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Australia regain lead after doubles

By Jeff Kavanagh



Chris Guccione, Lleyton Hewitt and captain Patrick Rafter (AUS)

Photo: Florian Eisele

HAMBURG, GERMANY: The Davis Cup by BNP Paribas World Group play-off between Germany and Australia began the day hanging in the balance at one point apiece, but finished with the visitors requiring a solidarity win in Sunday's reverse singles to take the tie, having won the doubles rubber 63 62 26 76(4).

Playing in cool, but otherwise ideal conditions, the Australian twosome of Lleyton Hewitt and Chris Guccione came out full of enthusiasm. Hewitt, who experienced a torrid time in his straight sets loss to the German team's No.1 Florian Mayer on Friday, was clearly full of energy, bouncing round the court and revving up a small, but vocal, crowd of Australian supporters with his trademark "C'monnnn!" The two metre tall Guccione had his own point to prove, coming into this crucial match with a 100 percent record in Davis Cup doubles, having won his last six rubbers.

At the other end of the court, Benjamin Becker was playing in his first Davis Cup doubles match and was finding the going difficult, struggling early on with his serve. Three double faults in the fourth game of the first set handed Australia two break points and although Becker's partner, world doubles No. 36 Philipp Petzschner, was able to save the second with a superb reaction volley at the net, it was not enough and the Aussies went on to win the game and then the set 6-3.

The second set quickly went the same way as the first, Becker broken in the fourth game and Petzschner in the fifth, the Australians marching on to take it 6-2.

Two sets down after just over an hour of play, the Germans were in trouble. Confident play by Petzschner at the net again coupled with an improvement in Becker's serve, however, saw the German team steady. They were still having difficulty mastering Guccione's serve – he finished the match without being broken – but were getting more change out of Hewitt, breaking him twice to take the set 6-2 and put themselves back into the rubber.

The fourth set began with Becker's serve hitting the skids again, and he was broken early to put the Aussies ahead 2-1. The writing appeared to be on the wall for the German pair at 4-2 down and with Hewitt serving to extend it to five. If Becker was finding it tough to win his service games, then so was the 31-year-old Australian and the hosts were able to break him and keep themselves in the match. From there, both teams held serve to take the game to a tiebreak, which was decided 7-4 in favour of the Aussies.

Australian captain Pat Rafter spoke of the performance of Hewitt and Guccione as being "pivotal" to the success of his team in the tie, particularly given the strong form of Mayer, who swept past Hewitt in straight sets on Friday and now plays Bernard Tomic in the first of the reverse singles rubbers tomorrow.

German team captain Patrik Kuhnen also made reference to the strong performance of Mayer, noting: "If he can win, it's two all [in the tie] and then the heat's going to come up."

Hewitt, who could well feature in that match, potentially against Petzschner after a less than convincing display by Cedrik-Marcel Stebe yesterday, reckoned he was up for the challenge. "I'd love Bernie to finish it off, but if I'm called up, I'm ready," he said.

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