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(23.02.2012) The scene was set at the end of the 1996 season for Stefan Edberg to bow out of the game in front of a home crowd in the Davis Cup Final in Malmo. The six-time Grand Slam champion had announced the decision to retire at the start of the year and everything had aligned perfectly, Edberg seemingly destined to crown a fine career with one last triumph.

Standing in the way was a French team that had performed heroics in the semifinals against Italy to overcome a surprise 2-0 deficit from the opening day. They entered the tie as underdogs but boasted a dangerous team comprising of Arnaud Boetsch, Cedric Pioline, Guy Forget and Guillaume Raoux who didn't turn up simply to play out Edberg's dream.

A thrilling weekend's play climaxed on a wild Sunday on which over nine hours of tennis was required to determine a victor in the first ever Davis Cup Final decided in the fifth set of the fifth match.

### **The dream turns to nightmare**



The opening rubber of the final drew Edberg, in his favoured position having a definite start time, against Pioline. The Swede had won four straight matches against his opponent including a meeting in Rome earlier that year in straight sets.

With the match barely under way any thoughts of a hero's farewell came tumbling down. A twisted right ankle meant Edberg could function at nowhere near his peak and Pioline capitalised to record a straightforward 63 64 63 victory and edge France ahead.

"I took a wrong step. It might be my last match. It's not a bad injury, but it's swollen," remarked the Swedish No. 1 after coming off court. He was scheduled to hit after Saturday's doubles and again Sunday morning to determine whether he could take to the court for one last hurrah but it was very much a race against time.

### **The King is dead. Long live the King**



Thomas Enqvist was playing in only his fifth Davis Cup tie for Sweden having begun to show why he was touted as the man to walk in the footsteps of Bjorn Borg and Edberg by winning back-to-back titles in Paris and Stockholm the previous month.

Charged with keeping Swedish hopes alive against experienced campaigner Arnaud Boetsch, the 22-year old showed few signs of nerves in front of the capacity crowd sealing a 64 63 76(2) success to level the tie.

The doubles swung the momentum back in France's favour as Forget, who was something of a

doubles specialist for his nation, and Raoux saw off Jonas Bjorkman and Nicklas Kulti in four sets 63 16 63 63.

### **Final day drama**

The drama really unfolded on the final day of the competition as the winners from the first round of singles returned to face each other, Pioline looking to wrap up the tie for the visitors. He looked set to do just that flying out to a two set lead when taking a tight second set 10-8 in the tiebreaker.

Enqvist fought back at the start of the third securing a break in the very first game that proved sufficient to take the set. The comeback was very much on when he raced into a 4-0 lead but Pioline proved his endurance to reel off four games of his own, only to hand a break straight back leaving Enqvist to serve it out to love.

The final set began in mirror image to the fourth, with the Frenchman shrugging off the disappointment of losing his two set lead. He stepped up to serve for the match at 5-3. At crunch time, however, it was Enqvist who secured his place in Swedish hearts breaking Pioline's spirit and polishing off his amazing fight back to level the tie once again with a 36 67(8) 64 64 97 triumph in 4 hours 26 minutes.

"I think it was the longest match in my career and one of the most important and most emotional I've ever played," Enqvist remarked. "I played well and I fought hard. To come back two sets to love and win is a nice feeling."

### **Down to the wire**

