

1-1-2006

Part One: The Influence of Fashion. Chapter 3, Taking Up Tennis

Patricia Campbell Warner

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/umpress_wtg



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Warner, Patricia Campbell, "Part One: The Influence of Fashion. Chapter 3, Taking Up Tennis" (2006). *When the Girls Came Out to Play: The Birth of American Sportswear*. 5.

Retrieved from https://scholarworks.umass.edu/umpress_wtg/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in When the Girls Came Out to Play: The Birth of American Sportswear by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

TAKING
UP
Tennis

THE FIRST REAL SPORT FOR WOMEN TO EMERGE FOLLOWING THE CRAZE FOR croquet was lawn tennis. Court tennis, or *jeu de paume*, as the French called it, had been a sport of kings. Akin to handball, it was played on a walled court, both indoors and out, from the misty depths of the medieval period. By the sixteenth century, players used a rudimentary racquet instead of their bare hands.¹ Henry VIII of England, who had a tennis court at Hampton Court, was an accomplished player—“it is the prettiest thing in the world to see him play,” reported a foreign ambassador—and his inventories listed suits of clothes designed specifically for tennis. Royal enthusiasm dwindled considerably over time, and by the nineteenth century, tennis had become a game played by rich Englishmen in their clubs. Needless to say, women were excluded. By the 1870s, though, according to rumored sources, a Major Walter Clopton Wingfield (a source of the rumors himself, it is said), aware of women’s enthusiasm for croquet, suggested that tennis be moved exclusively outdoors and that it include women. His motive wasn’t altogether altruistic; he apparently wanted to offer the men who partnered the women more of a workout than croquet could provide. Accordingly, in London in 1869, he invited friends to play his new game based on court tennis. It was not quite the success he had hoped for, but after tweaking the rules, the size and shape of the court, and the height of the net, four years later, in 1873, he once again invited friends to play, this time in Nantclwyd, Wales. By December of

that year, he had patented his game under the name “Sphairistike.” With the patent came an eight-page rule book, titled “Sphairistike or Lawn Tennis,” with the subheading “The Major’s Game of Lawn Tennis, Dedicated to the party assembled at Nantclwyd in December, 1873.”²

However reminiscent of all other hand or racquet ball court games it was, and however many challenges arose to the story of its origins, it caught on. Within the next year, an American, Mary Ewing Outerbridge, watched British army officers play a version of the game while she was on vacation in Bermuda. She managed to buy a set of equipment and toted it home to New York, where she and her brother set up a court at the upper-class Staten Island Cricket and Baseball Club. Later that summer another American, William Appleton, established the game at a club in Nahant, Massachusetts. Almost immediately, then, tennis moved off private estates and became a club game. Back in England, the Marylebone Cricket Club took it on, as did the All England Croquet Club, which shrewdly added “Lawn Tennis” to its name. In fact, so popular was the upstart tennis that it shoved the staid—and aging—croquet aside. The All England dropped “Croquet” from their name and staged their first play-off at their club in Wimbledon in 1877. The rest, as they say, is history.³ Almost simultaneously, tennis sprang up everywhere, usually under the auspices of the upper or upper-middle classes. By 1887 the *New York Tribune*, obviously in awe of the elite overtones of the game, reported:

Tennis clubs have sprung up all over the country; playing continually improves; and numerous tournaments with valuable prizes are held each season. The elegant character of the game holds off the professionals; and lawn tennis continues the game of polite society, essentially one for ladies and gentlemen. The original game was the pastime of kings and nobles; and though the modern game is simple, fascinating and inexpensive, there still lingers about it the odor of aristocracy.

During the past season 450 clubs have obtained courts at Prospect Park in Brooklyn.⁴

In spite of the claim of gentility, the very fact that some 450 clubs had appeared with such amazing speed in Brooklyn alone would suggest either

that Brooklyn was a city of the gentry or that tennis didn't take long to democratize once it hit American shores. *Outing* magazine, whose very existence reflected the importance of the sports movement, also carried the banner of elitism. In 1881 it reassured ladies that tennis would never attract the lower orders, and that, should they wish to participate, they would be "in the company of persons in whose society [they are] accustomed to move."⁵ And of course, even though it eventually welcomed the middle classes, tennis continues to enjoy an aura of social status.

Interestingly, the game of tennis as we know it today depended as much on two inventions as it did on any creator or upper-class enthusiasm. The first was the lawn mower, which coincided with the explosion of interest in croquet; the second was the invention of the rubber-core tennis ball. Although the cause and effect of the reel lawn mower strongly influenced the game of croquet, its impact was even greater on tennis, given the remarkable spread of the game. Indeed, at Wimbledon, at the All England Lawn Tennis Club, a sign over a lawn mower dating from around 1858 claims that without the invention of the mower, we would not be playing the game of lawn tennis we know today. The perfect green grass courts on which tennis was first played in the 1870s, and which gave the game its name, depended on the new machine.⁶

As for the ball, it represented a major difference between the earlier games of court tennis, or *jeu de paume*, and the game of lawn tennis, which needs a ball that bounces. Ancient balls were hard, made out of wool wrapped in leather strips. Because they had little or no bounce, they must have required a ferocious stroke to return off the floor or walls, which might explain how a man could even be killed by one, given enough misdirection. (Charles VIII of France is known to have been hit on the head and killed by such a solid, hard ball in 1498.)⁷ In the eighteenth century, layers of strips of wool three-quarters of an inch wide, wrapped around a tight core of wool strips, were tied into place with a specific pattern of string, then covered with a white fabric and sewn in place, giving us the precursor of the fuzzy white tennis ball of recent times. What made the difference in the game, though, was the vulcanization of rubber, a process developed by the American Charles Goodyear in 1839. The India rubber that evolved from Goodyear's process was applied as a hollow lining for the new tennis ball, used from the beginnings of lawn tennis in the 1870s.⁸

Although men and women played tennis together from the time it was introduced in the 1870s, Wimbledon did not abandon the pattern of clubbish male exclusivity that had flourished for centuries until 1884. Actually, in view of the prevailing notions about women and their activities at that time, the 7-year lag seems remarkably short. Far from the grunts of exertion accompanying the strength and endurance that competitive tennis engenders today, tennis at that time required little running or hard exercise. In fact, players did little more than bat a ball back and forth across the net—"pat ball," as it was called. As for the clothing, the restrained and ladylike nature of the game was a blessing. Women in contemporary illustrations (and cartoons too, it might be added) are shown arrayed in up-to-the-minute fashion, which in the 1880s achieved the tightest fit of any decade of the century, or indeed any decade since. Not only were women stuffed into encasing sleeves, corsets, and bodices, but they were also bound by yards of draperies swathed around their knees and drawn up in the back to form the most protuberant bustle ever to confound fashion. Hats perched firmly in place, gloves covered the hands clutching the racquets (to say nothing of the trains of the gowns held in the other hand), and shoes as often as not had heels. Never mind: the women were not expected to actually run for the ball.

All the same, at least one reform dress for tennis appeared at the time. In their history of sports fashions, Phillis Cunnington and Alan Mansfield refer to a fashion illustration of a dark dress as tight as skin on a banana, torso outlined by a curvaceous corset, legs swathed in horizontal swags laced together in the front in a fetching criss-cross pattern and gathered into a bustle at the rear, with a skirt that fell in straight knife pleats to the ground. This dress, so it was claimed, was a splendid bow to the action of tennis. One might ask how. First, and most important, it was fashioned out of the new knitted wool cloth known as jersey. Because of the way jersey "gave," the tight sleeves would hold their shape but ease over the bent elbow or the reaching arm. Even the skirt, so fashionably slim over the entire lower body, was also designed to give. The lacing on the swag could be eased open, and the pleats at the bottom allowed the feet to move without excessive binding. So, clearly, at least some dressmakers had the interests of the players in mind when they set out to accommodate them.⁹ It seems that in the early years of tennis's popularity, designers had to feel

TAKING UP TENNIS



"Ladies' Outdoor and Indoor Garments" show the versatility of "outing costumes." Made from "striped, tinted and plain white flannels and tennis and outing cloths . . . appropriate for tennis, sea-side, mountain and general outdoor wear." The "ladies' yachting blouse and kilt skirt" on the right is accessorized with a tennis racquet. *The Delineator*, July 1889, 4.

their way into new styles. By 1890, they offered a somewhat generic "outing costume" that covered a number of needs. *The Delineator* advised its readers that "tennis suits, though originally designed for outing purposes, are frequently worn at the sea-shore or in the country until the evening. They are sufficiently *négligé* to produce perfect ease and comfort, and when prettily made, are dressy enough to be assumed with propriety during the afternoon." A Sterns Brothers catalogue from the summer of 1892 showed six "Ladies' Yachting and Tennis Costumes." Only one was designated specifically for tennis, and it seemed to bear no relationship to the game at all, except perhaps in its cost, which was decidedly elitist. The "navy or black serge" dress was designed with a tight, low-cut sleeveless bodice worn

over a long-sleeved silk blouse with a high-necked collar adorned with a large bow. It cost \$17.50. Perhaps the one accommodation to tennis appeared in a note below that offered a cotton cheviot blouse instead of the silk, at the reduced rate of \$13.75.¹⁰ But clearly the preferred ensemble was the one shown. The skirt, slim and flat-fronted with fullness at the back, fell to the toe tips, barely skimming the ground.¹¹

It is therefore perhaps noteworthy that the second female winner at Wimbledon, the one who abandoned the “pat ball” game, was a mere fourteen years old at the time of her first victory there, in 1886. “Exuberant” is the word that comes to mind as we read descriptions of her. Her opponent, Miss Maud Watson, the reigning women’s champion, complained that she “did not have the same chance of returning the ball as with the other ladies.” The young Charlotte, or Lottie, Dod was a curiosity. Her close-cropped hair, “unusual height and strength,” and “violent” strokes amazed spectators used to seeing a much more demure and temperate game. Should there be any doubt that only a certain class played tennis, Lottie’s case seals it. She blithely dropped out of Wimbledon one year in the 1880s to take a cruise with a yachting party. But she returned the next year, won again, and kept at it, losing only four games in her entire career, retiring in 1893 at the ripe old age of twenty-one.¹²

One has to wonder if she would have been allowed to play with such vigor and effectiveness had she been an adult at the time of her first victory. Since technically she was still a child, it is very possible that a certain leniency may have been granted her in the matter of dress, allowing her skirts to be shorter, fuller, and more suitable for a girl of her age—and for freedom of movement. One photograph of her does exist, showing a young, pubescent, shapeless girl wearing a light-colored, loose-bodied dress that obviously has no corset underneath, and is gathered into a widish, low-slung skirt draped over the hips, a style typical of the 1880s. Since the picture cuts her off somewhere around her knees, we can only guess at the length of her skirt. In overall effect, the dress is either “aesthetic” (that is, loose but body-conscious and unconfining, a look very much in tune with the 1880s) or childlike.¹³ The sleeves are unusual for the decade: they are bracelet length and have a puffed cap, again suggestive of the aesthetic dress that foreshadowed the ballooning sleeves of the 1890s and very much looser than the formidably tight sleeves of the 1880s. The dress looks very



Tennis blouse, "spotted wash silk . . . particularly desirable for yachting, rowing and outdoor sports of all kinds." Note the tennis racquet held by her gloved hand. *The Delineator*, August 1891, 99

much like that of a young girl rather than a woman. Interestingly, a tennis blouse featured in *The Delineator* in August 1891 was fashioned on much the same lines. The tennis player is shown seated, clutching her racquet and fiddling with her hair, which is partly covered by a baseball-style cap (known as a "sports hat" at the time). Her sleeves are wide and gathered, with a high cap, and the neckline is high as well, and also gathered and ruffled. The waist or blouse (so-called because it blouses), is waist-length and very baggy, a most unusual style for the time.¹⁴ To finish Lottie's outfit, in all likelihood her shoes would have been the new rubber-soled canvas tennis shoes, manufactured by the Spalding Company, a further development of the earlier "croquet sandal" that had appeared in the 1860s.¹⁵ *The Delineator* details the range of popular styles in July 1892 (one year before Lottie Dod's retirement): "Tennis shoes are preferred low-cut and can be had in white canvas trimmed with white kid, and in russet and tan leather, the soles being always of rubber. Low shoes of black and tan ooze-leather [suede], with patent-leather tips, are also well liked for tennis. . . . The hosiery invariably matches the shoes."¹⁶

No one seems to have mentioned Lottie Dod's clothing at the time, so overwhelmed were they, one supposes, by her dynamic game. But perhaps after all, and certainly as she grew older, she dressed like the women she competed against. An insightful, even startling footnote to her story, especially for twenty-first-century readers, was recalled by a Major A. D. Mansfield, who saw her play a game of doubles in 1925 against two young women "wearing the modern type dress." According to Mansfield, Lottie, then in her fifties, managed to "[shake] up the girls" in the process. He concluded, "Here one can add that in the 1920s one still saw quite a number of the older women who still wore the pre-1914 kind of tennis dress and it was noticeable that some of them who were particularly small-waisted, and obviously tightly corseted, were particularly quick about the court."¹⁷ A perfect gentleman, he named no names, leaving us wondering. But one thing Lottie Dod did do for the woman's game was to liven it up. Her successor, Blanche Bingley Hillyard, a woman with a powerful forehand, wore gloves for a better grip on the racquet, and often had a mass of bruises on her left shoulder from her own racquet's strong follow-through.¹⁸ Such a thing would have been impossible had the game remained the gentle "pat ball" of the early 1880s.

As for the next teenager who conquered Wimbledon, the nature of her clothing is clearer. May Sutton was one of four tennis-playing sisters from Pasadena when she first came to Wimbledon in 1905 as a seventeen-year-old. That year she took the women's title, the first American ever to win the All England. Still teaching tennis back in California in 1972 at the age of eighty-two, she and her two older sisters, Violet and Florence, reminisced. (It must be remembered that this was the year before the famous Billie Jean King–Bobby Riggs match):

"Girls were faster in our day," remembered Violet. . . . "We ran more. But it's a wonder we could move at all. Do you want to know what we wore? A long undershirt, pair of drawers, two petticoats, white linen corset cover, duck shirt, shirtwaist, long white silk stockings, and a floppy hat. We were soaking wet when we finished a match."

"Girls today have a greater variety of strokes, but I believe we had more fight and speed, even though nobody ever dreamed of taking

lessons from a professional coach,” said May. . . . “Girls played the net even then. It wasn’t all baseline. Our weakest stroke was the serve. We just hit the ball up without much windup.”

“But how May could hit that forehand!” enthused Florence. “She’d play all day without missing a forehand drive. She had power. When she won the nationals in 1904 and Wimbledon in 1905 and 1907, she weighed 160 pounds. Girls didn’t worry about diets then. May even beat men. Our ‘little sister’ was the greatest of ‘em all!”¹⁹

May Sutton may have been great, but she ran into some difficulties at Wimbledon because of her clothing. One of her competitors objected to the flash of ankle revealed by a shorter-than-customary skirt, and to her bare lower arm exposed by a daring short-sleeved blouse. After much crying foul by her opponent, she was allowed on center court only after she agreed to lengthen her skirt. Even though she was forced to comply with tradition, she is credited with leading the way to women’s eventual emancipation from trailing skirts, high-necked shirts, and long sleeves.²⁰

Violet mentioned a corset cover as one layer of apparel but said nothing of the corset itself. Because the girls were young at the time, they may not have worn corsets; or perhaps the “duck shirt” (called “health waists” in earlier times) that is mentioned—referring, one assumes, to a stiff cotton bodice made of the canvas-like fabric duck—was a substitute. But other women did wear them, even while playing championship tennis, as late as the 1920s. The U.S. women’s amateur champion for 1910 (once again proving women’s devotion to fashion rather than practicality) extolled their virtue, however vaguely, as “desirable for many reasons,” not the least being that women looked better in them.²¹

Wimbledon has always been celebrated as a bastion of tradition and reverence for proper form. Scandalous clothing has been a concern since May Sutton’s day. This has consisted of wearing any article of clothing that veers away from the traditional. Sutton’s shortened skirt, probably no more than four to six inches from the ground, and her elbow-length sleeves were early examples. The knee-length, sleeveless Jean Patou dress that Suzanne Lenglen wore in 1919 was another; ankle socks, then shorts (for both men and, though short-lived, for women), colored rather than white clothing,

and in the mid-1980s a form-fitting white nylon bodysuit were others. This last, worn by a player named Anne White, caused a great furor in 1985. The *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* reported, quoting umpire Alan Mills, in phrases eerily reminiscent of May Sutton's case:

“The umpire [of the match] obviously decided she could wear it, but she was slightly fortunate to get away with it because it was not normal tennis attire . . . she won't be allowed to play in it again. She will be warned.”

The outfit brought photographers rushing to the court. Tennis fashion designer Teddy Tinling, who has chosen the garments of many top women players on the pro circuit, said: “She is quite within her rights. And she has a lovely figure to go with it.”

Wimbledon rules states [sic] that players must dress in predominantly white tennis clothing and that it must be appropriate.²²

All these examples represent the continuous struggle for reform and change which doubtless will exist as long as Wimbledon itself does. In recent years, more color has finally come to the courts, and more skin is being revealed, as is evident in the high (and one could add questionable) design of Venus and Serena Williams's outfits. Nevertheless, the vestiges of Victorianism hold firm in that the women who play the strong, muscular, masculine, and brilliant tennis of today must still wear little dresses with skirts and underdrawers. The “public” face of sports which insisted that women wear skirts while playing remains with us, not only in this sport but in field hockey, too. *Plus ça change, plus ça reste*. And white remains the preferred color, making all others look, well, bad form. It has been suggested that tennis clothing is white because, when it started being worn at the turn of the century, it was not only a highly fashionable color for women's clothing, but also upper class. White clothes, hard to launder and keep pristine, were the prerogative of the rich. That alone, quite apart from the nature of the game itself, marked it as elite. Sparkling tennis whites are still the uniform of choice.

Wimbledon in the early days stood alone as the *ne plus ultra* of tennis. It still does. Even today, if a player is to accede anywhere to rules and regula-

tions in the matter of dress, it will be there. But anyone who has picked up a racquet and headed off to the local courts knows very well that Wimbledon's regulation gear does not routinely appear on the folks playing on their neighborhood courts. As soon as the private clubs enter the picture, however, "appropriate" clothing becomes mandatory for their members. This is especially so in the matter of footwear, if only to protect the surface of the courts. Usually, though, it is the players themselves, who want to look as if they know something about the game, who dress accordingly and wear trim cotton polos or T-shirts with their primarily white skirts and shorts. But in the beginning, what did the average player wear? To gain some sense of that, we turn to Smith College, whose archives include early tennis photos.

Smith opened to educate women in 1875. Tennis appeared there just seven years later, two years before Wimbledon welcomed women's play. The first courts at Smith were simply wide grass lawns divided only by a net strung from two posts sunk into the ground. No lines divided up the court. We see these details in a remarkable stop-action photo from 1883. It shows four young ladies of the college dressed in dark, fashionably bustled and corseted dresses, smooth and slim at the skirt fronts, with long, tight—*very* tight—sleeves. One raises her arm to make her shot. The ball is clearly visible against the strings. But her hand is raised only shoulder high, in perfect form for a "pat ball" sort of game, and perfectly in keeping with the tight sleeve that sits very high in the armsceye.²³ The players' skirts fall to the instep; three women are bareheaded but one wears a hat. Another photograph from the same year shows three young ladies and a young man playing on the same grass. The man (a brother of one? a friend from Amherst College? an instructor?) is as fashionably and properly dressed as the girls, in a dark suit and a hat. By the following year, lines defining the boundaries of play had been laid out on the grass, but the clothes remained essentially the same. A studio portrait of a tennis foursome (perhaps the tennis team from Smith) dated 1884 verifies the high style that the women played in, complete to the corsets they wore. Even in the black and white photograph it is apparent that each girl wore a different color. Fashion plates from the 1880s offer a sportier alternative, often based on the yachting outfits of the time. One appeared in *Peterson's* in April 1888. Both fig-



Tennis on the lawn at Smith College, 1883. Note the ball caught in midflight on the strings of the upraised racquet. Courtesy of Smith College Archives.



Smith College tennis team, 1884. All wear fashionable attire, tight enough to outline the corsets underneath. Courtesy of Smith College Archives.



"Lawn-Tennis Gowns." *Peterson's Magazine*, April 1888.

ures keep the general 1880s silhouette with its tight jacket and bustled apron *tournure*, but they are boldly striped, echoing the blazers that men were wearing to play tennis at that time.²⁴ Both women wear very early versions—the earliest I have seen—of a man's boater on their heads.

Smith was not the only college to offer tennis. Bryn Mawr, opened in 1885, had tennis from the beginning. By 1892 it was a focus of athletic attention, and by the following year there was even a permanent court—one assumes indoors—for winter practice. That same year the college held an invitational tournament between the champions of Bryn Mawr and "the Harvard Annex" (later Radcliffe, now Harvard), as well as three students from Girton College, Oxford, who happened to be studying at Bryn



Smith College tennis tournament, 1901. Shorter skirts and rolled sleeves on the players contrast with the trained dresses of the spectators. Courtesy of Smith College Archives

Mawr. Miss Whittelsey of the Annex won the day.²⁵ No doubt they all wore mixed colors in their game. White became fashionable for tennis only after the turn of the century, when it became fashionable for women's clothing in general. An ad in *The Delineator* in August 1894 offered a “Manual of Lawn Tennis” (which was written, incidently, by that same Miss Whittelsey from Harvard Annex, who was referred to in the ad as “a well-known authority”). It shows a highly decorative leg-o'-mutton-sleeved outing dress, dark in color, with matching waist and four-gored skirt, trimmed lavishly with zig-zag braid at the hem and revers of the bodice. It is worn with a broad-brimmed, wired bow-trimmed hat and dark gloves. The ad also shows a voluminous-sleeved shirtwaist blouse worn with a dark full skirt.²⁶ In 1895, photographs show skirts and waists (or blouses) being worn in the style of the “tailor-made”—that is, menswear adapted for women—but again in more than one color. Here too the skirts are full-length. Only in a 1901 Smith photograph are we able to spot a difference in the clothing: by this time the players wear white, roll their sleeves to the elbow, and sport skirts short enough to show their feet. When we compare the players in this

picture with the spectators, who are fashionably dressed with pompadour hairdos, many with elaborate hats, and even wearing dresses with trains, we understand that finally we are seeing what may be called a specifically designed tennis costume.

Here at Smith, then, this new modified outfit had evolved a full four years before May Sutton was chastised for wearing essentially the same sort of thing at Wimbledon. Probably it had appeared elsewhere as well, at the many colleges that offered tennis for their students. By 1909 this modified dress for sport was the preferred tournament wear, even in England. That year, Mrs. Sterry, British ladies' champion for the fifth time in a row, confided, "To my mind nothing looks smarter or more in keeping with the game than a nice clinging white skirt (about two inches off the ground), white blouse, white band, and a pale coloured silk tie and white collar." Her photo, in Elizabeth Ewing's *History of Twentieth-Century Fashion*, shows a white man's style shirtwaist with standard shirt sleeves, French cuffs with gold links, a high, stiff collar (we can't see the tie), a white skirt that looks like linen, smoothly gored to flare gracefully at her ankles, a firm and tight wide belt, and black stockings and shoes.²⁷ Like the players today, she wears earrings. So the special tennis dress was on its way by the first decade of the twentieth century, clearly modified from the fashion wear, the "tailor-mades," of the New Woman of the day, in response to the demands of sport.

Change came slowly to tennis, tied as it was to the authority and tradition of a powerful governing organization such as the English Lawn Tennis Association—or, in America, the United States Lawn Tennis Association. Since it was men who made the rules of the game, men enforced the rules and the fashion of play. In Part Two, we will see how gym clothing, formulated on the women's college campuses of the United States, had changed the rules of dress by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, introducing new concepts of comfort, practicality, and freedom of movement. College girls borrowed ideas from their brothers, stealing their turtlenecks and cardigans to accompany the baggy bloomers or significantly shorter skirts they wore to play outdoor sports. But such sensible clothing was never allowed for public wear by the male establishment. The short skirt came to



Mount Holyoke College basketball team in their outdoor uniform, 1910. Their knee-length skirts predated fashion by a decade. Courtesy of Mount Holyoke College Special Collections and Archive.

tennis only at the beginning of the 1920s, and sweaters were introduced, as accessories only, in the same period. But the knee-length skirt had been introduced for campus sports wear as early as 1910, and worn at international gymnastic events as early as 1912. Thus, the “shockingly” innovative short tennis dress designed by Patou for Suzanne Lenglen in 1919 was in reality a full ten years behind its prototype. Clearly, however, it was a style whose time had come. Lenglen’s appearance at Wimbledon is described by Lord Aberdare in his *Story of Tennis*:

Suzanne acquired strength and pace of shot by playing with men, and for playing a man’s type of game she needed freedom of movement. Off came the suspender belt, and she supported her stockings by means of garters above the knee; off came the petticoat and she wore only a short pleated skirt; off came the long sleeves and she wore a neat short-sleeved vest. Her first appearance at Wimbledon caused much comment, but the success of her outfit led to its adoption by others. In her first championship, she wore a white hat but on subsequent occasions

she wore a brightly colored bandeau which was outstandingly popular until challenged by Miss Helen Wills's eyeshade in 1924.²⁸

The straight line of her outfit echoed the bloomer-middy gym suit combination that had been introduced over a decade before, and confirmed the no-waist waistline that grew out of the high-waisted look of the 1910s. This was the combination of no waist, short sleeves, and knee-length skirt that soon captured the world. Even so, skirts remained longer for a few more years, but finally they too crept up to match Lenglen's Patou dress. In fact, Lenglen's entire look became the rage of the twenties: her bandeau—or "headache band," as it became known—was copied everywhere, as were her "rolled" stockings, which, teamed with knee-length pleated skirts, became the symbol of the flapper. For the first time, then, we see a sports figure influencing fashion in a complete, recognizable, and instantaneous way. The media had done their part; magazines and newsreels broadcast Lenglen's image all over the world. But the look had already appeared ten years earlier, in the women's colleges.

Other innovations at Wimbledon and Forest Hills in the 1930s, such as Mrs. Fearnley Whittingstall's short socks in 1931, had been accepted as normal gym wear for some time before they were paraded in the very visible public forum of international tennis. For example, the *Boston Herald* had published a photograph, "Girls Who Started in First Women's Intercollegiate Tournament," on June 25, 1929. The girls wear one-piece dresses, cut just to or at the knee, either with cap sleeves or completely sleeveless. Several wear headache bands. Anklets and white tennis shoes complete the outfits, even though some of the girls wear their anklets over long stockings, rolled above the knee (two years before Mrs. Whittingstall's socks debuted at Wimbledon). Alice Marble's much-talked-about shorts, worn first in 1933, broke a barrier, and even though by the end of the 1930s men routinely wore them at Wimbledon, shorts for women never really did catch on in tennis circles. Ironically, shorts are worn everywhere else for hot weather leisure wear—but not at Wimbledon. Women still wear little skirts for serious tennis. Perhaps from this we can conclude that the form of the new outfit came about first in the privacy of the campus testing ground, but it took the fashion-conscious stamp of approval that fame and international press coverage could bring in order to deliver the critically important

CHAPTER THREE

message of acceptability to the world of women's fashion. Both had to be present. By the mid-thirties, then, in the years immediately prior to World War II, we see the merging of the two separate streams, the "private" gym costume and the "public" sports dress, into a new and fashionable kind of clothing, easy, sensible, and with interchangeable parts, that within another decade or two would start on the path of conquering the world.