ANDREW MARR SHOW
BORIS BECKER

AM: Boris Becker, let’s start with the basics. Are you bankrupt?

BB: I’m going through a personal bankruptcy for the last twelve months. I owe a English private bank 3.9 million euros. I’ve given the trustee in excess of five million euros only a while ago, so to my knowledge this case should be closed.

AM: And is this the only big debt you have, because people have talked about 54 million pounds owing?

BB: When you mention the name Boris Becker, people lose their reality or their sense of facts and they start imagining things that are absolutely not true.

AM: So how much money now do you owe?

BB: Well, I’ve paid it and my – my debt –

AM: So you owe no money at all?

BB: That’s why I don’t understand the confusion. I’ve given the trustee – the cost of the conviction 3.9 euros. I’ve given that money, the money is there, and so I don’t understand why we’re having these discussions.

AM: So anybody who actually is owed money by Boris Becker, any creditor, will be paid?

BB: Absolutely.

AM: How did this come about, because you have been a very, very wealthy man since you were 17? How did you get into a
position where you owed so much money? What was the money for?

BB: Well, it was a business deal that I was offered many years ago when I came to the United Kingdom. I was living in Switzerland. And, you know, a very famous bank said you could possibly have done it before, you could sell your brand rights in part of our country, to an English bank, tax free, and they would give you the money and you have five years to pay them off.

AM: And it didn’t work out?

BB: Well, it worked out good for three. Then unfortunately a couple of contracts didn’t continue and new ones weren’t coming, so they had a problem.

AM: Do you think you’ve been a bit financially irresponsible or at least naive?

BB: You know, I’ve been fortunate enough for the last 33 years to make a lot of money. And I made my first million at 17 years old, winning at SW19. I’ve been blessed, I come from a good family background. So money was never the incentive, never the issue. I think were different problems that came along.

AM: In the middle of all of this, rather surprisingly, you suddenly became a diplomat working for the Central African Republic. How did that come about?

BB: Well, I was approached by the President, His Excellency Mr Touadera, already in February, to help him improve the image, the reputation of this very difficult and poor country. And so in a ceremony in April he made me the Attaché of Sports, Cultural and Humanitarian Affairs. And that had nothing to do with my bankruptcy proceedings, it was just informing the trustee,
therefore the courts, that if they want to send me to another
hearing my official address is the Embassy in Brussels and not at
Wimbledon or in Germany. Unfortunately the other side didn’t -
didn’t respond to that and therefore we have these
misunderstandings.

AM: And this all came about through the Belgian side of the
Central African Republic. It’s been suggested –

BB: Correct.

AM: - that German politicians were the go betweens in all of that.
Is this true?

BB: The connection was made from German politicians. The
reason for it is I’m a son of a refugee. My family is all mixed race,
so I have a strong feeling towards the African continent and
therefore have a lot of respect and seriousness with it. And so this
was the story behind it, something I’ll continue to do for many,
many more years.

AM: Can I ask who the politicians were who were the in between
for this?

BB: I’m not throwing around with names. They’re not sitting on
the couch.

AM: They were Alternative Fur Deutschland politicians?

BB: Well, they were actually friends of mine, they were not
necessarily professionals, they were friends of mine that I know
for many, many years. That’s how this relationship came about.

AM: Have you ever been to the Central African Republic?
BB: I haven’t been yet. I’ve been very busy with my tennis engagement the last few weeks. But the invitation stands and whenever I have a week free I’d love to visit the country.

AM: So for those people who haven’t been and wonder what it’s like, can I read you what Amnesty International says about the Central African Republic? ‘The government,’ it says, ‘has minimal control outside the capital.’ It goes on: ‘widespread impunity fuels instability and conflict, armed groups were responsible for killings, torture, sexual assaults, abductions, arrests, extortion, looting, the exploitation of children and attacks on humanitarian workers. Many suspected perpetrators of human rights abuses and violations, including armed groups and security forces, were not investigated or tried.’ What is it about that country that so appeals to you?

BB: They have a very, very disturbing past, that’s correct. The President was elected in democratic elections. He has studied Maths at University in Paris. He’s a very honourable man. He wants to change the country. It’s a difficult one, it’s very poor, and they have a lot of internal fights with, you know, various parts.

AM: So what have you done in this role so far?

BB: Well, I don’t think anybody has spoken about the Republic Central Africa as much as they have done the last four to six weeks, and I’ve pointed out, as you have, about the difficulties and the trauma that they still have today.

AM: And how many meetings have you had in this job so far?

BB: I’ve met the President on three or four occasions. I’ve met the Ambassador on many occasions. I’ve spoken to the people on many, many occasions and now we’re about to go ahead.
AM: The reason I’m asking this, and you’ve referred to it already, is that many people you are using this perhaps cynically as a way to get out of the bankruptcy proceedings, claiming diplomatic immunity, as you now can.

BB: That’s correct. But one has nothing to do from the other. I’m not running away from my debt. I’m just informing the trustee and the courts about my position as I legally have to do.

AM: But you yourself have said, ‘the decision to commence bankruptcy proceedings against me was both unjustified and unjust. I have now asserted diplomatic immunity as I’m in fact bound to do, in order to bring this farce to an end, so I can start to rebuild my life.’ So you yourself have connected the two things.

BB: I have to inform about my official position when I receive court documents. They have to get to the right address. I have informed the other side already weeks ago about this position, and this is just a fact,

AM: It’s been very convenient hasn’t it?

BB: Well, being a diplomat has its ups and has its downsides. I just want to be correct and want to inform who I am today.

AM: Do you a Central African Republic passport?

BB: Yes, I have.

AM: Because the Foreign Minister has told the BBC that this is a forgery.

BB: I don’t know what’s internally happening within the politics of the Republic of Central Africa but I have received this passport
from the Ambassador. I’ve spoken to the President on many occasions. There was an official inauguration. I believe the documents they’re giving me must be right.

AM: Well, the Foreign Minister, whose signature is supposed to be on it doesn’t recognise his own signature. This could all be cleared up, because they want you to go back to the Central African Republic and be extradited there. Would you go if you were asked to go?

BB: I’m very happy any time soon to visit Bangui, the capital and to speak to the people personally about how we can move forward, and how we can solve this misunderstanding and this confusion.

AM: But as far as you’re concerned you have got a real passport?

BB: I have a real passport. It’s at the embassy in Brussels the last time I checked.

AM: This is all a rather sad, sorry and murky business. I can remember in 1985 watching you on the court of Wimbledon, and like many people across the United Kingdom we all kind of took you to our hearts. There was Boris Becker-mania. How has it come to this?

BB: Well, that was 33 years ago, and we all have moved on. I’m – I’m very happy with my life today. I’ve become involved in politics in the African continent. It’s close to my heart. I realised all the problems they’re facing because my own family had some of the same issues and some of the same problems. I experience racism. I’ve experienced these type of problems and I want to make a change. You know, me as a very German-looking man, it’s something that’s very close to my heart.
AM: Nonetheless, what we’ve been talking about, it’s a bit sort of distasteful and so forth. What has gone wrong in your life? When you as you say, you were a millionaire at 17. Did you simply have too much money too early in your life to know how to handle it?

BB: Well, again I think –

AM: To handle life even?

BB: There were a lot of unfortunate events. Thank you for the opportunity to speak out a little bit. There were many stories that were not true, just people lose their imagination when they hear Boris Becker. I do live a pretty exciting life. But yes, 17 years was young and I was very successful then. I believe I’m successful now.

AM: And to be absolutely clear, you will be at Wimbledon commentating?

BB: Very proudly. With my German English. Hopefully everybody understands me. I think they do. It’s been a part of my life. I’ve lived in Wimbledon and I’ve been part of the tournament for what, 35 years now.

ENDS