

Niemeyer hopes dashed in Desert Qualifying

*by Rick Angus
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Frederic Niemeyer led early and in between, but in the end it was like the notice on car mirrors, caution objects (victory) may appear closer than they are.

Fred's opponent, Kei Nishikori of Japan, came in as the favourite with a ranking of 125 after surprising the tennis world by winning the Delray Beach tourney in February. The eighteen year old advanced through the qualifying in that event to boldly announce his A.T.P. Tour presence.

Taking the first set 7 games to 5 by virtue of three breaks of Nishikori's less than potent service game, Fred's return game permitted Niemeyer to overcome his own sporadic service failings in the opening frame.

The second set appeared to be all Fred's as he took a 4-1 lead and was evidently cruising towards the main draw with a reportedly high profile scalp to cherish.

But as quickly as things settled into the proper order, events reversed their course and suddenly Fred was looking at a third set, which he did not physically seem to anticipate.

Right off the bat, Niemeyer was broken to begin the deciding set but Fred soon got back to even at 2 games each. While each player seemed reluctant to pursue an adventurous strategy and risk the negative repercussions that usually entails.

Nishikori with a woefully weak serve tried to run around each ground stroke opportunity and unleash a Jimmy Arias type winning forehand.

On the other side of the net, Niemeyer relied heavily upon his far superior serve and his aggressive approaches to net. It was a finely planned attack until his court fitness seemed to wilt causing unexpected errors to creep into his superior repertoire.

Fred was broken back to trail 2-3 and try as he may, Niemeyer was not able to get back into contention. Nishikori while suffering many anxious moments managed to eke out the match, 6-4.

The moral of this contest was clearly displayed. Niemeyer should be careful about counting his chickens prematurely and Nishikori, while inspiring Japanese hopes, is a far cry from the latest new kid on the block, worthy of closer attention.

Without a men's level serve and a very suspect backhand, Nishikori is definitely a work in progress. In Japan there should be justifiable suspicion that their countryman is a title magnet. Do not break out the champagne just yet.