

MIKE DICKSON

the world of tennis

Hair today, a Jamaican superstar tomorrow?

THIS is not to be condescending about one of the faster rising players in the game, but when Dustin Brown lines up in the men's singles at Wimbledon next week it will bring a hint of Cool Runnings to the All England Club.

The 25-year-old Jamaican's rapid improvement over the past 18 months sees him as a rare direct entrant from what we understand as the West Indies — the first for 42 years.

He will not be hard to spot, an unorthodox serve and volleyer whose regular forays to the net carry behind them an enormous main of dreadlocked hair.

Few players have taken such a colourful route to the big time, Brown having spent years trawling round the Futures and Challengers circuits in Europe courtesy of a VW camper van.

His whole tennis upbringing is also far removed from that of the soulless academy. Much of his formative period was spent playing at public courts around Montego Bay, interspersed with trying to get practice time on the more polished surfaces to be found in the nearby resort hotels.

There is, though, a strong German connection, as he spent the first 10 years of his life just outside Hanover where his Jamaican father Leroy had met his German mother Inge.

They moved back to Montego Bay, where he was to graduate from High School before taking his tennis more seriously and eventually moving back to base himself in Germany.

Animated on the court, he is laid back away from it. 'I always tried to keep my tennis up when we went back to Jamaica, but I spent a lot of the time trying to maintain the things that I had been taught earlier in my life as we had lived next door to some tennis courts in Germany,' he said.

'In Jamaica it was mainly public



Rising star: Jamaican Dustin Brown

courts, but I'd try and get into the resorts when I could. The camper van was my parents' idea and it was great — it's still what I use when I'm back in Germany.'

This probably explains why he has taken a relatively long time to break through, having climbed from 500 to inside the top 100 in the last 18 months. He is following in the footsteps of Richard Russell and Lance Lumsden, Jamaicans who played the circuit in the Sixties and Seventies. 'I'm not exactly Usain Bolt, hardly anybody knows me back at home but I would like to change that,' he said.

With a big serve and forehand — on which he regularly employs a highly unusual, whipped slice — there is likely to be more to come from Brown, who narrowly lost in the second round of the AEGON Championships to Uzbekistan's Denis Istomin.

A footnote to this, when considering the struggle Britain has to produce players, is that their match-up shows the huge global spread of tennis. There have been top level competitors from Haiti and the Bahamas and not many other sports could boast talent blossoming in countries as diverse as Uzbekistan and Jamaica.