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by **Vincenzo Martucci**



Boris reveals after his come-back: «I heard he was out, I felt better»

NEW YORK. Emilie is more dangerous than Emily. Maybe a few month old baby did more damage than the feared hurricane: also because all America was ready to defend itself from the hurricane, but certainly didn't expect the psychological damage that his firstborn daughter would do to Stefan Edberg, the two-time defending champion of the US Open who left the stage on Thursday night, beaten by Karel Novacek.

The Swede, who came to the net behind millimetric approaches and cold steel assaults, with a single thought in his mind: take the net as soon as possible, now "has a family", thinks to "being a good father", has discovered the delights of golf and trips to Kew Gardens outside London and, once on the tennis court, plays his part as always, only two decibels below compared to when he played wonderful symphonies.

With this result: «I only played flashes of good tennis, I was too inconsistent. Nevertheless it wasn't too hot, it wasn't too windy. The conditions were normal, even if everything was heavy, from the balls to the surface. Once I lost the first set I said to myself: "Ok, it's not a problem". After losing the second I acknowledged: "Now you're really in trouble". But I never went down, I won the third set and regained a lot of confidence in my chances. Because I really thought I could get back in the match, to still have chances to do it and I looked to be fighting hard. Then I immediately lost my serve again, though, and five minutes later the match was already over. Too early, much too early».

And yet everything looked right: from the powerful but predictable and inconsistent opponent, always beaten in the previous meetings, to the draw for the following rounds. «Yes, I really had a good draw. And I didn't even feel the pressure to defend such an important title as Flushing Meadows. But I didn't find the time on the ball, I didn't see the ball earlier, I hit it just a moment later, I was too tentative and many chances flew away. Anyway, I will still bring back good memories from this place, after the last two years of successes».

Even if there must be a lot of bitter taste for equalling the negative record for early elimination of a defending champion: at the second round, like Mats Wilander in '89 and Ilie Nastase in '73.

Meanwhile, on the Centre Court, Boris Becker was fighting against himself, even before than

against Andrei Cherkasov. Bum Bum was furious. Then he let himself go: «I think it was negative for the tournament to schedule my first match on Wednesday, when I had asked for playing as soon as possible, especially because on Monday there weren't big names in the order of play». That late match had then suffered a rain delay and was moved to Thursday night. After just two points, Bum Bum took out his rage hitting hard, too hard, just like when he was a teenager. And, like then, he often sent the ball out or ended up to be passed by the Russian's retrievals. Moral: he lost the first two sets playing nonsense, delaying the net attacks, collecting double faults (17, in the end balanced by 17 aces) and unforced errors (75), missing a ridiculous forehand from the baseline on the set point (7-6) of the second set tie-break.

«And then it got a little hard». Hard? Boris put shame on his Barbara who watched him with magnetic eyes from the first row, pulled out a feeling of sorrow even from Sampras: «I was sorry for him: even if he gets off of it, he will have to play seven matches in eleven days to win the tournament. He was unlucky with the schedule».

Then Boris stopped screaming, protesting against the entire world, smashing his racquet violently against his heels and, in a moment of stunning silence, he realized he could still beat for the eight time Cherkasov, to whom he had not left either a set, taking away the withdrawal of Bruxelles '91».

«I was there fighting, he gave me the chance to get back in the match on that break point that could take me on 2-4, and I suddenly heard from the Grand Stand: "Game, set and match Novacek". And to know that Edberg was out gave me a boost. For who knows which reason I felt better and I went 7-5 before rain started falling».

A break at least as providential as the announcement that the great rival had been eliminated coming from the near court. In fact John McEnroe from the tv microphone guessed: «Boris is Boris again. He is the great favourite of the Open». And seized at the neck his opponent who had always escaped him, hitting the most undefended corners of his court, the German closed the contest after 4 hours and 43 minutes, raising the game level as he only can do.

«I think I solved the match in the fourth set that was my best moment. I finally relaxed while he looked to be struggling and became slower. Then in the fifth set Andrei was much more tired than me and this made the difference. Thank goodness I'm still alive».

The service decline

by **Rino Tommasi**

NEW YORK. What had happened three years ago at the Roland Garros almost repeated itself on Thursday night at Flushing Meadows. Back then, it happened on Tuesday, on the second day of the tournament: in a few hours the first two seeds Stefan Edberg and Boris Becker were

brutally knocked out. Not by two unknown, because Edberg had lost against Bruguera, who would win the tournament three years later, while Becker had been defeated by Ivanisevic, runner-up in Wimbledon last year, but they had been two outstanding surprises.

This time the disaster has not been complete, because while Edberg has been beaten in four sets by Karel Novacek, solid Czech hard-hitter, Becker succeeded for the eighth time in his career (the third in this tournament) to get back from two sets down against Andrei Cherkasov who had beaten Edberg at the Roland Garros last year.

Edberg's defeat hasn't actually been a surprise if we consider how the Swede struggled to beat the modest Frenchman Delaitre and most of all if we analyze the development of all his season. For the first time since 1989, when he lost two finals (at the Roland Garros against Chang and at Wimbledon against Becker), Edberg will end the season without winning a Grand Slam tournament. He was runner-up in Australia, beaten by Courier, who stopped him again in the Wimbledon semifinal, while at the Roland Garros he stumbled on Medvedev at the quarters.

Technically, Stefan Edberg's decline is explainable with the lower penetration of his serve, that reflects itself in a lower confidence on the volleys. A player like him, who frequently applies the serve and volley tactic, can't afford to be passed too often on the returns.

In Wimbledon, for instance, Courier methodically passed him on the second serves, as many points looked as the tv replays of the previous ones. Also the other day Novacek, who had always lost against Edberg in three previous meetings, could break him five times and recover from a break down in two sets, the second and the fourth, he eventually won.

Edberg turned 27 last January. At this age both Borg and Wilander had already left the tour, but the decline of Edberg, who absolutely doesn't think of retirement, has completely different motivations. Borg and Wilander, the two Swedes who preceded him on the international stage, quit when they realized they couldn't train four hours a day, the minimum for players with their features, who based everything on patience, run and concentration.

Edberg belongs to another stream and shares only the passport with the other two champions. The talent will certainly allow him a longer career, always if he doesn't let himself get discouraged by less brilliant results than in the past.

This year he has won a single tournament, on clay (Madrid), the least suitable surface to his style. As always, he has accepted very gently the defeat, that will cost him many points in the ranking, but there's the hypothesis of a career that has started its descending phase.

As far as Becker, furious against the umpire of his match and with the organizers who forced him to conclude his first round on Thursday night (should he reach the final he will have played 6 matches in 10 days), he showed personality and good fitness. There are other doubts to clarify, but differently from Edberg, he can do it in this tournament.