

**November 10, 2006**

## **Sony Ericsson Championships Madrid, Spain**

**M. SHARAPOVA/S.** Kuznetsova

6-1, 6-4

An Interview with:

### **MARIA SHARPOVA**

**Q. The fact that she's moved you on the court from one place to another, has that meant a challenge for you?**

MARIA SHARAPOVA: Yes, it has been a tough second set.

**Q. And what about tomorrow's game, Justine?**

MARIA SHARAPOVA: Yes, tomorrow against Justine it's going to be a good match. I won her in the U.S. Open and I'm looking forward to tomorrow. The match is going to be a good one. She's playing good tennis again after months of injuries and I'll go out there and give my best and do my best.

**Q. Do you think you're at your best tennis at the moment, tennis level?**

MARIA SHARAPOVA: I mean, I don't know. I definitely think that I am a much better tennis player than I was, say, a year or two ago, yeah, for sure. But I still think that I can be a better player.

I've always said there's a lot of things I can improve in my game that can make me better, but, yes, I've just been happy that I've been able to be healthy and I've been able to play matches over and over again. And fortunately right now I'm on a good winning streak.

And I'm thankful for that. But I guess you never know what can happen tomorrow.

**Q. You say you are feeling like a better player than one or two years ago. How do you feel that? What makes a difference?**

MARIA SHARAPOVA: Well, one, I feel like physically stronger. I feel like my body stopped growing finally. It's been almost a year, year and a half. I feel like my muscles are building a little bit. I feel stronger on court.

I feel I can play three set matches and I don't have to worry about the next match being fatigued in the next match.

I feel like U.S. Open was a great example. I was able to be number one and two player in the world back to back in days.

Definitely would not be able to do that a year ago like I lost to Kim at the U.S. Open in '05 where I gave it all I had on the second set and then the third was just, you know, she was like a road runner, because I couldn't really do too much. I was just too tired.

And I also feel like I'm a much more experienced player. As you play more you gain more experience, you feel like you know what to do in certain situations.

**Q. Is there something that's special because there's the number one in the game?**

MARIA SHARAPOVA: No, just another match for me. Either way I've said this, number one or number two, I think I've had a great year. I've been really consistent in one event, second Grand Slam. So either way I'm not going to come out of the match disappointed.

**Q. Did you see Amelie's match and are you surprised to see Amelie at this level now compared to the first day?**

MARIA SHARAPOVA: Well, I mean it's pretty simple. When you come off of not playing for such a long time and playing your first match against the top player it's never going to be easy. And I've said this many times. I think you know no matter how much practicing you do or how much you work out in the gym it's never the same as going out and playing a match in front of a crowd.

And that's understandable. And of course as you play more and she's a top player. She figures things, she's smart enough to figure things out and improve, because you don't have another choice it's a round robin and you're only playing three matches.

**Q. Which match in the round robin was more difficult for you?**

MARIA SHARAPOVA: I think Kim's.

**Q. Same question as Wednesday night, what's the strangest thing that's**

**happened since winning the U.S. Open?**

MARIA SHARAPOVA: Sorry. There are not going to be a lot of fun answers. I guess my career has, not just after the Open, but it's led me to experience, to meet and experience people that I've admired over my career. Like I met Gwen Stephani after the U.S. Open a couple days after she was in New York with her baby, out to dinner.

If I was a college student I don't think I would have had a chance to do that. On a daily basis, a lot of things surprise me, seeing yourself on billboards and going in and out of the tunnel at the U.S. Open it's just a little unreal for me. Again I think it's good and as I keep being surprised I think I'll be grounded. It's surprised me. Like I said a lot of things on a daily basis happening and surprise, might be little things.

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