



Reach for the Top

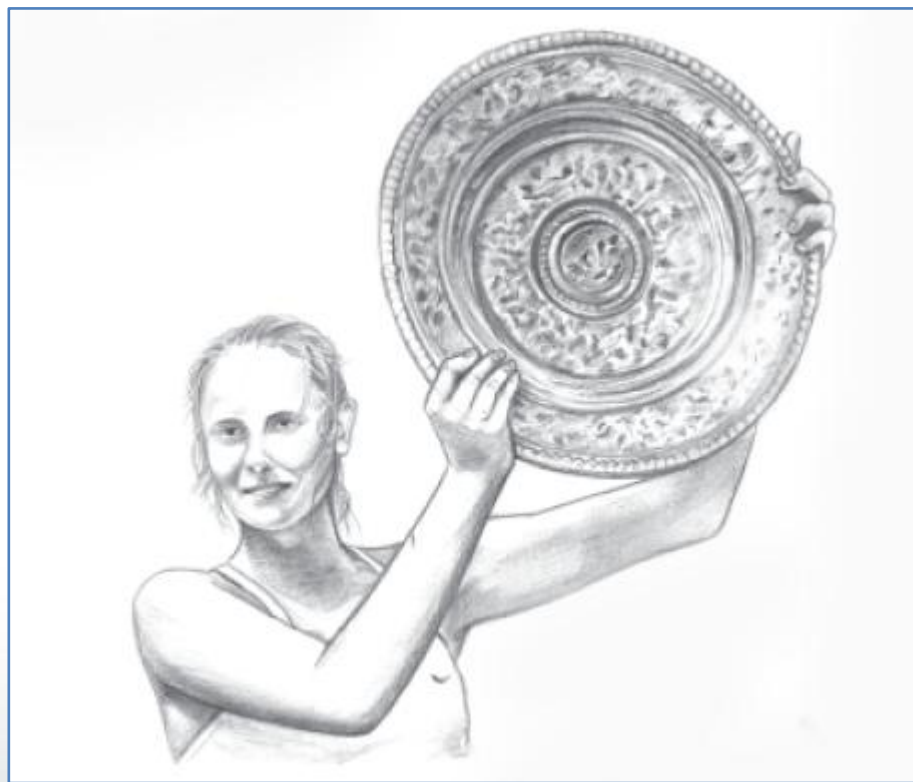
Part 2 Maria Sharapova

- **A Russian girl, Maria Sharapova, reached the summit of women's tennis when she was barely eighteen. As you read about her, see if you can draw a comparison between her and Santosh Yadav.**



1. THERE is something disarming about Maria Sharapova, something at odds with her ready smile and glamorous attire. And that something in her lifted her on Monday, 22 August 2005 to the world number one position in women's tennis. All this happened in almost no time. Poised beyond her years, the Siberian born teenager took just four years as a professional to reach the pinnacle.





2. However, the rapid ascent in a fiercely competitive world began nine years before with a level of sacrifice few children would be prepared to endure. Little Maria had not yet celebrated her tenth birthday when she was packed off to train in the United States. That trip to Florida with her father Yuri launched her on the path to success and stardom. But it also required a heart-wrenching two-year separation from her mother Yelena. The latter was compelled to stay back in Siberia because of visa restrictions. The nine-year-old girl had already learnt an important lesson in life — that tennis excellence would only come at a price.



3. “I used to be so lonely,” Maria Sharapova recalls. “I missed my mother terribly. My father was working as much as he could to keep my tennis-training going. So, he couldn’t see me either.



4. “Because I was so young, I used to go to bed at 8 p.m. The other tennis pupils would come in at 11 p.m. and wake me up and order me to tidy up the room and clean it.



5. “Instead of letting that depress me, I became more quietly determined and mentally tough. I learnt how to take care of myself. I never thought of quitting because I knew what I wanted. When you come from nothing and you have nothing, then it makes you very hungry and determined... I would have put up with much more humiliation and insults than that to steadfastly pursue my dream.”





6. That toughness runs through Maria even today. It was the key to her bagging the women's singles crown at Wimbledon in 2004 and to her meteoric rise to the world number one spot the following year.



7. While her journey from the frozen plains of Siberia to the summit of women's tennis has touched the hearts of tennis fans, for the youngster herself there appears to be no room for sentiment. The straight looks and the answers she gives when asked about her ambition make it amply clear that she considers the sacrifices were worth it. "I am very, very competitive. I work hard at what I do. It's my job." This is her mantra for success.



8. Though Maria Sharapova speaks with a pronounced American accent, she proudly parades her Russian nationality. Clearing all doubts, she says, “I’m Russian. It’s true that the U.S. is a big part of my life. But I have Russian citizenship. My blood is totally Russian. I will play the Olympics for Russia if they want me.”





9. Like any number of teenaged sensations, Maria Sharapova lists fashion, singing and dancing as her hobbies. She loves reading the novels of Arthur Conan Doyle. Her fondness for sophisticated evening gowns appears at odds with her love of pancakes with chocolate spread and fizzy orange drinks.



10. Maria Sharapova cannot be pigeon-holed or categorised. Her talent, unwavering desire to succeed and readiness to sacrifice have lifted her to the top of the world. Few would grudge her the riches she is now reaping. This is what she has to say about her monetary gains from tennis: “Of course, money is a motivation. Tennis is a business and a sport, but the most important thing is to become number one in the world. That’s the dream that kept me going.”



THANK YOU

