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"I tell myself that if things happened this way, it's because somewhere up there it was decided that way," the 34-year-old midfielder said in an interview on TF1 television. "And I don't regret anything that happened, I accept it."

Zidane, soft-spoken and relaxed in two television interviews late Wednesday, did not explain exactly what Italian defender Marco Materazzi said that enraged him, but he said it was about his family.

"I would rather have taken a punch in the jaw than have heard that," he told the Canal Plus channel, stressing that Materazzi's language was "very harsh," and that he repeated the insults several times.

'I apologize to all the children'
Zidane contrite for headbutt, cites insults of family
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Zidane and Materazzi exchanged words after Italy broke up a French attack in extra-time. Seconds later, Zidane lowered his head and rammed Materazzi in the chest, knocking him to the ground.

Zidane was sent off, reducing France to 10 men. Italy went on to win in a penalty shootout with Zidane -- an excellent penalty-taker -- in the locker room.

The act of aggression marred the end of the World Cup, with many warning it would tarnish Zidane's formidable legacy. Zidane retired after the tournament.

The France captain stressed that he felt no regret "because that would mean (Materazzi) was right to say all that."

"There was a serious provocation," said Zidane, who said he had never had tensions with Materazzi before.

"My act is not forgivable," Zidane said. "But they must also punish the true guilty party, and the guilty party is the one who provokes."

For days, sports fans around the world have been riveted by the question: What could Materazzi have said to set Zidane off in the last few moments of his career? Media from Brazil to Britain hired lip readers to try to figure it out, then came up with different answers.

Materazzi has acknowledged he insulted Zidane, without giving specifics. At nearly the same moment Zidane was on TV, excerpts from an interview that Materazzi gave were posted on an Italian paper's Web site. He denied insulting Zidane's mother.

"I didn't say anything to him about racism, religion or politics," Materazzi told the Gazzetta dello Sport. "I didn't talk about his mother either. I lost my mother when I was 15 and even now I still get emotional talking about her."

Zidane "has always been my hero," Materazzi said. "I admire him a lot."

Despite the head-butt, Zidane was awarded the Golden Ball award for best player at the World Cup -- though FIFA president Sepp Blatter has suggested Zidane could be stripped of the honor.

"The winner of the award is not decided by FIFA, but by an international commission of journalists," Blatter said in Italian newspaper La Repubblica. "That said, FIFA's executive committee has the right, and the duty, to intervene when faced with behavior contrary to the ethics of the sport."

FIFA's disciplinary committee opened an inquiry Tuesday into Zidane's behavior. His red card was not unusual: Zidane was sent off 14 times in his career at the club and international level.

Despite his temper, Zidane is better known for his sportsmanship and dancer-like style with the ball. He is a national hero for the French and a symbol of a young, multicultural France. Born to Algerian immigrants, Zidane grew up playing on concrete in an impoverished neighborhood of Marseille.
President Jacques Chirac has had only kind words for Zidane since the match -- reassuring him that France still "admires and loves him." Many in France have already pardoned Zidane. A poll published Tuesday in Le Parisien newspaper showed that 61 percent of the 802 people questioned forgave Zidane.

Zidane said many people have asked him not to retire, but he said he would not change his mind.

"I won't go back on it, at least I hope so ... (the decision) it's definitive," he said.

Zidane told TF1 that he was "going to rest, and then move on to something else."

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