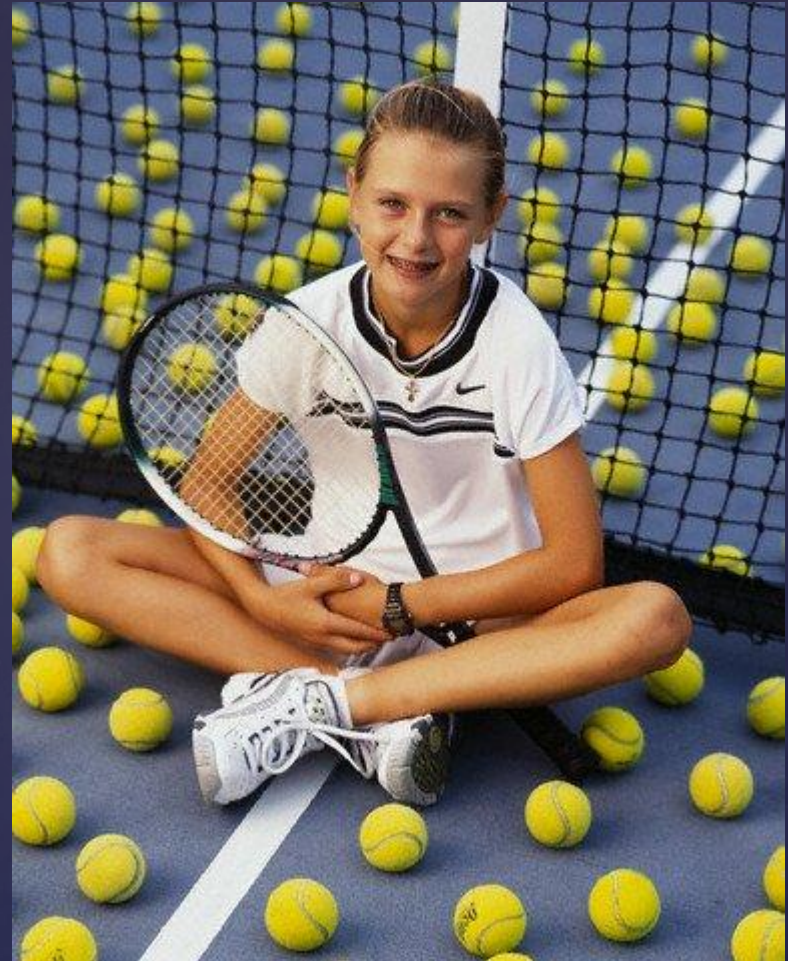
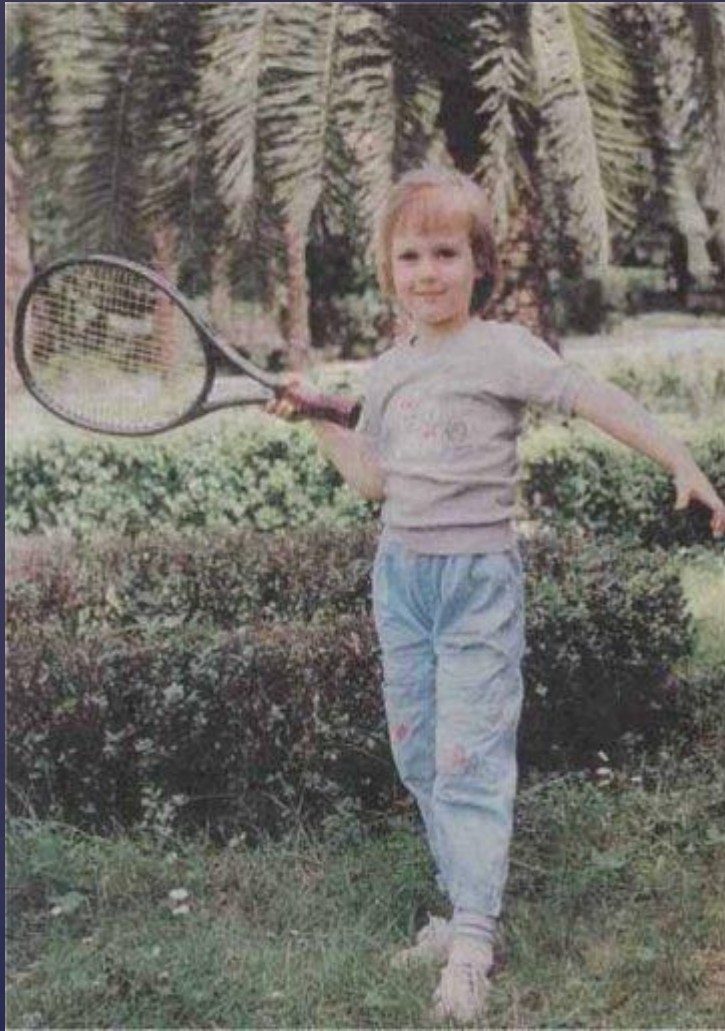


Maria Sharapova - the leader I admire



- ▣ **Maria Yuryevna Sharapova** born April 19, 1987) is a former World No. 1 Russian professional tennis player. In a career marred by serious injury, Sharapova has won 22 WTA singles titles. Since her shoulder injury in 2008, she has not recovered her championship form.





- ▣ Sharapova was born in 1987 in the town of Nyagan' in Siberia, Russia. Her parents moved from Gomel, Belarus after the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986 affected the region. When Sharapova was two, the family moved to Sochi where her father befriended Aleksandr Kafelnikov. Aleksandr gave Sharapova her first tennis racket at the age of four, whereupon she began practicing regularly with her father in a local park. She took her first tennis lessons with veteran Russian coach Yuri Yutkin, who was instantly impressed when he first saw her, noting her "exceptional hand-eye co-ordination."

- At the age of seven, Sharapova attended a tennis clinic in Moscow run by Martina Navrátilová, who recommended professional training at the Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy in Florida. Yuri and Masha finally travelled to America in 1994. Visa restrictions prevented Sharapova's mother from joining them for two years. Arriving in Florida with just \$700 to his name, Sharapova's father took various low-paying jobs to fund her lessons until she was old enough to be admitted to the academy.



- ▣ Sharapova made her professional breakthrough in 2004.
- ▣ Seeded 13th and aged 17 at Wimbledon, she reached her first Grand Slam semifinal by defeating Ai Sugiyama. There, she came back from a 6–2, 3–1 deficit to defeat fifth seed and former champion Lindsay Davenport. In the final, Sharapova upset top seed and defending champion Serena Williams. to win her first Grand Slam singles title, and become the third youngest woman to win the Wimbledon title. Sharapova also became the second Russian woman to win a grand slam singles title..



- The victory was hailed as "the most stunning upset in memory", with other writers commenting on her arrival as a serious challenger to the Williams' dominance at Wimbledon. She entered the top ten in the rankings for the first time as a result of the win. Following her Wimbledon win, attention and interest in Sharapova in the media greatly increased, a rise in popularity dubbed as "Maria Mania."



- She ultimately won her second major at the 2006 US Open defeating then-World No. 1 Amélie Mauresmo in the semifinals and World No. 2 Justine Henin in the final.





- Sharapova was seeded fifth at the Australian Open 2008, but was not considered a favorite. Nevertheless, she defeated former World No. 1 Lindsay Davenport in the second round, and then World No. 1 Henin in the quarterfinals. Proceeded to the finals, where she defeated Ana Ivanović to win her third Grand Slam title, having not dropped a set all tournament.





- After reclaiming the number one ranking in May 2008, Sharapova's shoulder problems re-surfaced, ultimately requiring surgery in October and forcing her out of the game for nearly ten months. Sharapova returned in May 2009 and was ranked No. 126 in the world due to her extensive lay-off. Since her comeback, Sharapova has won 3 singles titles (bringing her career total to 22) and improved her ranking.

- ▣ Sharapova's public profile extends beyond tennis, as she has been featured in a number of modeling assignments. Also she has been featured in many advertisements and has been the face of many fashion houses, primarily Cole Haan. Since February 2007, she has been a United Nations Development Project Goodwill, concerned specifically with the Chernobyl Recovery and Development Programme.
- ▣ Sharapova became engaged to her boyfriend, NBA basketball player Sasha Vujčić, after they had been dating for nearly a year.

