

<http://www.livetennis.com/category/livetennis-news/halep-put-too-much-pressure-on-myself-after-madrid-defeat-20150503-0000/>

Halep: “Put too much pressure on myself” after Madrid defeat

[Live Tennis Staff](#) in [News](#) 3 May 2015



(THOMAS KIENZLE/AFP/Getty Images)

Last year’s finalist Simona Halep was stunned in straight sets by Alize Cornet, and afterwards spoke to Live-Tennis about the match and what this changes for her.

Having seen her battle through to the Stuttgart semi-final and seen the change in her self-belief from last year to this year, it was a surprise to see her frustrated on court as the feisty Frenchwoman produced some great tennis to stun the World No. 2 in straight sets 7-6(6) 6-3.

Talking to Live-Tennis, she admitted that she had not been able to handle the pressure of defending last year’s points.

She said: "I put too much pressure on myself, and that's why I couldn't handle this situation and this match. I tried everything to play better today but I couldn't so she was stronger than me and she knew how to play in the important moments."

In Stuttgart just a couple of weeks ago, she described how after her quarter-final against Ekaterina Makarova, she decided she would never allow herself not to fight for every point, and even in her semi-final against Caroline Wozniacki, she struggled against some physical niggles along the way.

She even went as far as saying her goal had been just to make the final once more in Madrid, as opposed to lofty claims often heard from maybe younger still up-and-coming players of almost an expectation to win it all.

She explained: "You know inside, very deep in your body, it feels that you want to repeat the result, like what you did last year, but I think I think I thought too much that I have to win matches, so it's a good experience.

"I know now how to manage the situation and I don't make a drama now because I lost. She's a good player, she's a fighting player. I just tried everything and it couldn't go my way today."

There is no question of taking any time out to reflect with another premier mandatory around the corner, as she plans to practice from tomorrow, and just ready herself for Rome, but she is defending scant points there, before embarking on a run to defend even bigger points at the French Open.

She said: I am looking forward now, just to work hard, starting tomorrow I will have practice and I will forget this tournament. I learn many things that I have to be more relaxed when I have to defend some big points. It's nothing to do. The tournament is lost, so I have just to look forward and to go ahead."

She continued: "I have no pressure now any more, because of this loss I don't care anymore about the results. I just want to be relaxed on court and enjoy the tennis. I did this and was pretty good in the past.

"I have strong mental [strength] but today wasn't mental, [it] was more about to manage the situation that I have to defend once big final. I believe in myself, in my game, I believe I play good tennis. I feel the game and that's all. It's nothing to worry about."

There is a lot to to admire in Halep, despite this wobble. The self-belief is still there, but now fuelled by a sense of pragmatism that this was another learning experience. She has hold of the World No. 2 spot, just 230 ahead but with the seedings being determined after Rome, there is one shot more for her to settle at the bottom of the draw in Paris.

The Internazionali BNL D'Italia begins on 11 May.

<http://www.livetennis.com/category/livetennis-news/maria-sharapova-starts-title-defence-and-talks-scheduling-with-live-tennis-20150504-0001/>

Maria Sharapova starts title defence and talks scheduling with Live-Tennis

[Live Tennis Staff](#) in [News](#) 4 May 2015



(Photo by Clive Brunskill/Getty Images)

Maria Sharapova lit her light under her clay court season with a solid win over Tímea Bacsinszky.

Sharapova got off to a flying start against Bacsinszky, who has been enjoying a resurgence this year after years of injury, but once she was on her way, there was no shift of momentum to rescue the Swiss, as Sharapova closed out a 6-2 6-3 victory.

After the match, she said: "I think the conditions coming as defending champion, you relive those moments where I have to come back from behind in many matches last year and obviously facing an opponent that I've lost to previously in Wuhan in two sets, and someone that's been playing really good tennis as well this year, I knew this would be a tough match, there's no doubt about it and I had to be ready."

"It's been good to have a bit of a practice week uninterrupted in many ways and just to work on a few things, get used to the clay, the movement is still something I'll be working on as hopefully I'll be playing more matches."

Bacsinszky is enjoying the best year of her career, just outside the Top 20 already this year, and Sharapova spoke to us about her admiration for her comeback after her career looked in doubt.

"I have a lot of respect for athletes that come back after injury. When you're going through a period of injury, you're working so hard just to get healthy again while everyone else is working to become winners or to win championships, that you sometimes forget that your work is so minimal because then you have to go out and you have to work to try to be one of the best, so I really admire that., I respect people that can come back from being behind and feel that maybe wouldn't have a chance before."

The thorny issue of scheduling came to the fore, the week before Sharapova was attempting to win the Stuttgart title for the fourth straight time, and she had been set to play for Russia in the Fed Cup semi-final against Germany, in her home town of Sochi. A injury picked up in Miami meant she had to withdraw, and the scheduling proved problematic for others, including Germany's Andrea Petkovic, who also picked up an injury during that tie.

Sharapova explained how she has learned from sometimes painful experience to put herself first.

"I think it's one of the things I've really tried to focus on from the very beginning of my career is to try to have a minimal but the correct schedule and if that means having to skip a tournament maybe that you want to play, or people want you to play, or what might be beneficial for you, sometimes it's good just to give yourself an extra week.

"You know I've made sometimes tough decisions in my career, maybe sometimes wrong decisions playing the wrong tournament at the wrong times that have hurt me not in a couple of weeks but have hurt me some months down the line, where I look back and I think 'you know what, that week wasn't the right week for me to [have] played."

Scheduling continues to be contentious issue, certainly on the men's tour, but Sharapova offered us her insight on the challenges she has faced in terms of when and where to play.

"That all comes down to the tennis player is always the one making the decisions. They have a team that gives them advice and obviously their opinions but obviously at the end of the day it's that individual that has to drive their career and know what's best for them. I know that if I practice well, if I'm physically fit, I'm giving myself the best chance.

"I've never been a player that feels like I need to play 5 tournaments in order to get to my best so it's kind of a mental outlook as well, you know. I know that maybe in the beginning I'll have to dig out a few matches because someone's already played a few matches behind their back and I haven't but that's what you have give up sometimes."

Sharapova acknowledged that her strength, both mentally and physically has been very much part of a champion's mentality.

"When you get to that point of the match, so many things can happen, so many momentum changes, and if you're just a little bit tougher, it's not all about physical even though it's a big part of it. If you can just hold on to your concentration and your focus, everything else will fall into place. You have to have the belief in yourself that it will, which is much easier to say than [do], but you know how it is [laughing]."

Sharapova will play Mariana Duque-Marino in the second round.

<http://www.livetennis.com/category/livetennis-news/five-minutes-with-serena-williams-as-she-marches-on-at-the-mutua-madrid-open-20150505-0001/>

Five minutes with Serena Williams as she marches on at the Mutua Madrid Open

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(Photo by Clive Brunskill/Getty Images)

Serena Williams cruised in the third round of the Mutua Madrid Open with a straight sets win over Sloane Stephens, and Live-Tennis caught up with her after the match.

Although her opening round had been a more than comfortable win over an ill Madison Brengle, Williams admitted in her first press conference that her preparations for the surface earlier in the month had not been ideal, saying, after her first match:

“I definitely feel I know what to do more in terms of on the clay and being ready mentally for the clay and being ready for longer points, longer matches. And preparation, it was not as great as I wanted it to be, so just trying to play through it and do the best I can.”

After a competitive first set over the resurgent Stephens, it seemed a more comfortable match all round for the World No. 1.

“Today I was on the court and I thought wow this is one of the reasons I love this surface. It just give so many chances to get in the point and then to play yourself into the match, and I really love playing on the clay so yeah it just feels good.”



(Photo by Clive Brunskill/Getty Images)

It is a sad reflection though that when one of the world’s top men deliver a bagel result, they are lauded as being dominant and in control, yet for the women, the person on the receiving end is just as likely to come in for criticism of the women’s game being weaker.

Let’s not forget, we are talking about a player who just two years ago pushed Williams hard in their first encounter in Brisbane, before bouncing her out of the Australian Open that year. And when they met in Indian Wells, it was another three setter to put Williams 3-1 in the lead in their head to head.

Williams said: I don’t think it’s a sign of weakness, especially not on Sloane a player who’d beaten me before. She’s such a tough player and I’ve never won a 6-0 set against her before, and I don’t think I could ever do that again [laughing], I was really focused.”

Followers of Williams' account will have seen her battling the alien from the Predator films, chat soon turned to films and whether or not we had a chance to explore Madrid.

She joked: “There’s nothing to it, I was just hanging out in Madrid, he was attacking me, and then I got payback. It’s one of my favourite movies with Arnold and the predator. You’ve got to explore

downtown - they have all kinds of people there, they have people dressed up, it's like downtown New York."

However when it came to May the Fourth (work it out...) the World's top tennis star was less enamoured with the family Skywalker, it would appear.

"You know what, don't kill me I've never been a Star Wars fan. I was really young when I saw it in all fairness, I was super young and when you're young and the movie is more than like an hour, you just get crazy. I was like 'I don't like this' and I was traumatised by that and I never gave it a second chance."



(Photo by Pablo Cuadra/Getty Images)

Her friendship with Caroline Wozniacki has become the stuff of legend. In fact Wozniacki seems to be the lynchpin to a number of player friendships including Agnieszka Radwanska, who teased her during the Indian Wells Access Hour as well siding with Victoria Azarenka in their combined tirades against a disputed point in Doha. So what is it about the Dane?

"We're just birds of a feather they say flock together, She 's so sweet. We just have so much fun, we're always laughing, We're always there for each other when we're up or down, it doesn't matter how we feel, we're always there. I love her, she's a great girl.

"This is just one of a kind, and I just have a real connection with Caroline, I always have and you know it's just a life long friend. You know when you're on the tour so much it's so good to get to know someone and just be really close with them."

We did however learn a lesson from Serena's last press conference and left speculation for the third round match off the table. Williams will face Victoria Azarenka in the third round, after the Belurussian coasted past Ajla Tomljanovic on Tuesday.