

Elena's year to cherish

Tennis by Terry Phillips

ELENA Wagner, the German tennis ace who is top seed for the Texaco Challenger Tournament which starts in Cardiff today, has had a year to remember so far.

She plunged from 70 to 221 in the World in 1995, but has made a dramatic leap back and now stands at her best ever position of 62.

"I lost form and confidence, I just could not win," admits Wagner, a 24-year-old who was born in Sofia, Bulgaria but now has a German passport following her marriage to Axel Wagner five years ago.

"I practiced hard and worked hard on court, but nothing went right.

"Thankfully it was only temporary and I came through it. This has been my best ever year and I feel I am playing pretty well."

Wagner has already won two indoor tournaments in the Challenger series, winning the 25,000 dollars Redbridge event and the 50,000 dollars title in Southampton.

There was also a 75,000 dollars tournament win in Spain.

Now with new coach Stefan Eggmayer, who is with her in Wales, Wagner knows the Texaco Tournament at the Welsh National Tennis Centre is crucial to the next stage of



TOP SEED: German tennis ace Elena Wagner.

her progress.

"My aim is to be in the World's top 50 within a year to 18 months," says Wagner, who lives with husband Axel in Heidelberg, Germany.

"Right now I don't get the chance to get home too often, but my husband understands.

"For the next two or three years I will concentrate on my game and playing tournaments. Perhaps then it will be time to be at home more, we will have to wait and see."

This year Wagner has

played at Wimbledon and in the US Open plus tournaments in Spain, France, Germany and more.

Now she is out for success in Cardiff and says: "It's good to be in Wales. I am enjoying it here already, but my main aim is to do well."

The qualifying rounds of the Texaco Challenge ended yesterday and the main draw matches started today with the finals on Sunday.

Ticket details from Cardiff (01222) 452000.