

GAME, SET & MATCH

As Germany's Angelique Kerber and Serbia's Novak Djokovic enjoy being 2018 Wimbledon champions, we flick through the history of the oldest tennis tournament in the world.

The oldest, and arguably the most famous tennis tournament in the world, Wimbledon Tennis Championships began life as a way to raise cash to repair a pony-drawn lawn roller – for croquet lawns.

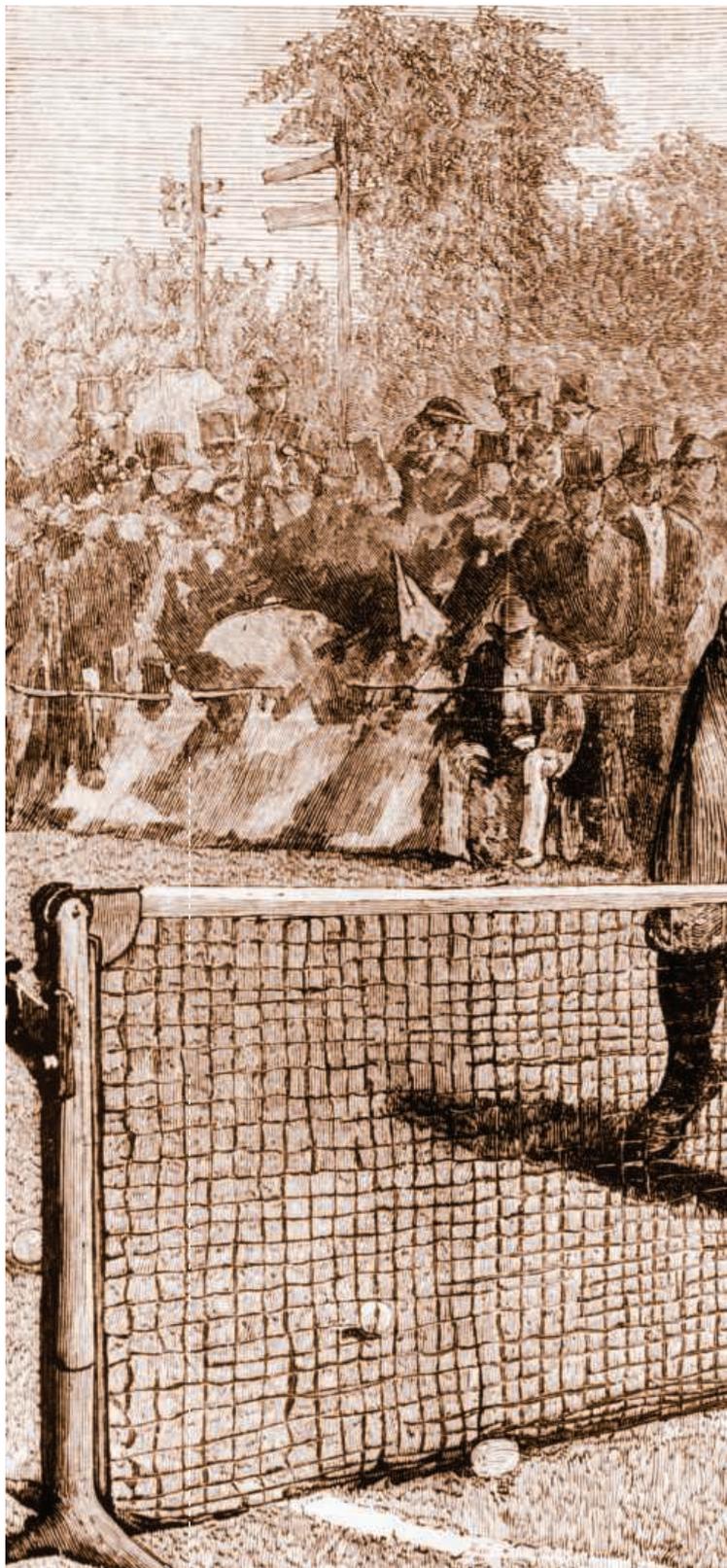
The All England Croquet Club was formed in Wimbledon, southwest London, in 1868, at a time when croquet was popular. Nine years later and with the popularity of tennis on the rise, the club changed its name to the All England Croquet and Lawn Tennis Club and announced it would hold a tennis championship, largely in order to raise money for “a pony-drawn roller for its croquet lawns”.

The first Wimbledon Championship started on July 9, 1877. Gentleman's singles only, 22 players took part and around 200 spectators paid one shilling each to watch the final, which was won by Spencer Gore.

Since then, the championships – most commonly simply referred to as Wimbledon – have carved their way into the annals of sporting history and are very much considered a great British sporting tradition.

This issue, *Flashes* takes a walk through Wimbledon's history and some fascinating facts...

Right: William Renshaw and H F Lawford playing for the men's singles title at Wimbledon in 1881, which Renshaw won







Women began playing at Wimbledon in 1884, seven years after the men's championship was introduced. The winner of the first ladies event, from a field of 13 entrants, was Maud Watson, the 19-year-old daughter of the vicar of Berkwell, a parish near Coventry in Warwickshire, England. She defeated her elder sister Lilian. Back then, women played in full-length skirts, petticoats and corsets – the whalebones of which often drew blood during matches.

British twins Ernest and William Renshaw dominated Wimbledon's early years. During the 'Renshaw Rush', the brothers combined to win five doubles titles in the 1880s. William, aided by the then automatic berth in the final, won a record six consecutive titles between 1881 and 1886. On three occasions, he defeated his brother to lift the Wimbledon title.



The championships were put on hold following the outbreak of World War II, when the All England Club was used to house civil defence and military personnel. On October 11, 1940, German bombs struck a corner of the Centre Court stands and destroyed 1200 seats. When Wimbledon resumed in 1946, the seats remained out of commission amid postwar rationing, and the grounds were not fully repaired until 1949.



In 1926 the Duke of York – the future King George VI – became the first member of the British royal family to play at Wimbledon. He played men's doubles with Sir Louis Greig against first round opponents Arthur Gore and Herbert Roper Barrett. The Duke and Greig were defeated in three straight sets.



Tennis rackets have changed over the years. Made originally from wood and then aluminium, the tennis racket has also been made from fiberglass, steel and now mostly graphite.



Althea Gibson became the first African-American player invited to Wimbledon in 1951, and was the first black player to win the singles title, in 1957.

The grass on the Wimbledon courts is an exact science. The 100% rye grass measures 8mm for the championships.



With 39,000 spectators in the Wimbledon grounds at any one point during the tournament these days, it's the largest single annual catering operation in Europe, requiring 3000 catering staff. Of course, Wimbledon is synonymous with strawberries and cream and over 166,000 portions are consumed over Wimbledon's two-week period. The strawberries are picked in Kent at 4am each morning, collected from the packing plant at 9am and delivered to Wimbledon by 11am to ensure the utmost freshness.

Wimbledon is one of the four Grand Slam tournaments, along with the US Open, the Australian Open and the French Open. It is the only major tournament still played on grass.



The fastest serves of all time belong to two players from the USA. Taylor Dent hit a 148mph serve in 2010, and Venus Williams holds the ladies record, serving at 129mph in 2008.



In 1981 a disputed line call gave rise to the now-famous John McEnroe quote: "You cannot be serious."

Umpires call for "new balls, please" after every nine games. In fact, in one of the longest partnerships in sporting goods history, Slazenger has supplied the tennis balls to the Championships since 1902, with around 53,000 balls used during the duration of the tournament. Yellow balls, more easily captured by television cameras, were first permitted at Wimbledon in 1986.



American player John Isner and Frenchman Nicolas Mahut hold the record for the longest match at Wimbledon. The pair slugged it out in a first round match in the 2010 men's singles for a whopping 11 hours, 5 minutes, over three days.

The overall prize pot for this year's Wimbledon was a record £34 million (\$44.6 million), with the women's and men's champions each lifting a cash prize of £2.25 million.



Although a British institution, Brit wins have been somewhat sporadic over the decades. No British man had won the singles event at Wimbledon between Fred Perry in 1936 and Andy Murray in 2013. Murray went on to reclaim the title in 2016. No British woman has won the singles event since Virginia Wade in 1977.

In this year's tournament, Angelique Kerber won her third Grand Slam singles title, defeating Serena Williams, while Novak Djokovic earned his first Grand Slam title in more than two years, and the 13th in his career, by beating Kevin Anderson to win his fourth Wimbledon championship. "There's no better place to make a comeback," said Djokovic of Wimbledon. "This is a sacred place for tennis."

