

April 28, 2017

## 'SOLID'

Sharapova wins

## AGAIN

round tie.

"I'm happy. I executed my game plan and I was solid," said a relieved Sharapova, whose comeback is deeply controversial and has a wild card to play in the Stuttgart event where she has been a champion three times.

## Stuttgart

**M**aria Sharapova picked up a second win in as many days on her comeback from a 15-month doping ban yesterday, beating fellow Russian Ekaterina Makarova at the Stuttgart WTA tournament.

The 30-year-old five-time Grand Slam winner dominated Makarova, ranked 43 in the world, for a 7-5, 6-1 win in just one hour, 20 minutes, in the second-

On Friday she will face Estonian qualifier Anett Kontaveit, who beat French Open champion and fifth-seed Garbine Muguruza of Spain in the second round, for a place in the semi-finals.

"I haven't played her, she is one of the few girls on the tour I haven't faced yet," said Sharapova.

"She has been playing some great tennis here and this is a great opportunity for both of us."

There was none of the rust or nerves Sharapova showed in beating Roberta Vinci 7-5, 6-3 in Wednesday's first round -- the first day she was eligible to play after testing positive for meldonium at the 2016 Australian Open.

This was a far more polished, confident display from Sharapova, who hit nine aces and 29 winners against Makarova.

But there is still work to do before facing Kontaveit as Sharapova also had seven double faults and made 19 unforced errors.

"Practice and playing are so different and you can only prepare the best you can, so it's

good to finally play," said the former number one.

"The reaction and anticipation you need are so hard to replicate in training and these are the things I need." Makarova, who has now lost all of her seven matches against Sharapova, put up a fight as the first set followed serve, but was broken in the final game. Sharapova pumped her fist and let out a scream as she converted her second set point.

It was all Sharapova in the second set as she won six straight games after Makarova won the first on her serve. Stuttgart has always been a happy hunting ground for Sharapova in the past and she has won three finals and tasted defeat just once in four previous appearances.

Having also been given wild cards to play at the Madrid and Rome tournaments, Sharapova must wait until May 16 to learn if she will get a wild card for the French Open.

However, there appeared to be no end to the criticism Sharapova has encountered on her comeback.

Eugenie Bouchard was the latest player to attack Sharapova, who the Canadian branded a "cheater" over her return from a drugs ban.

Bouchard has suggested the Russian should be kicked out of tennis for life and said the Women's Tennis Association was sending the wrong message in allowing Sharapova to come back from her 15-month suspension. (AFP)

Russia's Ekaterina  
Makarova returns to  
Russia's Maria Sharapova



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