

Shrieking Sharapova Silences Halep in Paris

June 08, 2014



Maria Sharapova posing triumphantly in Paris, celebrating her big win.

Her 12 double faults were a nuisance and the non-stop shrieks that punctured the air for more than three hours even made a baby wail, yet all Maria Sharapova will want to remember from the French Open is the moment she sunk to her knees in triumph.

The Russian had scrapped in eight major finals, winning four of them, but never before had she been taken to three sets in a showpiece match until she ran into a tireless Romanian named Simona Halep on Saturday.

Showing nerves of steel that would have made seasoned champions proud, Grand Slam final debutante Halep fought, believed and risked everything for three hours and two minutes before a backhand into the tramlines allowed Sharapova to hug the Suzanne Lenglen Cup for a second time in three years.

A woman who had played three successive three-set matches to reach the final was left in no doubt about where her 6-4 6-7(5) 6-4 win over Halep stood among her major wins.

"This is the toughest grand slam final I have ever played and all respect to Simona as she played an unbelievable match today," an emotional Sharapova told the crowd during a victory speech in three different languages.

"I can't believe it, seven or eight years ago I would not have thought that I would win more Roland Garros titles than any other grand slam.

"To think I won it twice... I'm so emotional right now, I don't know what language to speak... English, Russian or French."

While Sharapova clambered up the stands to hug her three-man entourage, which included coach Sven Groeneveld, a distraught Halep sat on her courtside bench with a towel over her head wondering what might have been.

"Yes. I was crying at that moment for a few minutes, and then I was smiling because ... it was my first grand slam final and I did everything on court," said Halep, who was bidding to become the first Romanian in 36 years to win a grand slam crown.

"I played very good tennis, very good level. So I'm really proud about these two weeks. They were incredible weeks here ... and it was an amazing feeling on court today," added Halep after picking up the 825,000 euros (\$1.13 million) runners-up cheque that will go some way towards soothing her pain.

Sharapova's purse was double that but for a woman whose worth is said to be close to \$100 million, the prize money was largely insignificant. What she really wanted to take away from Roland Garros was the trophy.

"I wish I could keep the big (trophy) ... I might have to steal it. There is a reason why I haven't been to one shop while I have been in Paris. It's because I want this. I haven't eaten many macaroons, either. It's because I want this," Sharapova said after recording her 50th win at Roland Garros.

Parisians had not been treated to a three-set women's final at the claycourt major for 13 years but Sharapova and Halep made up for lost time in a match that seemed to have never-ending twists and turns.

A battle that started with the sun beating down on Philippe Chatrier Court — featuring 227 points, 83 unforced errors, 66 winners, 33 break points, 16 breaks and 12 Sharapova double faults — turned into a contest that was the longest women's final in Paris since 1996.

The double faults became a recurring nightmare for Sharapova as she kept gifting her fourth-seeded rival break points.

It cost her the opening game before she leveled for 2-2.

Serving for the set at 5-3, another double fault left Sharapova cursing her luck as she got broken.

With one tendon-twisting rally being followed by another sinew-stretching point, Sharapova's shrieks started to hit new heights and left one baby high up in the stands crying

her lungs out just as the Russian earned her second set point on Halep's serve.

No stranger to making a noisy racket herself, the seventh seed blocked out the commotion to snatch the set as a distracted Halep whipped the ball wide on set point.

Their bare shoulders were glistening with sweat and Sharapova's pale rose-coloured dress even changed into a darker shade of pink but there was no let up on the intensity in the second set.

Halep broke for a 5-4 lead in a game that brought the cheering crowd to their feet following a 21-shot rally but that advantage disappeared within minutes as Sharapova broke back for 5-5 thanks to a rasping service return that bobbed on the tape and dropped dead over the net.

The set headed into a tiebreak following two more breaks and Halep rewarded her vocal cheering squad's chants of "Si-mon-a, Si-mon-a, Si-mon-a" by bagging the tiebreak 7-5 when her seventh-seeded opponent slashed a backhand wide.

The drama did not stop there.

Serving at 4-4 in the third set, Halep was left dismayed and distracted after a Sharapova shot was called 'out' rather late by a linesman, only to be overruled by the umpire.

That set off a chain of events that resulted in Halep losing eight straight points, the match, and the trophy.

But a year after walking away from Roland Garros as a first-round loser and ranked 57th in the world, Halep will stride out of Paris as the world's third best player and with the knowledge that she has left an indelible mark on the soft red.

See also:

[Sharapova Grinds Into Last Four in Paris](#)

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/06/08/shrieking-sharapova-silences-halep-in-paris-a36254>