

STYLE & FASHION



MATCH POINT
Fred Perry, Helen Wills Moody and S.B. Wood before a 1932 mixed doubles match in Paris.

century lawn tennis was first played in darker garden-party garb of silk dresses and full-on suits, cool, and forgoing and status-y white began its ascent when the sport became more rigorous and competitive.

Another reason: White conceals sweat, and women who were obviously perspiring “were not deemed ladylike,” said Nicole Markham, a curator at the International Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport, R.I. She calls the default to white sexist, classist and misogynistic.

Whites endured for women and men (who were the sole players at the inaugural Wimbledon tournament in 1877). That famous tennis tradition still mandates mostly white garb, which can

be accented only with minimal colored trim, as do plenty of private clubs in the U.S. Club & Court, an American line that launched during Covid, has had great success with whites. “They’re our bestsellers,” said co-founder Kristin Nevins. “They keep you cool on the court and are a great staple...for any player, from newbie to pro.” Venus Williams is a supporter too. “You can never go wrong with whites,” said the seven-time Grand Slam singles champ, calling them “timeless” and “the ultimate classic tennis look.”

We’ve come a long way from misogyny, anti-perspiration ideologies, but tennis whites are most definitely still a thing.

2 I’m hyper-organized and planning my Halloween costume early. To telegraph my newfound passion for tennis, which iconic looks should I reference?

See below for a few ideas ranked from “Wear these if you’re going for comic relief” to “Wear these if you want to lob attitude at every attendee.”

Andre Agassi, 1988 Acid-Wash Jorts On the Court
As if the lion’s mane mullet weren’t enough, the “Open” author treated fans to a slew of fashion offenses—like these jean shorts—during his 1980s heyday.

Billie Jean King, 1973 Making a Spectacle
In 1973’s Battle of the Sexes, BJK defeated Bobby Riggs while sporting her trademark glasses, feathery shag and an embellished, color-blocked dress.

Bjorn Borg, 1978 Head-to-Groin Fila
Mr. Borg may have been named the Best Swedish Sportsman Ever, but that does not make his itty-bitty shorts any more palatable.

Chris Evert, 1977 Lady Killer
Credited with launching the tennis-bracelet craze, this former world champ crushed competition while wearing some of the sport’s most feminine court looks.

Serena Williams, 2021 Meow Mix
After the catsuit she donned at the 2018 French Open prompted the French Tennis Federation to ban the garment, Ms. Williams clapped back, playing in a Flo-Jo-esque one-leg Nike onesie at the 2021 Aussie Open.

BURNING QUESTIONS

Ace Your Tennis Style

Anyone can take up tennis (and during lockdown, many did). But it requires skill to hit a volley while serving on-court fashion points. Dana Wood offers a primer on the history of tennis garb and tips for picking a winning look.

3 I’m not a traditionalist. What are some hip brands I should check out?

For the gym-honed girly girl: Bobbe Frilly, frisky and destined to tempt a Millennial’s debit card.

For the upbeat minimalist: Redvanly
Bright colors and bold stripes add a little zip to this basics-driven men’s line.

For the classic-with-a-twist: L’Oeuf Poché
Skeggings, anyone? How about a tank with a handy back pocket?

For the retro-look nerd: Sergio Tacchini
The brand John McEnroe put on the map is back and more relevant than ever (pictured right).



4 Why is everyone saying I need ‘court specific’ shoes? Can’t I just play in my running sneaks?

If you’re OK with taking a major spill or leaving black marks all over the hard court you’re so fond of playing on, by all means, wear running shoes. If, however, you’re a fan of stability and durability, step up to an actual tennis shoe. Only a legit tennis shoe can accommodate the intense lateral movement the sport entails, said Dave Limke, senior footwear buyer for online retailer Tennis Point. Given that most courts in the U.S. are hard, Mr. Limke recommends substantial “non-marking outsoles.” Multiple brands including Asics and Nike offer six-month guarantees on soles for certain styles. For clay courts, shoes with chevron- or herringbone-patterned soles, like Asics’s Solution Speed FF 2, resist clogging and provide traction. Podiatrist Brad Schaeffer recommends investing in Dr. Scholl’s Performance Sized to Fit Running Insoles to make any shoe a little more comfortable.



5 I’m a new tennis fanatic and longtime vintage fan. At a yard sale, I recently found an old-timey V-neck sweater just like the one Great Gran wore on the court. It gets nippy at night here in Petoskey, Mich. Can I bust out my score for my next doubles match?

It’s not 1912, so that would be a firm no.

6 Is it really necessary to splash-out on pricey high-end tennis socks when I could be putting that dough toward a fancy new racket?

If your feet are miserable, you’re miserable. So yes, you absolutely should invest a bit of coin in quality socks. Those from Thorlos, which have been around since the early 1980s and are beloved by such tennis greats as Martina Navratilova, Andy Murray and Maria Sharapova, are among the best. The special sauce? Precision padding and a blend of acrylic and polyester fibers that wick the bejesus out of perspiration. During a match, “the foot is slamming into the sides, toes and top of the shoe,” said Eric Cody, Thorlos’s vice president of sales, e-commerce and merchandising. “We strategically place the pads on those impact areas.” Pony up for a few pairs of the bestselling Maximum Cushion Rolltop socks (\$14 each) and you’ll be doing the happy dance.



From Top: Skort, \$72, spank.com; Skirt, \$158, topurchase.com; Skirt, \$84, elevenbyvenuswilliams.com

7 I think tennis skirts are seriously outdated but my tennis-expert friend swears by them. Should I reconsider my stance?

For posers and players alike, tennis skirts are trending. A member of the latter camp, Venus Williams checked off a tidy list of reasons why she digs them. “They allow for so much movement,” she said. “When you’re lunging to return a shot or sprinting up to the net, it’s critical that your outfit moves with you and lets you pivot, leap or reach.” While there are loads of fashion takes on the tennis staple, like the Match Point Skirt by Wland Nation, most have no business being on a court. How to quickly tell an adorable impostor from the real deal? Fabrication. Look for a moisture-wicking microfiber (like Nike Dri-FIT), rather than sweat-magnet cotton or 100% polyester, which can retain odor. Most true tennis skirts are actually shorts with snug, built-in briefs or shorts that enable you to securely store tennis balls—the last thing you want when racing to smash an overhead is a neon Wilson flying out of your underpinnings. Actual shorts need to be very long (a look many female players contend is unflattering) to offer pockets deep enough for adequate ball storage.

7 OK, I’m hooked. How can I start building my tennis wardrobe without breaking the bank?

Once you’ve got a pair of quality shoes matched to your surface of choice (i.e., hard or clay), you really don’t need much else. Men can get by with a pair of tennis shorts, a few tops and possibly a zip jacket for cooler weather. Women will want a few skirts and tops, including a long-sleeve option for layering. Solid colors are best for heavy rotation and mixing and matching. And since you’ll likely be serving and volleying in the sun, fabrics that offer UV protection are definitely a plus.

Men

Polo, \$145, Lacoste, 212-219-9203; Shorts, \$48, filac.com; React Vapor NXT Shoe, \$160, nike.com

Women

BloqUV Shirt, \$64, tennisexpress.com; Skirt, \$95, recreationalhabits.com; GEL-Resolution 8 L.E. Shoe, \$140, asics.com

8 I’ve noticed pros never wear sunglasses, even in the blinding rays of the Australian Open or Indian Wells. What gives? Do I need them?

“Eyesight and depth perception are incredibly important when playing tennis,” said Ms. Williams, who’s firmly against shades, no matter how cool. “It’s a very fast-paced and precise sport and wearing sunglasses can interfere with how you’re seeing the ball. They can also slide down your nose, fall off your face or block peripheral vision.” Whoa. But guess what? You, Mr. or Ms. Tennis Civilian, still need to protect your peepers. And since you’re not

vying for a Grand Slam title, it’s fine to wear some shades. If you don’t, said New York City and Naples, Fla., ophthalmic plastic and reconstructive surgeon Irene Gladstein, you can expect “a multitude of eye-related issues” from blurry vision in the short-term to cataracts and eyelid



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