

Sharapova out

Moscow

Magdalena Rybarikova silenced a packed, partisan house on Centre Court with a 7-6(3), 6-4 win over Maria Sharapova in the opening round of the VTB Kremlin Cup yesterday.

Using varied play from the baseline to great effect, the Slovak won the last five points of the

opening set tiebreak before breaking Sharapova for the first time in the second set to seal the victory in one hour, 55 minutes.

"It was very difficult for me, because it felt like Fed Cup. It's absolutely normal, Maria is a huge superstar here and she's a real champion," Rybarikova said on-court after the match.

"I'm happy that I went through this match, and it's good for my confidence. I'm very happy with that."

Both players came off successful campaigns last week, with Sharapova winning her 36th career title in China at the Tianjin Open, and Rybarikova finishing runner-up to Barbora Strycova at the Upper Austria Ladies' Linz.

However, it was the Slovak who

handled the demands of playing six matches in just about a week's time better, utilizing her legs to chase down Sharapova's groundstrokes from corner to corner, and drawing the Russian into errors with an abundance of slices and dropshots.

A tidy 15 winners to 17 unforced errors came off of Rybarikova's racquet, while Sharapova was unable to balance out 46 unforced with 31 winners.

One break in each set nearly proved enough for Rybarikova, as the seventh chance of the opening set proved lucky for her to move ahead 6-5 and serve for a one set lead.

However, Sharapova hit back, generating her first break point opportunity in the 12th game and duly converting to send the set to a tiebreak.

The five-time Grand Slam champion got the first mini-break of the tiebreak to lead 2-0, but Rybarikova proved

undaunted, winning seven of the final eight points to move in front.

The second set went with serve almost for the duration, with either player getting to deuce on the other's serve just once - as Sharapova was forced to save break point in the second game.

Rybarikova battled her way through her toughest hold of the match at 4-4, saving two break points in a marathon game, to keep herself ahead, and used the momentum to snag the decisive break in the 10th game to move through to the second round.

The win for the No.8 seed sets a round of 16 encounter with Alizé Cornet, who defeated Russian Ekaterina Makarova yesterday.

"She's a very difficult opponent, who plays very differently than Maria," Rybarikova assessed. "She runs very well and she's also a big fighter, so it's going to be a very tough match. I want to enjoy today's victory and I want to think about tomorrow's match, tomorrow."

(wtatennis)

Magdalena Rybarikova (file pic)

Maria Sharapova (file pic)

VTB Kremlin Cup

