

November 8, 2006

**Sony Ericsson Championships
Madrid, Spain**

M. SHARAPOVA/K. Clijsters

6-4, 6-4

An interview with:

MARIA SHARAPOVA

Q. Seemed like the key tonight was really serving in some important moments.

MARIA SHARAPOVA: Can you talk louder? I can't hear.

Q. Seemed the key tonight was really serving in some important moments in the match. Do you think it was a key tonight?

MARIA SHARAPOVA: It's a big key. I think I only served 51% in my first match. I think it's the lowest I've served in, I don't know, probably in all the matches I've played; and I know that was going to be an important key. I definitely needed to improve that, especially against Kim.

I don't want her to look at too many second serves. And, yes, definitely helped me especially in the last game.

Q. Just in the beginning of the second set, towards the end of the second set she started to get more into the match. Did you feel at all that you weren't in control at any point or was that not the case?

MARIA SHARAPOVA: I don't think I played that bad of a game at 5-2. She went for her shots. I don't think I gave it to her at 5-2. 5-3 I was up Love-30 on her serve. Played a great point. She came up with an unbelievable backhand down the line. At that point I got a little tired and made a few errors in that game.

And, yeah, that game, when I won, I was lucky I could serve out because I wasn't making any first serves in the beginning of that game, let her get to 15-40, but I'm definitely happy I was able to serve it out.

Q. You seem to be talking about the game as if it was just another match. But it seemed to me like it was one of your best matches, if not the best, since the U.S. Open?

MARIA SHARAPOVA: Yeah, I think the quality of my tennis today was quite high. I felt like I was moving really well. No matter how deep or big some of her shots were, I still felt like I was in position after them. And that just comes from playing a lot of matches, I think.

And, of course, beating her finally in San Diego definitely helped me, because little things here and there that I thought helped me, you know, beat her. But I was definitely playing some real good tennis in the first set and the beginning of the second.

Q. If you compare the way you're playing now, say the middle part of the year, the clay, when you just weren't playing well at all --

MARIA SHARAPOVA: Basically wasn't playing at all.

Q. Okay. What's really improved in your game, though? What's the thing you're most pleased with?

MARIA SHARAPOVA: I mean honestly this might sound dumb, but the most important thing, I've said this many times, is that I'm healthy. I'm on the court and I'm pretty much -- my foot, like I said, is not 100%, but I'm not worried about anything. I'm not protecting anything. You don't see tape on anything. And you just are out there and you're playing.

Because I've had so many matches I'm enjoying myself I know that I've played good tennis. It's not like I'm just going to go out there and miss every ball, unless something happens. I know that I've played a lot of matches, and I feel good about my game.

Q. And in the sweep between since the U.S. Open and the four tournaments you've played in Europe, what's the strangest thing that's happened to you in the two months?

MARIA SHARAPOVA: On court or --

Q. I don't know, anything.

MARIA SHARAPOVA: Oh, God,

strangest thing. I don't know. That's weird. I'll think about it. Maybe I'll give you an answer in the next one.

Q. How did the Ball Boys do tonight?

MARIA SHARAPOVA: They're all right. I don't think that they're going to do perfect just because they've never done something like this in their career. So you can't expect them to do everything great.

Everyone makes mistakes. That's normal. But they're all right.

Q. Both you and Kim had some pretty key points overturned with challenges. What did you make of the line calling?

MARIA SHARAPOVA: Well, I've said this many times. You know, one or two points that are very important can turn a match around. Especially in our situation today.

I mean on big points, either the mark was one millimeter on the line, two of the balls just shows you that sometimes a human can't really see that close. It's impossible.

So you can't really -- it's not the line judge's fault. So, of course, it's great that we can use that.

Q. Just talking about Hawk Eye, do you have any views on whether it should be limited to two challenges or so or whether if it's there it should be used as much as possible?

MARIA SHARAPOVA: I mean so far in my experience it's been fine. I think if you have unlimited you'll see a lot more challenges even on balls that you probably think are the right call you're just going to want to challenge.

I think that's going to become a little bit boring. So there definitely should be a limit. But I heard there was an incident with (inaudible) at one of the tournaments where something happened on matchpoint. And he didn't have any challenges left.

So, I don't know, maybe -- I think sometimes if the umpire is not sure of the call, I think I would at least maybe have him, because he doesn't know, maybe instead of the players having to use a challenge if he really doesn't know the call maybe he's able to, you know, to ask to see the replay. But other than that I still think there should be a limit.

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