



Sixty seconds on . . . meldonium

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Poor Maria Sharapova. A drug she has been taking for a decade turns out to be a banned substance. Now she's lost her Nike and Tag Heuer sponsorships

Yes, definitely a double fault for the Russian tennis star.

But was it an unforced error, as the tennis cognoscenti say?

Meldonium (also known as mildronate) is a drug made in Latvia used for treating heart failure, angina, and myocardial infarction. It isn't licensed in the United States or Europe.

Does Sharapova have any of these conditions?

We don't know, but it seems unlikely. She has said that she had magnesium deficiency and a family history of diabetes. What we do know is that research has been published claiming that the drug significantly improves exercise tolerance in patients with angina.¹

And in those without?

Yes. The World Anti-Doping Agency has had its eye on meldonium for a while and added it to its banned list on 1 January.

Sharapova says she missed that. Didn't read an email, apparently

She must also have failed to read that at least six athletes have been provisionally banned for use of meldonium, including a

Russian cyclist and two Ukrainian biathletes. On the same day as Sharapova's announcement, the Russian ice dancer Ekaterina Bobrova said that she too had tested positive. She was "shocked," she said.

Are you shocked?

Not in the slightest. Russian sport is systematically contaminated by doping, as the International Association of Athletic Federations has finally and reluctantly acknowledged. Russia is currently suspended from international athletic competitions.

Does Sharapova have any defence?

She says she knew the drug as mildronate; it appears on the World Anti-Doping Agency's list as meldonium, in the section listing metabolic modulators. So there's room for an honest mistake there—for her, at least, if not for the "family doctor" she says prescribed it to her in 2006.

Who is this doctor?

Unnamed, so far. But since childhood Sharapova has lived in the US, where meldonium isn't even licensed. So it would be interesting to know.

1 Dzerve V. MILSS I Study Group. A dose-dependent improvement in exercise tolerance in patients with stable angina treated with mildronate: a clinical trial "MILSS I". *Medicina (Kaunas)* 2011;47:544-51.22186118.

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