



PHOTO: AFP

Czech Tomas Berdych jubilates after beating Serbian Novak Djokovic in the Wimbledon semifinals at the All England Tennis Club in London yesterday.

Berdych in final

AFP, London

Tomas Berdych clinched a place in the Wimbledon final for the first time as the Czech 12th seed defeated Serbian third seed Novak Djokovic 6-3, 7-6 (11/9), 6-3 on Friday.

Berdych, the first Czech man to reach the Wimbledon final since Ivan Lendl in 1987, has been a dangerous force on the ATP Tour for the last five years.

But he hadn't been able to translate his talent into success at the grand slams until the last month.

Since the start of the French Open, the 24-year-old has been in the form of his life. He reached the semi-finals at Roland Garros and totally overwhelmed six-time champion Roger Federer in the quarter-finals here.

That stunning victory over Federer ended the defending champion's run of seven successive Wimbledon final appearances but, more importantly, it confirmed Berdych's transformation into a big-game player.

Now he can look forward to a first grand slam final appearance against world number one Rafael Nadal or Britain's Andy Murray.

Djokovic admitted this week that he has suffered a crisis of confidence over the last few months and even his progress to the last four had been a triumph for his spirit rather than a reward for particularly fluent play.

The 23-year-old, who won the Australian Open in 2008, had reached this stage once before in 2007, but he was forced to retire from his clash against Nadal due to injury.

This was to prove an equally painful experience.

Berdych is an undemonstrative soul on court, but his lack of visible emotion reflects his clinical approach to the game.

He plays with metronomic efficiency and allows his opponents to beat themselves at times.

Standing a lofty 6ft 5in tall, Berdych had kept Federer on the back foot with a barrage of booming serves delivered with pin-point accuracy.

With Djokovic looking slightly inhibited by the occasion in the first set, it wasn't long before those tactics paid off as the Serb missed two easy forehands to give Berdych the first break after six games.

Berdych was showing no signs of a hangover from his Federer victory and he had no trouble serving out the set.

Djokovic had a chance to get back into

the match when he earned a break point early in the second set.

Even then Berdych had the answer as he came up with a crushing forehand winner to get out of trouble.

Berdych racked up three break points of his own at 5-5 and converted the second when Djokovic smashed an overhead way off target to surrender his serve.

That looked like being a killer blow for Djokovic, but he raised himself when Berdych served for the set and broke for the first time to force a tie-break.

After an hour of baffling lethargy, Djokovic was beginning to play with the verve that defines his game.

He was chasing down every ball and even when he fell 6-2 behind in the breaker, he managed to save the four set-points.

Djokovic fought off another two set-points and seemed to be turning the tide, but suddenly he imploded as a double-fault gifted Berdych the set.

That was the defining moment of the match. After fighting so hard to stay in the tie, Djokovic was a spent force in the third set.

It was only a matter of time before Berdych got the crucial break and he did so in the eighth game before serving out the best win of his life.

Purbachal, Agrani get first points

SPORTS REPORTER

After five consecutive defeats, both Agrani Bank and Purbachal Parishad played out a goalless draw in the Bashundhara Senior Division Football League at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Sepoy Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Though both the got their first point after five matches, they are still in threat to be relegated.

Purbachal are at the bottom of the 12-team points table with five from eight matches while Agrani are just ahead with seven points from eight matches.

Rana hattrick gives Police first win

SPORTS REPORTER

Rana Das slammed a hattrick as promotee Police AC tasted their first victory in the Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League with a 4-0 defeat over Wari Club at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Police led the first half with a strike from Rana, who later scored two more goals in the second half to complete his hattrick.

Golam Mostafa Manik netted the fourth goal to award Police its first victory in six matches. It was the sixth straight defeat for Wari.

Chapal off to Australia

SPORTS REPORTER

Hockey coach Barkatullah Chapal leaves here for Australia today to take part in development coaches' programme.

The programme, conducted by Hockey Victoria, will be held in Victoria province from July 5 to 14 and Chapal is also supposed to join a local club in Victoria during the period of course.

Bielsa on JFA wish-list

REUTERS, Tokyo

Former Argentina coaches Marcelo Bielsa and Jose Pekerman head Japan's wish-list to take over from Takeshi Okada, local media reported on Friday.

Okada is set to retire to a life of writing poetry and farming after the Blue Samurai were knocked out of the World Cup in the last 16, triggering a search for his successor.

"I want to get away from soccer," Okada told Japanese television on Thursday after the team returned from South Africa following their penalty shootout loss to Paraguay.

"Even if I was offered a new contract. It won't happen so let's not talk about it."

Japan's stock has risen after their surprise run to the knockout stages following victories over Cameroon and Denmark.

"The most important point is to evaluate what each of the candidates can bring to table," Japan Football Association (JFA) technical director Hiromi Hara told the Nikkan Sports.

"Experience is important but also the coach's character and passion for Japan," said Hara. "We don't want to rush."

Bielsa, 54, led Chile to the last 16 of the World Cup where they were beaten 3-0 by tournament co-favourites Brazil earlier this week.

The new coach's first task will be to win the Asian Cup in Qatar in Jan. 2011.

ESP
 FIFA 2010 World Cup
 QUARTERFINALS
 Germany v Argentina
 Live from 8:00pm
 Paraguay v Spain
 Live from 12:30am (Sunday)
STAR Sports & SuperSport5
 Wimbledon Championships
 Women's Singles Final
 Live from 6:30pm

Kaiser shocked at Maradona hate

AFP, Berlin

German football legend Franz Beckenbauer expressed his amazement on Friday at the criticism of Argentinian coach Diego Maradona which has emanated mainly from Brazil's three-time World Cup winner Pele.

Beckenbauer - whom Maradona is attempting to emulate in winning the World Cup both as a player and as a coach - said that he disagreed with Pele's claim on Thursday that Maradona's previously troubled private life would affect his squad - who take on Germany in the World Cup quarter-final on Saturday in Cape Town.

"Above all one must not underestimate him (Maradona)," said Beckenbauer, who won the 1974 World Cup as a player and the 1990 one against a Maradona-captained Argentina - as coach.

"He was an exceptional player (he captained Argentina to victory over the Beckenbauer-coached West Germans in the 1986 final) and nobody is entitled to give him lessons on football. What's more, his players are ready to march through fire for him," 'Der Kaiser' told Bild from South Africa.

Beckenbauer, who also 'won' a third World Cup as he was largely responsible for Germany winning the right to

host the 2006 edition and headed up the highly successful hosting of it, said that he was also not impressed by midfielder Bastia Schweinsteiger's goading of the Argentinians.

Schweinsteiger, who at 26 is amazingly one of the veterans of the German side, had accused the Argentinians of being provocative - something he got first hand in 2006 as the South Americans reacted angrily to losing to the Germans on penalties.

"They were maybe not very intelligent remarks," Beckenbauer said of Schweinsteiger's comments.

Beckenbauer, a well-groomed and youthful looking 64, said that the key to Germany repeating their victory of 2006 was to muzzle the individual talents of playmaker Lionel Messi, as Inter Milan had done so effectively in the Champions League semifinal.

"It is imperative that we muzzle him (Messi).... Inter Milan showed how to do this in the Champions League semifinal against Barcelona, isolating him and stopping him from

passing the ball so freely, this will be the job of Bastian Schweinsteiger and Sami Khedira," said Beckenbauer.

Beckenbauer conceded that this clash would be the toughest yet for the Germans, who have won three of their four matches here twice scoring four times and losing one a 1-0 defeat by Serbia, but that if they progressed, then a fourth world title, but first since Germany was unified, would be on the cards.

"This match against Argentina will be by far the toughest that our side has played up till now in the finals," said Beckenbauer, who earlier in the finals apologised for derogatory remarks he made about the England team though he was proved right in the end as the Germans humbled them 4-1 in the last 16 clash.

"But if we emerge victorious from the match, the dream of a world title will become reality."

The winners of the match will play either European champions Spain or South American outsiders Paraguay in the semi-finals.

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Dawn of a new Italy

INTERNET

It is not as if a collective state of amnesia has swept the country since Italy's early exit from the World Cup but at least it's a clean slate that awaits Cesare Prandelli as he begins his tenure in charge of the national team.

Thursday may have been a day the former Fiorentina coach will never forget well, until he gets down to drawing up a list of players capable of restoring Italian pride on the international front.

At least expectations have been suitably realigned with the new world order, which leaves Italy in a similar position to those other fading football empires England and France.

However, the new man has the opportunity to create a fresh identity so get ready for the new buzz word in Italian football: Meritocracy. Players will be in the squad on current form, not just because they are household names.

Marcello Lippi tried this policy once in a friendly against Northern Ireland last summer ahead of the Confederations Cup but once the World Cup qualifiers kicked in again, the ball-playing Giuseppe Mascara, Pasquale Foggia and Sergio Pellissier were immediately cast aside for a more prosaic approach.

Prandelli's first task will be to ensure that he does not follow that tired and tested route to ultimate failure and add to that unwanted number

of one- or two-cap wonders.

His biggest worry must be that the young players will not get a chance at club level over the arc of a season to even merit a cap but there is no doubt that Mario Balotelli will finally make the breakthrough to the senior squad for the friendly against Ivory Coast in August.

There should be space for Davide Santon, who drifted off the radar following the Confederations Cup but at least the full-back wasn't

tainted with the same brush as those who travelled to South Africa this time around.

Domenico Criscito, Claudio Marchisio and Leonardo Bonucci will have learnt from last month's sobering experience - and then there should be room for Lorenzo De Silvestre at Prandelli's former club and Bonucci's central defensive partner Andrea Ranocchia, whose season was curtailed by a knee injury.



CESARE PRANDELLI

Of course it's not difficult to be amiable when you are attempting to make a good first impression: just look at Jose Mourinho on his arrival at Inter. But at least Prandelli starts on the right foot, well respected both within the game and amongst the media.

With a solid club record, an amenable personality and an ability to get the best out of even the most wayward performers the new Commissario Tecnico is at least in there on merit.

South Africa not just about football

REUTERS, Port Elizabeth

Fans whose teams have dropped out of the World Cup are finding there is plenty to keep them in South Africa even after their soccer dreams die.

From cuddling baby lions to diving with sharks, South Africa has a myriad of attractions and is eager for football visitors to sample the goods in the hopes that their enthusiastic tales when they get home will help boost tourism.

Chris Dorsey and his friends began their three-week tour in Johannesburg, South Africa's city of gold, before viewing wild life in Kruger, the country's top game park.

"We saw leopards, that was incredible... Would we have come to South Africa if it wasn't for the World Cup? Maybe, one day, but this definitely convinced us to come explore now," the American, from Austin, Texas, told Reuters.

South Africa spent about 40 billion rand (\$5.21 billion) on the one-month event, hoping to attract millions more tourists in the next few years and reverse negative advance reporting that painted it only as ridden with violent crime.

"You always hear about how dangerous this country is, but I've had no problems at all," said Tom Flynn, a 19-year-old England fan, before jumping 216 metres (yards) from the world's tallest bridge bungee jump outside Plettenberg Bay, clad in an England wig and a flowery dress.

Thieves have targeted players and journalists during the tournament, but so far it has been free of everything but minor crimes, which in most cases have been swiftly and sternly dealt with by police and special courts.

Up to 370,000 foreigners were expected for the soccer spectacular, most visiting the continent for the first time.

With an expensive long-haul flight between South Africa and the most fervent soccer fans in Europe and South America, numbers are way down on Germany in 2006. But that was expected

and authorities are convinced the benefits will be big.

"We couldn't get better advertisement for the country," said Roshene Singh, South Africa Tourism's Chief Marketing Officer.

"Many people who are leaving are going to recommend South Africa as a holiday destination and they also may come back."

Experts say the word-of-mouth impact could be worth more than many expensive advertising campaigns.

Yet although the country's riches are vast - from sandy beaches, dramatic scenery and wildlife to trendy nightlife - most visitors have stuck to the host cities or their routes between the stadiums.

Face Adrenalin, the company which organises the bungee jumps, lies on the coast between Port Elizabeth and Cape Town and benefits each time visiting fans pass through.

Being near the French, Japanese and Danish team base camps helps, said Gareth Solomans, the group's operations manager.

"Tourism around here comes to an almost standstill this time of the year. Now we get some 120 people a day," he said.

This is the traditional low season in South Africa, hosting the first winter soccer World Cup for three decades.

Some operators said World Cup bookings had topped their high-season Christmas levels.

Singh said with beach parties in sunny Durban and music events in Cape Town the tournament had reinforced South Africa's status as an all-year round tourism destination.

Authorities also hope that many fans will stay on for longer breaks after the tournament ends on July 11.

While Cape Town, Johannesburg and the Kruger Park have been most popular, Soweto township, home to up to a million poor black South Africans and a historic legacy of the country's divided past, has attracted unexpectedly large crowds.

So has Johannesburg's moving Apartheid Museum.

"Things that happened in this country were incredible for humanity and we are here to appreciate that," said Arturo Alcocer, 44, an industrial engineer from Queretaro, Mexico.

The World Cup is expected to add around 0.5 percent to South Africa's GDP in 2010. Singh estimates tourism will add 10 billion rand to the economy, almost 10 times what the hosts spent on marketing in the past four years.

But some operators have lamented the lack of a dividend, with the global economic crisis and alarmist reports on crime depressing original estimates of visitors.

Thousands of South Africans who had expected to make a killing by renting their houses at inflated prices have been left empty-handed after foreign bookings slumped.

Organisers have said Africa as a whole would benefit from a lasting legacy of a successful World Cup but from mountainous Lesotho to the beaches of Mozambique, neighbouring countries have complained that they have not seen a jump in revenues.

In fact, tourist operators in neighbouring countries say the World Cup has had a negative effect, with congested, expensive flights to the tourist hub of South Africa putting people off.

Booking tills in Namibia have been quiet all June. "Normally around June we have at least three or four tours to the Sossusvlei dunes or Etosha," said safari operator Rebekka Hidulika, referring to the country's huge red sand hills and northern game park.

"But this month we haven't had a single tour, not one."

Shareen Thude from the Namibia Tourism Board said bookings have dropped by more than 50 percent compared to last year and many hotels saw pre-booked rooms returned to them just weeks before the tournament, giving little time to find new guests.

Many Namibian hotels and airlines have now slashed prices by half to at least attract some local or regional tourists.

Yet the World Cup hosts believe future visitors will venture beyond South Africa's borders.

"This is soccer, a guy thing," said Slovenian fan Robert Langerholz. "Next year I will bring the family and explore."

Capello to stay on

TELEGRAPH

The Football Association have confirmed that Fabio Capello will continue as England manager despite the team's poor performance at the World Cup.

The decision, which ends uncertainty over the Italian's future, was made following a meeting of the Club England board today.

In a statement the Club England Board said: "The Club England board considered all aspects of England's performance and operations at the FIFA World Cup, and it was unanimously agreed that Fabio is the best man to continue managing the England team."

Club England Chairman Sir Dave Richards said: "We are all still extremely disappointed at our performance in South Africa, and we believed it was important that we took some time to reflect on everything in a calm and considered manner back in England. After fully discussing our performance we remain convinced that Fabio is the best man for the job."

"He went into the World Cup with a reputation as one of World football's finest managers and we are confident Fabio will benefit from his first international tournament experience and this will undoubtedly make us all stronger for the Euro 2012 campaign." FA Board Acting Chairman Roger Burden commented: "The FA Board supports this decision. It is the right decision and will allow us now to rebuild for the future with Fabio leading us forward."

Capello will now be charged with the process of qualifying for Euro 2012, and with the wider project of rebuilding the team harmony which appeared so fractured during the World Cup.

Spanish sweat on Martinez

AFP, Potchefstroom

Spain's 21-year-old central midfielder Javi Martinez had to leave his side's World Cup training session early on Thursday after suffering an ankle injury, team sources said.

A Spanish Federation statement revealed that Martinez, a newcomer to the international scene, suffered "a heavy blow to the ankle" shortly before the session ended at team headquarters in Potchefstroom, southwest of Johannesburg.

The Federation said they were monitoring the Athletic Bilbao player's fitness ahead of Saturday's quarterfinal with Paraguay in Johannesburg.

Premier Div Hockey League
 Abahani v Ajax
 Time: 4:30pm
 Venue: Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium