



QUOTES

25 July 2019

with **BORIS BECKER**

QUESTION: How did you see Alexander Zverev's performance today?

BECKER: I was very pleased, as he managed to come back in the second set again. Unfortunately, he has not won too many matches in the last few weeks and of course every win is important. He played very well today. Every opponent is difficult, and you must win your matches first, even if you are the tournament's second seed and he did that very well.

QUESTION: You have also been in responsible position at this tournament for several years. Now the tournament is in the hands of the Reichel family. What's your impression about this year's edition?

BECKER: Exactly, I was chairman of the tournament for five years and know the Rothenbaum tournament very well. It has not changed so much since my last appearance. And compliments to the Reichel family, which I believe, will try a lot of new things here this year. A lot of things seem to work out, especially the weather, however the weather is not in their hands. Sometimes things even work out better with luck than knowhow. I followed the first few days from home and I am glad that I could see the three top players today. Struff, who lost to a very strong Carreno Busta, Zverev and now our young hope Rudolf Molleker.

QUESTION: Mr. Becker, do you think that Zverev's return to Hamburg could help him after those less successful months on the Tour?

BECKER: Yes, I think you recognized that well. He has returned to his hometown in Germany. That's good for him. He seemed to be happy coming home again. I think Hamburg was the big breakthrough for him with the run to the semi-finals three or four years ago. As a tennis player you never forget, where you won the first big matches. The timing also fits with the wild card. I'm afraid that if he reached the second week at Wimbledon, he would not play here, but that's in the past. He seems to be playing more freely with a little more confidence. I really liked the forehand today, and these are all components on the way back to the very top of the game.

QUESTION: At Wimbledon, you subtly criticized Ivan Lendl mentioning that he should either fully commit to Sascha Zverev or not at all. Can you maybe talk about this again?

BECKER: I did not criticize Ivan Lendl, but I asked myself a couple of things. If you have a high-profile coach like Ivan Lendl, then you need to have him with you on the Tour. If this is not the case, it will be less than ideal. It's pointless for the player as well as for the coach. That's what I was talking about. He hasn't been there for almost the entire clay-court season. I do not know the details of the contract and I don't want to interfere in their partnership, but if you have such a coach, then he has to be present. Why this isn't the

case, Sascha will be able to answer that question better than me. Sascha is always accompanied by his father, it will always be like that, but he made the decision to hire Lendl and then you have to either do it properly or leave it. So, this current situation I think is not satisfactory to both parties.

I am a close friend of Sascha's and I probably know the situation better than I would like, have to or can explain to you. The situation is not satisfying for either of them. Lendl is one of the best coaches worldwide – full stop. Sascha Zverev is one of the best players worldwide – full stop. They won the ATP World Championship together and then something broke. I don't want to tell you what it is. And now, it is July and it wasn't satisfying for either of them. The result, Paris was good but the other results on clay were not satisfying. This is the way one has to see it. Now, I see a kind of new start with Sascha. He is also somebody, who likes to freely tell his frustrations. I advised him not to do that too often, but he is 22 years old and I have sons that age, who don't necessarily do what I would like them to do. So, it's a generation problem but I do like him a lot. He is still one of the world's greatest tennis players. At the moment he has, I don't want to say a crisis, but a situation where he feels some resistance for the first time, where he doesn't reach the results he wishes for so much. He is also a player, who has been at the top for years now and his opponents study him. He has to develop and get rid of his weaknesses. That is why I mentioned his forehand right away; I really liked it. He knows that. It takes time. Also his dad knows that. And sometimes you need a new voice. When I see him we often talk about tennis in my role as team captain – let's put it that way – but I can't and don't want to do that every week. And he knows that. The most important is that I think he is motivated through and through, i.e. he wants to be the world's best tennis player, he wants to win Grand Slams. And where there is a will there is a way.

QUESTION: Who do you think will make it to the finals of the Hamburg European Open and who will win the tournament?

BECKER: If I only knew. According to the seeding the finalists should be Thiem against Zverev but the seeding is not always correct. However, on clay I would see Dominic Thiem as the tournament favourite. How he, except for Nadal and maybe also Sascha Zverev, played best on clay last year. I watched some of his two matches. He is in good shape. And he also has to give something back after his first-round loss in Wimbledon. That wasn't ideal, that's fact. But I think he feels best and at home on clay.

QUESTION: Mr. Becker, you had very successful years with Novak Djokovic. You said that you can't and don't really want to work with Sascha. So, what is it that would need to happen to make you coach another player and work with him closely, apart from Sascha?

BECKER: After the very intense period with Novak Djokovic I took over a new role in tennis, i.e. Head of German Men's Tennis. IN this role, I was Sascha Zverev's mentor for two years and I did see him often. I see him every week, talked to him often until one day the question came up how things will continue. I said that I can't and don't want to work full time but that there are one or two great coaches out there who can help. One of them was Ivan Lendl. And it also worked well. They became ATP World Champions. Then, something happened. Patricio Apey is involved, as well as Sascha's age plays a role. He is slowly changing from being a boy to becoming a man and you have to find your boundaries. This is all part of the development and I am always by his side, and if he asks me he I will always tell him my honest opinion. But I can't even imagine travelling around the world as tennis coach for 30 weeks again. With pleasure, I take on my role as head of men's tennis. I am at every Grand Slam, I am at a lot of big Masters tournaments and I am also at Hamburg Rothenbaum. Thus, I am here – full stop.

QUESTION: You mentioned Rudi Molleker. How did you follow his progress over the past year and what are your expectations for him?

BECKER: Of course, I followed his progress closely over the past three years. The transition from a hopeful talent and one of the best juniors to the seniors is very tough. He is not the only one. So far, he has done a good job. And we are a wonderfully democratic sport. The truth is on the court. If you feel good and win you are right, if that is not the case then you are not right. And he went through a few phases during the spring where he lost a lot of matches in. So, something was going wrong. But he is clever. Also thanks to the Wild Card at the BMW Open his form curve is going back up. Then, he also got a Wild Card in Stuttgart where he also played well and now he is here. We support him to the best of our knowledge. Slowly, he is starting to appreciate that more than maybe a year ago. But at the end of the day, he is a sole trader. He needs to know what is best for him. I think that now the path is a bit clearer to him.