

## Game, set and match to

# Boris Becker

*Boris Becker, Wimbledon prodigy turned pundit, talks about his three new loves: Lilly, who he married on Friday, Anna, the little girl he once refused to admit was his, and last but not least, poker*

BY COLE MORETON  
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

Boris Becker wants you to know something. "I've changed, there is a new chapter starting." So just forget that other thing you know about him, the one everybody always wants to talk about instead of his magnificent tennis career, OK? (What's that, you don't know? Well, 10 years ago Becker

locked eyes with a woman in the Nobu Japanese restaurant in London, had very brief sex with her in some kind of cupboard and later a baby girl was born. Oh, and when the encounter happened, his wife was at the hospital. Pregnant. But really, forget it. At least for now ... ) His second wedding ceremony, at a Catholic church in St Moritz on Friday was not just a celebration of a joyous union. It was also a tightly managed event, intended as a message to all those who watched and worried over the years, as the youngest ever Wimbledon champion became a wild child, then a playboy. "There comes a time in every man's life when he needs to settle down," says Becker, intensely. Then he smiles. "In my case, again."

We are talking before the wedding, sitting in the window of San Lorenzo, the Italian restaurant in Wimbledon that many players use as an unofficial canteen during the tennis tournament, which starts on Monday. Becker first came here as a boy, before winning the championship in 1985 at the still-astounding age of 17. He went on to five more Grand Slam titles, an Olympic gold, a fortune in prize money and a tabloid life so intense it would have turned lesser mortals to dust.

"What I do does not go unnoticed," says Becker dryly, but in truth he doesn't exactly fight it. Offered a table at the back, for privacy, he has chosen to sit up front "for the view." But he has turned his back to the street outside, so was it his view he was worried about, or that of the passersby?

### A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Becker is something to look at. Very sexy, I'm told, if you like your men cocky, fit and a bit wild. He still has the indefinable physical presence common to great athletes, which makes those around him (well, me) feel flabby and inferior. His clothes — a green tweed jacket, a blue shirt, deep indigo jeans and cowboy

boots — look as expensive as you would expect from a man said to be worth US\$100 million, but they are not flashy. His hair is not spiky as it is when he commentates for the BBC every Wimbledon, making Sue Barker blush with his quips, but cut shorter and swept back. Blond, too, rather than ginger. Becker is not that carrot-topped boy any more; there is silver in his stubble.

"I was really young when I first came on the scene," he says. "I was bound to go through changes along the way, and they happened in front of a lot of people's eyes." Yes, but it probably didn't help that he did things like pose naked on the cover of a magazine with his then wife, Barbara Feltus, whom he married in 1993. They were in love. Publicly. The sickening reaction from German racists, because of her African-American heritage, intensified the media obsession with him in his homeland. When they were divorced in 2001, the pre-trial hearing was televised. Feltus got a reported US\$14 million and custody of their sons Elias and Noah, who are now nine and 15 and live in Miami.

As for Anna, the nine-year-old child of that brief liaison in Nobu, he denied being her father but was proved wrong by a DNA test, not to mention their undeniable resemblance. Anna is now at school in London, and Becker has news. "I have rented a place here," he says, "since February. I live within walking distance of Center Court. It's so much easier when you live in the same place, [as your child] to have more privacy. To do what is necessary, as a dad."

His new wife is Sharley "Lilly" Kerssenberg, a Dutch model. They announced their engagement live on a German game show in February, to great surprise. The host, his friend Thomas Gottschalk, exclaimed: "No, not again?" Only a few

months earlier, Becker had been engaged to Alessandra Meyer-Woelden, the daughter of his former manager, but now he told viewers: "I lost my way."

He hired his own crews to film and photograph the wedding, for his personal Internet site and syndication across the world. "I don't want to hide in a tent," says Becker, who has clearly learned the English art of understatement. "I'm very happy about my next move, and I want to share it with the world."

We have to talk about the tennis as well, though. Every summer he takes time off from his sportswear business and car dealerships to rile his old rival John McEnroe in the commentary box. His employer, the BBC, has called him Britain's Favorite German (not, it must be said, a crowded field). "I was honored. In Germany they don't find me German enough sometimes. Humor plays an important part in my life, and that's so not German." He now proceeds to say nothing funny at all for the time it takes to eat an avocado and prawn salad, then steak and mash. Maybe his deadpan delivery obscures the side-splitters. He is glad, he says, that the British finally seem to have got over telling jokes about the war. "I think the World Cup in 2006 changed a lot of the stigmas and stereotypes you had. We like a good time as well. We are foreigner friendly. The sun even shines in Germany. We are a country that loves this multicultural, multiracial life."

### BECKER ON MURRAY

There's nothing funny about our perennial obsession with whether a British player can win Wimbledon. "Yes," says Becker, without hesitation. "I think he can." Federer is the favorite. Nadal is "in a league of his own" although "he can't possibly go on the

way he is going, playing so many tournaments. He will break down eventually." But Andy Murray has impressed Becker. "It's his attitude. He isn't satisfied with being the best British player. He is willing to do whatever it takes to become No. 1 in the world." He's tougher than Tim Henman, then? "Probably. There's a big difference to most other players, not just the British ones."

Becker knows what it takes. On the wall of our restaurant is a photograph of him as a youngster because this is where he came for dinner every night before that first triumph (and the subsequent ones). He was alone, apart from his coaches. "That was a good thing. These days most parents become the management team of their children, which I find horrendous. It's very bad for the child to all of a sudden have your father on your payroll."

His parents "had a different plan" after he was born in Leimen, West Germany, in 1967, the son of an architect. "I was supposed to be a lawyer, a doctor, something like that." Instead their son was submerged into the fiercely competitive, indulged, insular world of professional tennis. He thrived. When his powers began to wane, Feltus was a help. Leaving though, when his time was up in 1999, was a greater challenge than any tournament. "It took me a couple of years to get adjusted to my after-tennis life. I made a couple of mistakes."

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Former German tennis star Boris Becker and his new wife Sharley "Lilly" Kerssenberg smooch during the ZDF TV show *You Bet...* in Duesseldorf, Germany.

PHOTOS: EPA



## [ TECHNOLOGY REVIEW ]

BY HIAWATHA BRAY

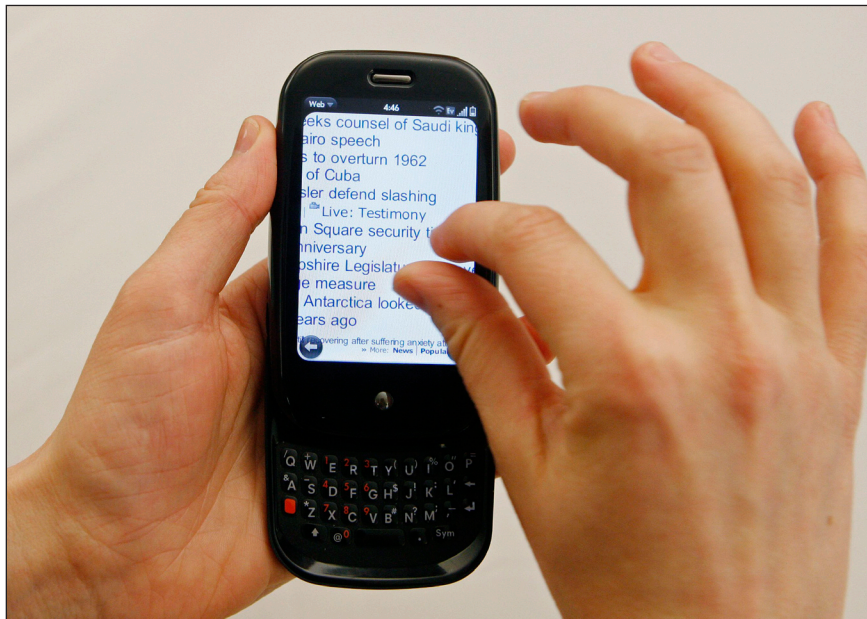
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, BOSTON

Nearly a week with a Palm Pre cellphone, and I've only placed a couple of calls. I've been too busy taking photos, reading the news, listening to music, playing games, watching videos, and reading the instructions.

That's a major weakness of Palm Inc's much-anticipated new gadget. The Pre is a powerful, versatile smartphone, and in some ways better than Apple Inc's renowned iPhone 3G. But it falls short of the elegant simplicity that Apple has taught us to expect.

Besides, Apple's just cut the price of the basic iPhone to US\$99 in the US, half that of the Pre. And Apple is rolling out new, improved iPhones and upgraded software to boost capabilities. Throw in a desperate recession, and it's plainly a lousy time to launch the Pre, but it's the only time Palm's got.

Palm once dominated the market for personal digital assistants — pocket computers for storing an address book and appointment calendar. Too bad that its market was devoured by cellphones that did the same things; first, Research In Motion Ltd's BlackBerry line, and then the iPhone.



The new Palm Pre cellphone is a competitor to Apple's iPhone.

PHOTO: REUTERS

The Pre, which went on sale on Saturday, might get Palm back into the game. It could also rescue Sprint Nextel Inc, the only carrier now offering the Pre in the US. Sprint has lost 6 million subscribers since 2007 and is desperate for a hit phone that will win them back.

So was AT&T Inc when it scored the exclusive US rights to the iPhone, and that worked out well.

But the Pre is no iPhone. Fire it up, and you're not sure what to do next. The most impressive feature of the iPhone is that you know how to use it the moment

you switch it on. Its on-screen icons are self-explanatory, and respond just as you'd expect.

Not so with the Pre, whose designers took to heart the old Apple slogan, "Think different." The phone's user interface takes some getting used to. But that's partly because the Pre, unlike the iPhone, can run more than one software app at the same time.

For instance, try the Pandora Internet music service. Pandora picks up music through a 3G cellular network or a Wi-Fi network. But what if you want to listen to Pandora and read the newspaper? Both the Pre and the iPhone have apps for newspapers, but since the iPhone runs just one app at a time, the Pandora music stops when you launch the browser.

On the Pre, just launch Pandora, and then the newspaper. They run concurrently, allowing you to enjoy cheerful music along with your daily dose of bad news.

Managing multiple apps took a little practice. The apps either fill the screen or appear as little "cards." You slide the cards back and forth with a finger swipe. The iPhone has a similar navigation feature, but you can touch any part of the screen to shift its icons.

With the Pre, you must swipe a small area just below the screen. It's hard to see where to put your finger, and I still have trouble doing it right. Luckily, closing Pre apps is easier. Just flick the card upward and it soars off the top of the screen. Still, I had to watch a video tutorial, included with the Pre, to understand swiping. That's something I didn't need to do with an iPhone.

Some Pre features explain themselves. Set the Pre to collect your e-mail, and you get a nice little on-screen notification of incoming messages. Tap the notice and your e-mail program launches, without interrupting your other apps. Smart and slick.

Another touted Pre feature is its "real keyboard" with pushbuttons instead of the iPhone's touchscreen keypad, which many experienced thumb-typists find unsatisfying. Too bad the Pre's real keyboard is a real pain, with keys too small and flat for comfortable use. Compared to the Pre, the iPhone's touchscreen is as comfy as an old IBM typewriter.

But this annoying keyboard also enables another excellent Pre feature, "universal search." It works like Spotlight, the excellent search function found on Apple's Mac computers.

Type any word — "boss," for instance — and the Pre will search all files on your device in search of that word: apps, stored documents, address book entries, whatever. And it'll give you the option of searching the Internet via Google, Wikipedia, or even Twitter. Again, very smart.

No question, the Palm Pre is good stuff, and likely to be popular with Sprint loyalists. But it's probably not enough to woo back defectors or win new business.

After all, there's the iPhone, sleek, attractive, and with thousands of software apps compared to a few dozen for the Pre.

The newest iPhones, priced at US\$199 or US\$299, go on sale in the US Friday. They offer a built-in video camera, Spotlight search to match the Pre's universal search feature, the ability to control the software using voice commands, and even a service that'll use GPS tracking to locate the phone if you ever lose it.

About the only thing missing is a help icon, like you find on the Pre. That's because the iPhone is so simple, most people won't need one. And that's the main reason why Apple has little to fear from Palm.