at once. But Barrington held out, hoping there was a surgeon who could perform a hip replacement to withstand the rigours of the squash court.

Then, 20 months ago, he heard of a new operation being perfected by orthopaedic surgeon Derek McMinn, which avoided the need for a full hip replacement.

'I'd been to see a few surgeons but I wasn't confident that what they proposed was suitable for me,' says

Jonah, who lives in Glastonbury, Somerset. 'My wife Madeleine, a former athlete, had a conventional hip replacement which didn't work very well, so I was wary of going down the same route.' Jonah was sufficiently convinced that McMinn's operation — performed on men with an average age of just 48 — was the one that would allow him to resume his love affair with squash.

McMinn, who works at Birmingham Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, relished having a former professional sportsman as a patient.

McMinn's operation involves removing only diseased and damaged areas of the hip. Conventional hip replacement surgery requires the insertion of a large steel rod into the femur and a completely new hip joint normally made out of plastic or metal.

The new metal hip head is glued into place with a special cement and is coated with a

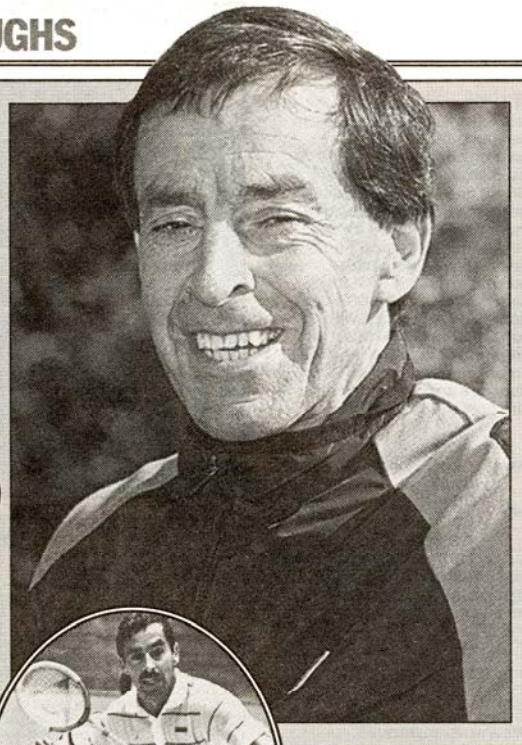
synthetic substance so similar to natural bone that it is well tolerated by the body. It is made from a substance similar to tooth enamel designed to be hard-wearing.

For years, surgeons have been looking for ways of avoiding a full hip replacement and McMinn believes this could be the solution.

So far, he has treated more than 600 patients in three years but knowing whether or not a new hip replacement technique works is a long process and it could be another seven years before the success rate is known.

But surgeons do know the new hip will suffer 100 times less wear and tear than conventional hip replacements.

For Jonah Barrington his new hip has meant that, once



Fighting fit: Squash star Jonah Barrington is on top form after a hip replacement

held in Sheffield. He was knocked out of the singles in the over-55s, but reached the semi-final stage in the doubles.

'The hip is holding up really well,' he says. 'I am not conscious of it being any different to my own hip.'

Despite being nearly 60, Barrington is fiercely competitive and is aiming to win a title when the next world championships take place in two years.

'It was quite some achievement to get back after being out for so long, particularly as I had to build up my muscle strength because of the Achilles tendon surgery.'

'I was desperate to play again and I am enormously grateful that there is an operation which allows sportsmen who need hip replacements to carry on playing competitively.'

Barrington was once famed for his four-hour training sessions and religious devotion to fitness, but he says he is avoiding punishing workouts because of his new hip.

'I have to look after it, but whenever I've been on court I've never had a problem. I'm probably just being cautious because Mr McMinn says the more exercise I have the better it is for the hip,' he says.

■ **FOR information contact the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital on 0121-627 1627.**