

Tennis Star Sharapova Says She's Proud of Her Russian Roots

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Maria Sharapova hits a return during training at the resort town of Acapulco, ahead of the annual Mexico Open.

LONDON — Maria Sharapova's life-changing move from Siberia to Florida as a seven-year-old propelled her on a path to fame and fortune, but she says she would never turn her back on her mother country.

It is sometimes easy to forget that five-times grand slam champion Sharapova, the world's highest-paid female athlete, is actually Russian until you witness her conduct a post-match press conference in her native tongue.

With \$32 million in prize money alone, a string of lucrative endorsements, her own candy business and even a famous boyfriend she is the living embodiment of the American dream.

Yet, Sharapova baulks at the idea that she would want to trade her Russian passport for an

American one, as former Czech Martina Navratilova did early in her glittering career.

"I would have if I wanted to [change citizenships] but it's never been actually a question in my family or in my team whether I wanted to change citizenships," the Russian told CNBC in an interview to be screened on Wednesday.

Sharapova, who won the Wimbledon title aged 17, still gives her all for Russia in the Fed Cup and was a torch bearer at the Sochi Winter Olympics a year ago.

She said her Russian heritage moulded her instincts.

"It is about the family environment, it is about the rich culture," the 27-year-old said.

"Just life experiences that I look back to and I know that for so many years I was shaped into the individual I was from those experiences.

"And not necessarily simply the country, but the people, the mentality and the toughness and that never giving up attitude."

World number two Sharapova will not have to venture too far from her adopted home at the Miami Open, which starts this week.

Should the tournament go according to rankings she will play nemesis Serena Williams in the final.

She beat the American in the 2004 Wimbledon final and again a few months later but lost the next 16, most recently in this year's Australian Open final.

But Sharapova said their rivalry still burned strong.

"She's at the peak of her career. I am now number two in the world," she said. "I feel like we're still driven and hungry to be the best tennis players.

"I don't think anyone in the tennis world believed that, in 10 years' time, we would still be rivals. I think it's an incredible story."

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