

Boll wins all-European semi-final

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Timo Boll secured a 4-2 win against fellow European opponent Vladimir Samsonov on Sunday morning at the Echo Arena in the 33rd Liebherr Men's World Cup.

Coming into the match it was Boll who lead the head-to heads 5-3 with their last meeting a comprehensive 4-0 win for the German in the final of the German Open in 2009. In fact, the last time Samsonov beat Boll was back in 2007 at the Chinese Taipei Open.

Boll, however, began nervously, touching the ball long on a couple of occasions early on as he conceded the first four points to Samsonov. It was a very tentative start from both players who, despite their experience, clearly felt the nerves on the big stage as they realised their opportunity of a final place without having to beat one of the Chinese players.

Boll's poor early start cost him in the first game as Samsonov was allowed to win the opener 11-7 without having to extend himself in any big rallies.

It took until the 11th point of the second game for any lengthy rally as the pair were evidently still feeling their way into the match. On that occasion it was the Belarussian who won the point before repeating the dose on the next point as Boll netted twice to open up a 7-5 lead.

Boll finally broke the shackles at 8-5 to push Samsonov back and use his forehand power for the first time, but it didn't matter as the 36-year-old secured a second game 11-8 and an important 2-0 lead.

The left-handed Boll finally clicked in the third game and rushed into an early lead, which he carried on throughout to dominate a one-sided game 11-2 and get himself back into the match.

The fourth game was a tight event throughout and you could sense the players were starting to hit their gears, especially Boll who began attacking from deep defensive positions.

It appeared as though the 31-year-old had the edge in the middle distance topspin rallies while Samsonov relied on picking up points close to the table. When Boll won the rally of the match for 10-7 he was just a step away from securing the fourth game and drawing level at 2-2, he duly applied the finishing touch next point for an 11-8 game.

Boll as then slowly establishing himself on the match and an unreturnable backhand flick across the table gave him a 7-4 lead and a hint at his new assertion of dominance.

His lead in the fifth game was converted into an 11-7 game and a 3-2 lead as he quietly moved himself into pole position for the final place.

When Boll won a magnificent deep forehand topspin to topspin early in the sixth game it appeared as though there was no shift in momentum, something the giant Belarussian desperately needed to change.

At 8-7 down, Samsonov decided he needed a timeout in order to affect this momentum shift. It didn't work. Boll created two match points at 10-8, which the Belarussian brilliantly saved, but he couldn't save a third as the German number 1 secured the game 12-10 and a place in the final to boot.

Boll would now have the chance to compete for his third Men's World Cup title against one of the Chinese pair Ma Long and Xu Xin who contested the other semi-final at the Echo Arena.

Timo Boll (GER) bt Vladimir Samsonov (BLR) 4-2 (7-11, 8-11, 11-2, 11-8, 11-7, 12-10)

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