

## GAME, SET, STYLE: UNVEILING THE FASHION SECRETS OF TENNIS DRESS CODE

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**Abstract.** Clothing in the game of tennis is one of the most important elements in the sport, both in terms of the role it plays, and the impact of the historical tradition it holds. Over centuries, both clothing and tennis shoes have undergone massive evolution, transitioning from traditional attire to more practical and technologically advanced designs. This evolution has not only enhanced the players' performance but has also contributed to the financial development of tennis through effective marketing strategies. Clothing in the game of tennis has always had a set of specific characteristics, often passed down from one generation to another as an unwritten rule. Although it does not have a major role in how a tennis match is influenced, it has a significant financial impact, through the important role of marketing reflected by associating the apparel with important figures in tennis. Throughout history, tennis clothing has evolved, abandoning many of its traditional aspects, opting for a much more practical version of the way they are made in the context of innovation, technology and design (durability, style and sustainability). Despite embracing innovation and modern design principles, certain traditional elements persist, notably exemplified by the strict dress code of prestigious events like Wimbledon. Similarly, tennis footwear has experienced significant transformations, largely driven by changes in playing surfaces. These advancements aim to optimize players' performance at the professional level and, like clothing, contribute to the financial dynamics of the sport. Therefore, the present paper aims to illustrate how the evolution of these essential elements of tennis equipment have led to the improvement of the game of tennis, and how the preservation of traditions over time has helped in the rise of the marketing element in tennis.

**Key words:** tennis clothing, tennis shoes, tradition, marketing, evolution.

### Introduction

The evolution of men's and women's tennis apparel has gone through many changes throughout its history, from its inception to its impact on the fashion world. This is evident both in marketing and in the way major sports brands make huge profits from the impact male and female tennis players have on the court when they wear their logos.

### Women's Tennis Fashion

In the early days of tennis, women's tennis clothes had to take into account not only the fashion of the time, but also its mentality, depending a lot on the image of the woman in the era. Starting from the 19th century, women were restricted from wearing loose clothing that could help them move around on the tennis court. Initially, the clothes worn by women were very uncomfortable, often accompanied by accessories uncomfortable for a sportswoman, such as corsets or floor-length dresses.





Sources: allure.com



Source: sport.ro

The situation changed once with the famous French player, Suzanne Lenglen, whose name today names one of the most important courts at Roland Garros, the grand slam tournament that is hosted by the French capital. In 1919, Suzanne Lenglen made her Wimbledon debut wearing an extremely revealing outfit: a short-sleeved V-neck dress and a calf-length pleated skirt. A floppy hat covered her short hair. She rolled up her white stockings to her knees because the suspenders would restrict her legs. She was not wearing a corset. She wasn't even wearing a petticoat. This was labelled as indecent by the media, but it was a turning point for women's tennis fashion.

From then until now fashion has changed and turned its attention more towards the comfort and durability side, with an emphasis on the aesthetic side as well. Today's female players are much more interested in the comfort and qualities that a piece of equipment provides, how the ideal piece of equipment can improve their performance on the court. In this era, brand endorsements became a significant influence on the fashion and flair of modern tennis apparel for top players.

Venus and Serena Williams were ones of the key players in changing the fashion landscape by introducing lightweight and durable polyester and nylon materials that remove moisture away from the body. As fabric technology advanced, tennis clothing also began to incorporate sun protection features. The fabrics were made with a combination of weave, colour, high-quality sunscreen ingredients, and sun-bouncing minerals like titanium oxide and zinc oxide infused into the fibres. Sharapova's dress at Roland Garros in 2015 was a popular choice, featuring Dri-FIT technology to keep moisture at bay. The design included a thin T-back, showcasing her nearly bare back and ensuring freedom of movement.

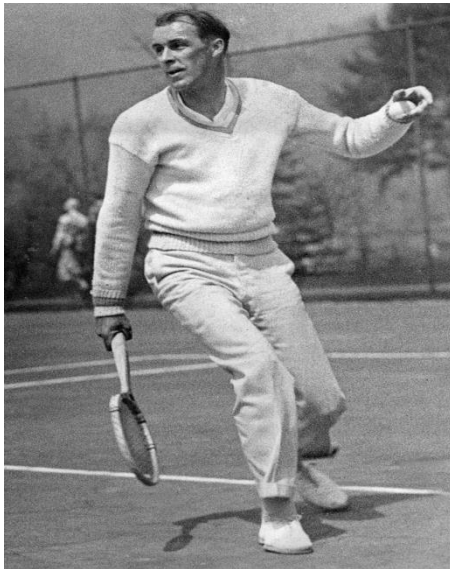
Naturally, these changes had a significant impact on the marketing strategies of equipment manufacturing brands. High-profile athletes endorsing their clothing resulted in major profits for big sports brands, particularly from female players. At the 2017 U.S. Open, Sharapova impressed spectators with a sophisticated black lace Nike dress created by Riccardo Tisci, which featured numerous glittering Swarovski crystals.

However, with these changes came clothing controversies reminiscent of the early days of tennis. An example of this is the incident involving Serena Williams at Roland Garros in 2018, where she wore a black catsuit inspired by Wakanda. Williams claimed that the outfit was designed to help prevent blood clots, a recurring issue for her. Despite her justification, the French tennis federation later banned this type of equipment.

### Men's Tennis Fashion

Men's fashion has not always stayed the same over time. From the starting point, men's clothing was as uncomfortable as it was for women, and often included unnecessary design elements. Men often

wore shirts, pants and even ties during tennis matches. Men's fashion didn't make significant advancements until the 1920s when Rene Lacoste introduced his innovative designs.



Source: Wikipedia.org



Source: townandcountrymag.com

Tennis player Rene Lacoste, known as the Alligator, revolutionized men's clothing by inventing a short-sleeved cotton shirt that was far more comfortable than traditional styles. In the early 1930s, short-sleeved shirts were becoming more common and around the same time, a bold new trend emerged. In 1933, Bunny Austin made history as the first male tennis player to compete in a major public event wearing shorts instead of trousers.

In the 1970s, colour was incorporated into men's tennis clothing for the first time in the history of the sport. This change was made in response to complaints from spectators who found it hard to differentiate between players due to the plain colouring. Additionally, headbands gained popularity around this time, with both John McEnroe and Bjorn Borg wearing them during their iconic rivalry. In the 1990s, athletes transitioned from wearing short-shorts to baggier Bermuda style shorts. Some players, including Agassi, began sporting lycra cycling shorts underneath this new trend, which has persisted over the years.

Nowadays, men's tennis attire prioritizes comfort, ease of movement, and freedom of the body. Sponsorship has also become crucial, with brands often outshining the clothing itself or its symbolic value. Although materials have changed, to ensure better evaporation of sweat, but also much greater flexibility, important players such as Novak Djokovic or Roger Federer still opted for the traditional polo style of the shirts. As in the case of women's tennis, men's tennis clothing has also made important advances in marketing, thanks to the association of brands with important names in world of tennis. A notable example is the successful partnership between Rafael Nadal and Nike, which over the years has developed countless clothing designs including the use of Nadal-specific tops.

Men's tennis has not been immune to controversy either, and a notable example was the break between Nike and Roger Federer, respectively the latter's move to the Uniqlo camp. The Swiss player motivated the break between him and the big American brand as a difference of vision on how clothing should look and what it should convey.

### Preserving traditions

Perhaps the most notable example of the preservation of the tradition of tennis clothing is in the dress code of the prestigious Wimbledon tournament. With a remarkable history behind it, dating

back to the 19th century, Wimbledon has kept its stamp on how tennis players should dress during the tournament as much as possible. In the beginning, both women and men used to wear white during tennis matches because white easily hid sweat stains and did not attract strong heat like other colors.

Even today, the Wimbledon tournament has in its dress code the tradition of wearing the mandatory white to be able to participate in the event. But this code has also brought dissatisfaction from players such as the American player Andre Agassi. Andre Agassi became well-known for refusing to participate in Wimbledon from 1988 to 1990 due to the tournament's strict all-white dress code, as he preferred colorful attire. However, he changed his mind and competed in 1991, ultimately winning the Grand Slam title the next year while wearing all-white clothing.

## Tennis Shoes

Whether they are women's or men's footwear, tennis shoes have had a noticeable evolution over time, designed to help players adapt to both surfaces and playing conditions. Since the late 1800s, tennis shoes have evolved significantly from the early days of the sport. Initially, women were seen playing in heeled boots that went above the ankle, while men wore loafers with spiked soles for better traction. The Open Era that began in 1968 allowed top tennis players to participate in major tournaments and also allowed them to receive sponsorships from sportswear brands, transforming footwear from mere equipment to a form of personal expression and opening up new endorsement possibilities.



Sources: [weare1959.com](http://weare1959.com)



Source: [runrepeat.com](http://runrepeat.com)

In modern times, tennis players are concerned with the aesthetics and materials of their shoes to ensure optimal comfort for their feet. Additionally, advancements in technology have resulted in a variety of innovative techniques to enhance footwear, such as materials that prioritize abrasion resistance and comfort, along with shoes that feature memory foam heel lining to conform to the shape of the wearer's foot, among other advancements.

## Conclusion

Clothing has seen major innovations in design, material selection, breathability, durability, and overall function. Similarly, tennis shoes have also undergone advancements to meet the requirements of different court surfaces and provide maximum comfort to players. Over time, there has been significant evolution in both tennis clothing and tennis shoes, leading to new horizons in technology and advancements, and with these developments, there have also been noticeable changes in the marketing strategies of brands investing in tennis equipment.

## Authors' Contributions

All authors have equally contributed to this study.

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