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The Shot – The Smiles -- The Mood Changed

BY JOHN MARTIN

SAN DIEGO — When he lost his serve twice in the first set at this year's French Open, Mikael Ymer, an Ethiopian émigré now living in Sweden, adopted a somber expression. His opponent, Novak Djokovic, won 6 points on drop shots, and remained stoic. As the two men marched from one end of Phillip Chatrier stadium to the other, it became clear this was going to be a rout.

Finally, with Djokovic serving at 6-0, 3-2, 30-15, Tennis Channel commentator Jim Courier observed that Ymer's best hope would be to drive the ball up the middle of the court.

"If you don't have a lot of power," he said, "the one thing you don't want to give someone with Novak's capability is an angle. The best strategy would be to employ no strategy, which is to go straight through the middle of the court...don't give him angles to work with. Force him to get it to work.

"There was that crazy Australian Open a few years ago," he said. "Novak won it in five sets but



TWEENER: In 3.05 seconds, Ymer raced 21 feet and smashed a winner between legs.

doubt Ymer could not hear Courier's advice from the broadcast booth. But something had to happen, it seemed. Then, in an eight-stroke rally Djokovic lured his opponent to net, lowering his left shoulder and slicing the ball barely over the net into Ymer's ad court.

From the baseline, Ymer ran forward to chip the ball back before it could bounce a second time. He succeeded, but only managed to push it up the middle to Djokovic, who moved two steps inside his baseline and caught the ball at his waist, popping a backhand lob over Ymer's head. Ymer instantly reversed direction, turning his back on Djokovic and sprinting 21 feet toward the line in 3.05 seconds. (I

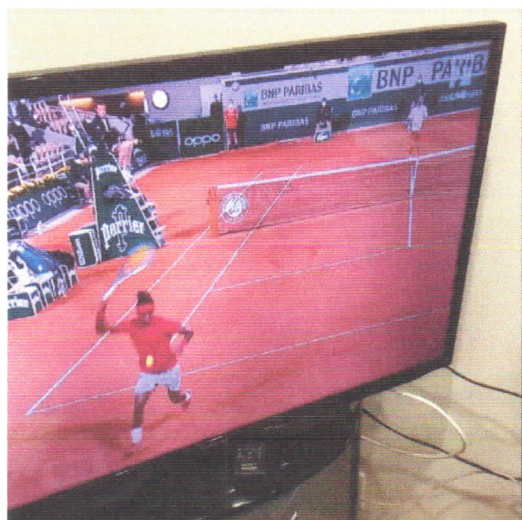
measured with my cellphone stopwatch). Then,



with both players and Tennis Channel viewers holding their breath, Ymer slashed his racket downward and slammed the ball between his legs crosscourt past a startled Djokovic for a winner.

Suddenly the mood changed. Ymer's smile slowly turned into a grin. Djokovic's expression melted into a comfortable smile and he raised his racket to clap his strings.

A dreary rout was averted by a sensational stroke and lots of smiles.



had 100 unforced errors." Djokovic's sharp angled strokes had been tearing apart the 22-year-old Swede's ground game.

No



Final score: Novak Djokovic defeats Mikael Ymer, 6-0, 6-2, 6-3