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The world’s game? Globalisation and the cultural economy of tennis

Barry Smart

Tennis as a competitive professional sport is played around the world for most of the year. Both the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) men’s tour and the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) tour open in Australia at the beginning of the calendar year and end in November. During the 11-month season, tournaments are held on every continent around the globe. It is a schedule that offers players a global profile, status and prestige from playing success, as well as lucrative financial rewards and a range of commercial opportunities, but also it is experienced by players as ‘a seemingly never-ending timetable of tension-filled tournaments, tedious travel and, for some … inescapable injuries’ (Macur 2011). Tennis is now a world game, one that provides a media platform for transnational corporations to raise the profile of their brands and enhance the market appeal of their consumer goods and services by taking advantage of the high profile and iconic cultural status of leading players who with the development of a consumer society have become, as Jean Baudrillard (2017, p.63) remarked, ‘heroes of consumption’. Without doubt tennis has acquired a cosmopolitan character as it has successfully exploited the world market and become a world game, but the origins and developmental trajectory of this global sport are complex and warrant close consideration.

A genealogy of tennis

Historical evidence of people playing numerous different ball games, including hand-ball games and racket sports, in communities and societies around the world, serves as confirmation both of Johan Huizinga’s (1949) observations on the universality of a play spirit in human civilisations and, in turn, the complex origins of modern tennis. As Heiner Gillmeister’s (1998, p.2) cultural history reveals, from the mid-twelfth century a range of ball games were being played, with characteristics comparable to the later French game jeu de paume, ‘from which modern tennis evolved’. The medieval game jeu de paume has been identified as the earliest precursor of a family of racket sports, which includes “rackets” played with a hard ball on a large wall-enclosed court, “squash racquets” played with a small rubber ball on a smaller wall-enclosed court than rackets, which has its roots in Harrow public school in the mid-nineteenth century
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(https://www.britannica.com/sports/squash-rackets), “real tennis”, or court or “royal tennis” as it is sometimes described, and “lawn tennis” or tennis as it became known following the variety of surfaces on which the game began to be played after its establishment at Wimbledon in 1877 (Gillmeister 1998). From early roots in monasteries and public schools to the growth of clubs, formation of associations, development of international tournaments, professionalisation, growing media coverage and increasing corporate interest and involvement, a genealogy of the sport of tennis demonstrates its global diffusion and the growing influence of commercialism, corporate sponsorship and promotion, media communications and spectacle and celebrity on the game.

The sport of tennis represents a celebration of competitive individualism and constitutes an ideal vehicle for promoting the virtues of individual effort, training, application and pursuit of self-interest. Although there are team tennis tournaments and competitions, the most significant being the Davis Cup, the sport of tennis foregrounds the contribution of individuals and celebrates their athleticism, ability, competitiveness and physical prowess and power. Given the global communication flows which extend the global reach and appeal of tennis competitions and tournaments, the associated forms of consumerism (sportswear/trainers/rackets) stimulated by corporate brand sponsoring of events and players, and cultivation of iconic global celebrity tennis figures, it is understandable that tennis now constitutes a globally popular game, if not the world game. To explore the various dimensions of the global profile of tennis, consideration will be given to the global development of tennis; the global tennis landscape, sponsorship and the media; and global sports brands and iconic celebrity tennis figures.

Tennis and globalisation: phases of development

Drawing on Giulianotti and Robertson’s phase model of ‘football’s historical globalization’ (2009, p.5), I suggest the global development of modern tennis can be conceptualised via the following six phases.

A “germinal phase” from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century saw early ball games with tennis-like features develop and grow in influence across the continent of Europe. This is a period in which versions of tennis-like ball games played by monks in the cloisters of monasteries were usurped and developed in various ways by the aristocracy (Gillmeister 1998). Following this, there was an ‘incipient phase’ from the mid-eighteenth century to the 1870s which ‘witnessed the steady decline of the ancient game of tennis’ and the development of various modern racquet sports (Gillmeister 1998, p.174). A ‘take-off’ or formative phase can be identified from the 1870s to the 1920s, a period in which Major Walton Clopton Wingfield obtained a patent in 1874 for a new form of tennis that he called ‘Sphairistiké’, followed in 1877 by the All England Croquet Club, in the vicinity of Wimbledon, becoming the All England Croquet and Lawn Tennis Club and announcing an annual tournament. Further manifestations of the game’s global development in this period include the formation of the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) in 1888, the first formal international lawn tennis championship, the Davis Cup, held in 1900 between teams from the US and Great Britain, and the establishment of the International Lawn Tennis Federation (ILTF) in 1913.

Tennis also featured in the first modern Olympiad in Athens in 1896 and in subsequent games held in Paris (1900), St Louis (1904), London (1908) and Stockholm (1912). The Great War meant that there was no Olympiad in 1916, but tennis featured in the Antwerp Olympic Games (1920) and again in the VIII Olympiad in Paris (1924). However, that would be the last time until tennis returned for the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Lake and Llewellyn (2015) explain that organisational problems at the Paris Games in 1924 and disagreements between the IOC and the ILTF, coupled with worries on the part of the latter that tennis at the Olympics might
detract from the appeal of the Grand Slam tournaments and the Davis Cup, led to the withdrawal of tennis from the Olympics.

In their account of the history of tennis at the Olympics, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) describe the removal of tennis from the Olympic Games as a consequence of ‘the breakdown in negotiations’ with the International Lawn Tennis Federation ‘over the latter’s various demands (being able to apply its own definition of amateurism in particular)’ (IOC 2017). It is tensions and disagreements over the terms and conditions under which competitors participated in tennis that are integral to the fourth phase, the struggle over professionalism, from the mid-1920s through to the late 1960s. Tennis in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was primarily a social activity played in accordance with the values and assumptions of the amateur ethos in social class-exclusive country club environments. Professionalism, in a number of forms however, was steadily compromising, if not eroding, the amateur ethos. An embryonic professionalism was present in the form of employed grounds-men or court attendants who were ready and able, for a fee, to offer instruction on strokes and tactics to tennis club members who wished to improve their game. A second respect in which a vestige of professionalism, as payment for playing, began to be a feature of tennis was in the form of competitors in tournaments receiving contributions towards their travel costs and in some instances prize money for winning (Smart 2005). As the number of prestigious international tournaments grew the costs of participation increased significantly and players began to be paid more generous expenses for appearing (Jefferys 2009). It was concerns over the respects in which money transactions in various forms were becoming a feature of the sport, coupled with an inability to construct an agreed operational notion of amateurism, which had precipitated the fall out between the IOC and the ILTF after 1924.

The growth of tennis as a spectator sport after the Great War, the increasingly international and competitive character of major tournaments, which meant players had to commit themselves to the sport full-time and effectively become professional in approach, and the decision of very successful high profile players to abandon the amateur game and join professional tennis tours, called into question the amateur ethos and raised the public profile of the professional game (Jefferys 2009). Early examples of players turning professional include in 1926 the iconic Suzanne Lenglen from France, the first tennis diva, and in 1930 Bill Tilden from the US, each of whom dominated women’s and men’s tennis respectively to such an extent that they became global celebrity figures (Smart 2005).¹

Fred Perry, whose approach to tennis was highly competitive and thereby deemed to be at odds with the prevailing amateur ethos, provides another example. Perry won three Wimbledon single’s titles and three US Championships, as well as the French and Australian Championships before turning professional in July 1936. On signing his contract, Perry was reported in the Philadelphia Inquirer as having ‘swapped glory for gold’, and before endorsement contracts became a prominent feature of professional sport, he began to receive attractive offers ‘from motorcar and cigarette people’ (Perry 1984, p.109). In addition, and in anticipation of the potential consumer appeal and commercial value of sports goods and brands, Perry emulated Rene Lacoste in establishing a sport shirt company, Fred Perry, with a distinctive wreath logo (Smart 2005).

Following the Second World War, amateurism endured despite a succession of leading male amateur tennis players turning professional, participating in major professional tournaments, and taking advantage of the increasing range of commercial opportunities becoming available to professional athletes. While the professional game was not always successful in attracting spectators, and the amateur game, especially the Grand Slam tournaments (Wimbledon, and the French, Australian and US National Championships), retained the loyalty and interest of the public, the sport was very much in transition. As the schedule of tournaments grew, so the costs
of playing increased and became a ‘full-time occupation’ funded by expenses, calling into question the reasons for perpetuating the differentiation between amateur and professional (Jefferys 2009, p.2255). In this period there were differing practices by tennis governing bodies in respect of amateurism and concerns were expressed that ‘shamateurism was rife in top-level tennis’ (Jefferys 2009, p.2258). The American player Pancho Gonzalez (1959, p.168), US Nationals singles champion in 1948 and 1949, cryptically commented in the course of his successful professional career: ‘In tennis the difference between an amateur and a professional player is related to a phantom table. The amateur receives money under it, the professional over it’.

From the late 1950s, there were a series of changes to the rules regulating amateur expenses, growing calls for a radical restructuring of the game, and votes at several ILTF annual general meetings – in 1960, 1962 and 1964 – to propose open tennis competitions and remove the amateur-professional distinction among players, among a number of creative suggestions to include professional players but retain amateur control. All were defeated, however, having failed to receive sufficient support from tennis governing bodies (Lake 2015). In 1967, following a series of significant subsequent developments, including a BBC-televised professional tournament held at Wimbledon over the August bank holiday, which was very well received, and the formation of a new professional event, World Championship Tennis, which attracted more leading amateur players, the LTA voted in December ‘to abolish the words amateur and professional from its domestic rules’ (Jefferys 2009, p.2265) and, notwithstanding expressions of outrage from some regions of the tennis world, effectively inaugurated the era of “Open” tennis. At an emergency ILTF meeting on 30th March in Paris the proposal for “Open” tennis was agreed by 47 member nations. Open tennis improved the quality of play, raised the number of spectators at tournaments and ‘made the sport … more attractive to television audiences’ (Brown & Soulier 2013, p.xi).

The final two phases of the globalisation of tennis to be considered are closely articulated and involve firstly, the increasingly close relationship formed between tennis, the media and sponsorship, and secondly, the development of global tennis brands and iconic globally popular celebrity tennis figures. The tennis landscape became indisputably global, as did the players who were increasingly drawn from countries around the world to compete in the various tournaments staged on the men’s and women’s tours. The developing global tennis landscape became closely articulated with, indeed was shaped and transformed by, the development of global communications, media and transnational corporate sponsorship. In turn, this contributed to the emergence of global tennis brands and iconic celebrity tennis figures, including Roger Federer and Serena Williams.

The global tennis landscape, communications media and sponsorship

The global tennis landscape went through a marked transformation in 1970 by a group of female tennis players who refused the growing prize money differential between men’s and women’s tennis in the Open era. In 1968, when Rod Laver won the men’s singles title at Wimbledon, he received £2000 while Billie Jean King, who won the women’s single’s title that year for a third time, received only £750. The differential was even greater in other tournaments, including an 8:1 differential in favour of the men’s game at the Pacific Southwest Championships in 1970, which led to the women players withdrawing from the event (Spencer 2000, p.390). Nine players, including King, alongside Rosie Casals and Nancy Richey, signed 1$ contracts with World Tennis publisher Gladys Heldman to compete in a new women’s tour, which with the sponsorship of the Philip Morris tobacco company and the inaugural Virginia Slime event in
Houston on 23 September 1970, became the Virginia Slims Series (WTA 2017). In 1971 there were 19 Virginia Slims tournaments and in 1973 Billie Jean King established the WTA which united ‘all of women’s professional tennis in one tennis tour’ (WTA 2017).

In July 1973, in an attempt to appease female players, the United Stated Tennis Association (USTA) offered equal prize money to women and men competing in the US Open, and in the September Billie Jean King responded to a ‘Battle of the Sexes’ challenge from Bobby Riggs, a former Wimbledon and US National Championships (now US Open) winner and former world number one. Throughout 1973, Riggs had repeatedly claimed the women’s game was inferior and in May he defeated Margaret Court in two sets and bragged that he could beat any of the leading women players (Spencer 2000). The contest between King and Riggs took place at the Houston Astrodome in front of the largest live audience for a tennis match. A reported 90 million people around the world watched the contest on television, making it the most watched match in tennis history. In a five-set match, King beat Riggs in three straight sets and the global media coverage of the contest brought tennis into the lives of millions of people for the first time’ (Court & McGann 1975, p.170).

Tennis tournaments involving the ATP and the WTA are now held across the globe throughout the year. Tournaments are concentrated in Europe and North America but are also held in South America, Asia, Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The growth of tennis into a truly global sport has been made possible by a number of other factors, including the technologies of jet travel and satellite television. As US former world-number-one tennis player Jim Courier (2004) observed: ‘With tournaments in every continent and with the players often moving to a different country each week, tennis is a sport dependent on jet travel’. The hectic schedule would not be possible without air travel. Courier (2004) added: ‘Flying certainly allowed our tour to become more global and it’s opened up new horizons for tennis’. However, while air travel allowed the ATP and WTA tennis schedules to become global it was developments in television technology and the advent of satellite television that created the possibility of global audiences for live sports events and, in turn, tennis tournaments taking place across the world. As Tomo Martelanc (1974, p.3, 4) commented in a UNESCO paper on the impact of satellite television, communication satellites provided the prospect of ‘world-wide diffusion’ of television programmes, made possible global audiences for the transmission of local events, and indeed created the possibility of ‘global television’.

The globalisation of sport gathered momentum with the development of television technology and the advent of the Entertainment and Sport Programming Network (ESPN), which was established in 1979 by Bill Rasmussen (Smart 2007). ESPN was particularly significant as regards innovative coverage of sport as it recognised the potential that communication satellites offered for delivering a national audience in the US for live coverage of local sports events. In turn, by revealing the potential of satellite communications for sport coverage in the US, ESPN opened up the possibility of global sports coverage, led to sport around the world becoming ‘electrically contracted’ in the words of Marshall McLuhan (1973, p.12–3; see also McLuhan & Fiore 1967, p.63); effectively the world of sport became a ‘global village’, major events, teams and players became known across the globe. Bill Rasmussen’s understanding of the potential opened up by communications satellite technology ‘eventually wrought a giant explosion of the sports world in America and an even greater one in the internationalization of sports’, including tennis (Halberstam 2001, p.126).

Developments in communications media have transformed the ways in which sports events and tournaments are organised, staged and consumed. In respect of tennis, the first radio broadcast across the UK of Centre Court matches at the Wimbledon Championships commenced on 29th June 1927, and on the 21st June 1937 the BBC Television Service began live coverage
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of Wimbledon tennis to the relatively few who possessed television sets (Escolme 2018). In 2015, 40 networks and 3,000 broadcasting personnel provided global television coverage of the Wimbledon Championships for over a billion people across 200 territories (Kirkham 2015). In the intervening period, the playing surfaces, stadiums, structure and rules of tennis have changed in good part to ensure tournaments and television schedules are not too disrupted by local weather conditions and the risk of lengthy matches. The introduction of covered venues and indoor tournaments, tie breaks to reduce the length of sets, reduced sets in some tournaments and other innovations, including, with the exception of Wimbledon, a relaxation of dress codes, has contributed to the growing appeal of tennis to global corporations, media companies and their audiences. As Woods (2011, p.56) noted, ‘Satellite television and the internet have allowed events to be seen around the world’ and that has further increased the popularity of tennis and tennis players who have ‘attracted huge sponsorship dollars’.

In 2015, the WTA released its global television digital audience data for 2014 which revealed an increase of 22.5% over 2013 in viewers of its 22 Premier tournaments, ‘cementing women’s tennis as the world’s most popular women’s sport’ (WTA 2015). The five WTA tournaments that drew the biggest cumulative television and digital audiences for women’s tennis in 2014 were as follows:

1. BNP Paribas WTA Finals Singapore presented by SC Global (Singapore) – 26,928,804
2. Miami Open (Miami) – 23,065,116
3. BNP Paribas Open (Indian Wells) – 22,975,675
4. Rogers Cup (Montréal) – 20,271,499

As Management Today reported, with ‘a growing legion of … fans worldwide’ (Gale 2016), tennis has become a profitable sport for tournaments, venues and leading players and an increasingly attractive investment proposition for sponsors. Significant increases in television viewing figures in the US, Australia and Europe for the 2017 Australian Open – a tournament that previously had struggled to attain good viewing figures – provided further evidence of the growing global appeal of tennis (Tandon 2017). The rising global interest in tennis was confirmed the following year by an ATP website report that announced satellite delivery of ‘the excitement of the ATP World Tour to a global audience’ of 973,000,000 in 195 broadcast territories, complemented by a digital subscription service delivering ‘a rich tennis streaming experience to a global audience, all year round from all ATP World Tour tournaments’ (ATP 2018a).

In 2015 Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal were ‘among the world’s top-ten highest-paid athletes’, benefiting substantially from lucrative endorsement contracts and sponsorships as well as tournament prize money (Gale 2016). Venues, tournaments, match statistics, even aces served have acquired sponsorships. In addition, fan zones have been established by sponsors as they strive to take advantage of opportunities to promote their brands. In 2010, tennis sponsorship worldwide was reported to be US$600 million rising to US$703 million in 2013 and US$801 million in 2016 (Statista 2018). As Gale (2016) observed of the appeal of tennis to sponsors, it is now ‘a global, gladiatorial, year-round game, with natural breaks perfectly suited for commercials and analysis’. The ATP tour has a number of sponsoring partners, including Emirates, FedEx, Infosys, Peugeot, Moet & Chandon, Rolex, Head and Tecnifibre. The WTA tour sponsoring partners include Porsche, Dubai Duty Free, QIYI (the largest online video service platform in China), SAP (a data processing and software company), USANA (a nutritional products and dietary supplements company), PEAK (a sportswear company), Cambridge Global Payments and Tennis Warehouse. Players have clothing, shoe and racket sponsors; both Roger Federer and
Serena Williams, for example, have clothing and shoe deals with Nike and racket endorsement deals with Wilson. A study of the clothing, shoe and racket sponsors of the leading 30 men and women players at the beginning of 2018 revealed that Nike and Adidas were the most prominent brands as far as sport apparel was concerned, with Babolat, Wilson, Head and Yonex standing out in respect of rackets.

Global sports brands, iconic tournaments and celebrity tennis figures

In addition to the players and their respective tours, tennis tournaments also attract significant levels of sponsorship, with the four grand slams regularly drawing strong support from high-profile global corporations keen to increase brand engagement and awareness. As the Chief Revenue Officer of the United States Tennis Association observed of the game’s appeal to sponsors, ‘tennis is the most successful gender-neutral sport’, including its fan base, which tends to be ‘affluent, well educated, and increasingly diverse’ (Austin 2017). Principal partners and official suppliers for the Grand Slams in 2018 are identified in Table 10.1.

2018 Grand Slams – sponsoring partners and official suppliers

The global reach of one tennis tournament sponsor, the French international banking group BNP Paribas, is mapped in Table 10.1.

A number of sports brands have been associated with tennis, and what are now iconic global tournaments, from a relatively early stage in the game’s history. For example, Slazenger, established in England in 1881, has provided the balls at Wimbledon since 1902. The ball production process itself, including various raw materials, stages of manufacture and packaging, has been estimated to now involve ‘11 different countries across 4 continents before … final assembly in the Philippines and then shipment to England’, which reveals an occluded aspect of the globalisation of tennis (Geography News Network 2013). Dunlop, another English company,

Table 10.1 2018 Grand Slams: sponsoring partners and official suppliers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grand Slam events</th>
<th>Partners and official suppliers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Open</td>
<td>• KIA, ANZ, Jacob’s Creek, Rolex, Disney, Emirates, Mastercard, Toshiba, and Wilson.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 20 other ‘Partners’ listed including</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Häagen-Dazs, LavAzza, and Yonex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Open</td>
<td>• BNP Paribas, Emirates, Peugeot, ENGIE, Lacoste, Longines, and Perrier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 13 ‘Official Suppliers’ listed including Adidas and Mastercard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wimbledon</td>
<td>• Slazenger, Robinsons, IBM, Lanson, POLO Ralph Lauren, HSBC, Evian, LavAzza, Stella Artois, Jaguar, Häagen-Dazs, and Pimm’s listed as ‘Official Suppliers’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Open</td>
<td>• American Express, Emirates, Chase, J P Morgan, CITIZEN, Deloitte, IBM, POLO Ralph Lauren, Visit Orlando, Dean &amp; Deluca, Evian, Mercedes, Spectrum and Westin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 10 ‘Official Suppliers’ listed including Jacob’s Creek, LavAzza, Heineken and Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ESPN identified as ‘Domestic Broadcast Partner’</td>
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</table>

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was formed at the turn of the twentieth century and moved into manufacture of tennis balls and rackets in the 1920s, and it is argued that more Grand Slams have been won with Dunlop rackets than any other brand (Smart 2007). Wilson, established as a sports goods company in the US in 1931, was identified in 2018 as the most popular of the 18 major racket brands on the market and reportedly used by 37% of the top 30 male and female players (Anonymous 2018). Slazenger, Dunlop and Wilson continue to occupy a significant place in the game, along with other long-established brands such as Babolat (established in 1875 in France), Head (1915 US) and Yonex (1946 Japan). A measure of the growing global appeal of tennis since the advent of the Open era is the increasing number of tennis clothing and racket brands that have emerged around the world, including Prince (1970 US), Pacific (1972 New Zealand and Germany), ProKennex (1978 Taiwan), Tecnifibre (1979 France), ANTA (1994 China), Under Armour (1996 US), PowerAngle (2000 US) and Solinco (2010 US).

With the growing commercialisation of tennis, high-profile players have become global brands. In some respects, John McEnroe, a highly controversial figure whose playing prowess and on-court (mis)conduct attracted global media attention, might be regarded as the first tennis player, following his signing with Nike in 1978, to acquire something like a global brand status (Smart 2016). Nike produced a signature McEnroe tennis clothing and footwear collection with a distinctive logo, a red swoosh and ‘Mc’ emblem, championing ‘the athlete’s divergence from conventional tennis attire’ and embodying his rebellious attitude (Nike News 2015). Global advertising campaigns created by Nike traded on McEnroe’s tennis brilliance and the public’s awareness of his frequently irreverent conduct by presenting images of footwear with captions

![Figure 10.1](https://group.bnpparibas/en/group/bnp-paribas-tennis-game-loyalty)

Alongside these developments for male players, tennis is the only sport in which a number of women have had the opportunity to earn substantial prize money and acquire lucrative endorsement contracts. As the Forbes (2015) ranking of the highest-paid female athletes in the world revealed, seven of the top ten played tennis and two of those, Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova, were the only women to make Forbes’ overall top-100 highest paid athletes list. Incidentally, both received less than half the income of Roger Federer who was the highest paid male tennis player (Thomasson 2015; see also Rothenberg 2016), which reveals that while tennis might be regarded as the most successful sport as far as reduction of gender differences is concerned, there remains a disparity in endorsement income between the top male and female players. Serena Williams has more Grand Slam titles than Federer but in 2015 her endorsement deals were $13 million in total compared to Federer’s $58 million. The fact that Sharapova, a considerably less successful player, secured endorsement contracts worth $23 million in 2015 led one critic to remark that female athletes are marketable ‘only insofar as they look a certain way’ (Bain 2015).

Concluding remarks: on the cosmopolitan character of tennis

Whether professional tennis has become the world game, as Jack Kramer anticipated it would, is questionable (Kramer & Deford 1979, p.305), but it is certainly a very popular world game, a cosmopolitan game played on every continent for 11 months of the year, and popular with fans, media and corporate sponsors. The major tennis tournaments provide global exposure for their corporate brand partners and sponsors. A survey of the most globally active corporate tennis sponsors in 2016 revealed Emirates to be the most prominent, followed by FedEx and Peugeot, with BNP Paribas, Wilson, Head, Coca-Cola and Rolex also being significant contributors to tournament events. In respect of industry sectors engaged in global tennis sponsorship financial services, airlines and the auto industry were the most prominent (ESP 2018). In 2018, players in the top 100 on the ATP tour were drawn from thirty-nine countries (ATP 2018b) and the top 100 on the WTA tour from 33 countries (WTA 2018). As Wertheim and Bourkoff (2017) note of the growth in the game’s global diversity, between 1974 and 1999, 16 of the end-of-year number one men’s tennis players were from the US, but by 2017 there was only one in the top ten, and at the ATP Tour’s World Tour Final in London that year ‘the eight players in the field hailed from eight different countries’. Comparable signs of diversity are evident in the women’s game with the four Grand Slam and WTA Finals winners in 2017 coming from the US, Latvia, Spain, the US and Poland respectively.

Tennis is now a thoroughly cosmopolitan sport, in good part because of the respects in which it has been able to successfully court sponsorship by staging not only popular and well attended tournaments around the world but also by providing broadcasting, streaming and social media platforms, and since 2003 a Tennis Channel (‘Where Champions Live’), for commercial corporations to promote their brands and market their products globally to tennis fans and consumers. Tennis is a sport that crosses borders, transcends differences of age, gender, ethnicity and to a lesser extent class. It is now a global product, a part of the entertainment industry, an exemplification of the respects in which with the globalisation of capitalism’s cultural industries ‘creations of individual nations become common property’ (Marx & Engels 1968, p.84), and which in the specific case of tennis has led to it becoming a world game, a game closely articulated with global capital.
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Notes

1 Lenglen received a fee of approximately $100,000 (equivalent to around $1.3 million in 2017) to play a series of matches against another former amateur Mary Browne in the US and Canada. Lenglen had defeated Browne in the 1926 French Championships. They were joined on Pyle’s professional tennis tour by Paul Foret, Vincent Richards, Harvey Snodgrass and Howard Kinsey.

2 The word ‘lawn’ was removed from the title of International Lawn Tennis Federation in 1977.

3 A measure of the historic significance, global reach, and world-wide interest in the King-Riggs match is provided by the subsequent release of the Golden Globe-nominated film Battle of the Sexes in 2017.

4 Further rule changes were tested in a new tournament in 2017, the Next Gen ATP Finals held in Milan, for the eight highest ranked players under 21 years of age. The changes aimed to ‘squeeze matches into a two-hour format that were faster-paced and would attract fans between 25 and 40’ and produce matches that would be ‘much more attractive to TV stations that are wary about signing up to air matches that could last much longer than their allotted times’ (Reynolds 2017).


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