Without obsessive, slightly unhinged parents, you might never become a tennis ace, says Tim Adams. The parents of British tennis players, that is. They are not crazy enough to create Wimbledon champions. They don't string tennis balls above their babies' cots to improve their hand-eye coordination (like Mike Agassi), and then have their toddlers play in the midday sun in the Nevada desert to improve their resistance to heatstroke. You can trace this kind of relationship back to French champion Suzanne Lenglen, who won six titles at Wimbledon and six at Paris between 1914 and 1926; Lenglen was the creation of her father, Charles. He put her on a strict tennis regime when she started school, and forced her repeatedly to hit a handkerchief he placed on the court.