

WEEKLY ENGLISH PRACTICE

Boris Becker feared attack in UK jail

Former Grand Slam tennis champion Boris Becker has spoken of his loneliness, his fears and the lessons he learned behind bars.



In a German TV interview, Boris Becker revealed he had learned a hard, painful and very expensive lesson and rediscovered the person he once was. Becker, 55, was **jailed** last April for two and a half years for hiding £2.5m (€2.9m) of his **assets** to avoid paying his creditors.

Most of his sentence was spent at Huntercombe Prison, near Henley in Oxfordshire. As a Category C jail, it is more secure than an open prison.

Dressed for the interview in black, Becker immediately **cut a slimmer figure** than when he was sent to prison in April. In prison you're a nobody, you're just a number, he said.

"For the first time in my life I felt hungry - meaning I went to bed hungry," he remarked, **pointing out** he weighed 97kg on arrival in jail and lost 7kg over the next few months, although he had since put on more weight. "Prison was good for my health. They did have alcohol but I didn't drink any."

At Wandsworth he was given a cell to himself because of his name, he said. But when the door slammed shut for the first time, it was for him the loneliest moment he had ever had. He remembered being unable to sleep because of screams from fellow **inmates**, who were every kind of criminal imaginable.

There was no mirror in his cell because it could be used as a weapon and he admitted to being shocked when he discovered how he had changed.

Although he was afraid of taking a shower because of attacks he had seen in films, in reality there was enough privacy so "you don't see anyone naked". He also spoke of one prisoner at Wandsworth who had tried to **blackmail** him into giving him money.

Prison life was clearly a challenge and Becker did not hold back in his description of death threats, very dirty cells and highly dangerous inmates.

"My main concern was having a double cell. Your cellmate can attack or threaten you."

For the first three weeks he said he tried not to **stick out** and just wore grey. He learnt to avoid looking at other inmates and kept his eyes to the ground: "Just don't look at another inmate the wrong way."

"Actually I once had what they call an 'altercation' with an inmate who wanted to kill me," he said of an incident at Huntercombe prison in October.

"He tried to come after me, he told me all the things he'd do to me," said Becker. When he shouted for help it was other prisoners on the wing who came out to defend him. Prison guards tended to **turn up** slowly, or not at all, he said.

The man had underestimated Becker's position in prison, he believed, and later asked for his forgiveness and kissed his hand.

He got to know three inmates he names as Jake, Russell and Billy who he describes as "listeners" and even credits them with saving his life.

His 231 days in prison had, he said, given him time to rethink his life and to become closer to his four children and partner.



Adapted from [this article](#)

by ECP coach

Darren Lynch

Word list

jail: to put someone in jail or prison.

asset: something valuable belonging to a person or organisation that can be used for the payment of debts.

cut a slimmer figure : to have lost weight and look thinner

point out: to tell someone about some information

inmates: people who are kept in a prison or a hospital for people who are mentally ill

blackmail: the act of getting money from people or forcing them to do something by threatening to tell a secret of theirs or to harm them

stick out: to be very easy to notice or be seen

turn up: to arrive or appear somewhere

Let's chat about that!

1. Do you think you could handle prison? For how long?
2. Who is the most famous criminal in your country? What crime did they commit?
3. If you had to go to jail, how do you think you would behave while inside?
4. Are there any crimes that lead to a prison sentence that you disagree with?
5. Do you believe jail sentences can help to rehabilitate people? Why (not)?
6. What is your favourite prison movie?

Use of English: past perfect simple

What is the **past perfect simple**?

The Past Perfect Simple is: **had + past participle**

The past perfect simple is used to express an action taking place before a certain time in the past.

Example from the text:

He also spoke of one prisoner at Wandsworth who had tried to blackmail him into giving him money.

- We use the past perfect simple (had + past participle) to talk about time before or up to a certain point in the past.

*She'd published her first poem **by the time she was eight.***

*We'd finished all the water **before we were halfway up the mountain.***

*Had the parcel arrived **when you called yesterday?***

- We can use the past perfect to show the order of two past events. The past perfect shows the earlier action and the past simple shows the later action.

*When the police arrived, **the thief had escaped.***

***I had already left the office** when I saw your message.*

Which of the two explanations would you say the example from the text falls under?