



Tennis: development, globalisation, and sociology in the international context

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ABSTRACT

Tennis today is a global sport, which provides a media platform for media and sports event companies to raise the profile of their brands and enhance the market appeal of their consumer goods and services, taking advantage of the high profile and iconic cultural status of relevant players that with the development of a consumer society has turned tennis players into "consumer idols". Undoubtedly, tennis has acquired a globalist character by successfully exploiting the world market and becoming an international game, so it constantly introduces innovations and new resources, to satisfy the needs and expectations of the players, be they professional sportsmen, amateurs, or commercial companies. This has led to the current globalisation, which allows access to techniques, competitions, or products anywhere in the world under similar conditions. The origins and historical trajectory of the development of this global sport are complex and show the transformation from a recreational game to a universally practised, commercialised, and globalised sport, which requires means of innovation in services, policies, and administrative aspects so that the increase in the number of participants in this sport and the economy it generates continues to grow. Another effect of globalisation has been the inversion of the social pyramid of practitioners, which went from royalty, nobility, and aristocracy in the 19th century, to a sport with practically no class distinction, inclusive and with gender equality¹.

Key words: tennis, globalisation, socialisation, tournaments.

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INTRODUCTION

The beginning of modern tennis, as we know it today, emerged in the 19th century in England. This country spearheaded the development and promoted the white sport of the racket worldwide, including it in the process of globalisation². This historical origin is not peacefully accepted by all historians and is still the subject of controversy.

In this development, we do not consider the remote past of ball games: from archaeological remains found in the tomb of the pharaoh Khnoum Hotep 2500 BC; in Rome, 1st century AD, with the game ludus pilae cum palma; in France, (city of Picardie), 12th century, where it is believed that the word "tenez" was coined, which derived in Tennis. In Italy, where the poet Francisco Berni referred to Tennis in 1505; in England, where the game of Royal Tennis was born, sponsored by King Henry VIII.

If the country where tennis originated is in question, so is the question of who the inventor of the sport in the modern era was. In 1997, Walter Wingfield took the glory of being considered the inventor of modern tennis, the year in which he was recognised - at the International Tennis Hall of Fame³ - as the creator of modern tennis and its rules.

Wingfield presented a game he called Sphairistiké⁴, in 1873⁵, at the Nantchwyd Christmas Festival, claiming to have invented a new net for the ancient game of tennis. In 1874,



on 23 February, Walter Wingfield registered, according to the patent, what he called "A new and improvised portable court for playing the ancient game of tennis". The lot consisted of a wooden box containing: four rackets, a net with stakes, a set of strips for marking out the ground, vulcanised rubber balls made in Germany, and instruments for measuring and marking out a court.

The game was to be played on a grass surface, the court was shaped like an hourglass, narrower at the net and wider at the ends, with a high uneven net and marked lines at the sides. Serving had to be from a diamond-shaped box at one

end only, and when serving, the ball had to bounce beyond the service line rather than in front of it. Played on grass in its early days, it was played on croquet lawns or in the gardens of the English aristocracy, as evidenced by the writings of Lord Lansdowne, in 1869, who reports that Major Wingfield gave him a demonstration of the game on the grounds of his house in Berkeley Square.

Royal Tennis", at that time, continued to be played at the stately Lord's Cricket Ground (England), where the game had started in 1838. Thus, we can point to a practice of "Royal Tennis" - played only by royalty and the upper social strata - concentrated in a heterogeneous group belonging to the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.

The social rules of tennis entailed the use of good manners, self-control, moderation of actions, and a strict dress code for men and women⁶. The game quickly became a closed circle for certain socio-economic classes, in which both players and spectators were upper class, where capital and power were concentrated. The sport spread through the main social networks and through the mercantile companies that were established throughout the length and breadth of our planet.

Walter Wingfield's story as the inventor of modern tennis is the most widely publicised, however, we have evidence⁷, that some fifteen years before his patent⁸, lawn tennis was already being played by the British Thomas Henry Gem⁹ and Juan Bautista Augurio Perera (Spanish naturalised English citizen)¹⁰. Both were fans of the ball sport called "Racket". The first match was held in the garden of Perera's house in Edgbaston, Warwickshire (England)¹¹, in 1859, and they called it "Juego de Pelota"¹². The dimensions of the court were virtually identical to those used today, although the height of the net was different¹³. In 1872, after moving to Leamington, Gem and Perera, together with local doctors Frederic Haynes and Arthur Tompkins, founded the world's first lawn tennis club in the grounds of the Manor House Hotel¹⁴.

At Perera's former home in Edgbaston¹⁵, a blue plaque commemorating the invention of tennis reads: "In 1865 the game of lawn tennis was created and played here by Major T.H. Gem, lawyer and sportsman, and J.B.A. Perera, merchant".

The epicentre of modern tennis can therefore be found in England, as an evolution of various ball games developed in different parts of the world (France, India, etc.). Tennis evolved from its original status as a "royal and noble" activity, towards a broad aristocracy (military, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, etc.) and liberals belonging to a social elite. At that time, tennis had not yet entered its globalisation phase.

TENNIS AND SOCIALISATION: THE CHANGE FROM A GAME TO A SPORT IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Tennis is one of the sports that most influences the mechanisms of socialisation nowadays, and that is why its analysis from the social sciences is justified, due to its scope and effects beyond its economic character as a spectacle, playful and competitive.

As a cultural fact and a clear exponent of globalisation, tennis has been analysed by different scientific branches, making it a prototype of scientific multidisciplinary in sport in the international context from different studies and all regions of the world.

The socialisation of tennis is studied through a specialised branch that delves into the analysis and understanding of the

social interactions that take place in the context of this sport, through the Sociology of Sport¹⁶, which analyses sporting activities or events about broad aspects of society. Through a critical analysis, this branch of sociology seeks to understand how sport is not only a physical expression but a social microcosm that reflects and affects multiple layers of society and globally affects all continents of our planet.

Pierre Bourdieu was one of the first sociologists to undertake the scientific study of the socialisation of sport. He established a premise: "We must ask ourselves whether sport in the modern sense implies a rupture with the 'ancestors' of the games that we consider sports today"¹⁷. He concluded that we cannot make a sociological study of sport based on the anachronism that seeks analogies between those games of pre-capitalist European or extra-European societies and sports in the strict sense in the contemporary era, since we must start from the historical moment when the "manufacture of sporting products" was created, in relation to the creation of rules, social identity of players, spectators and athletes' prizes, which meant the change from a game to a sport in the strict sense¹⁸.

In other words, and within the current context in which we find ourselves¹⁹, the dynamics of tennis socialisation are related to the global market, power relations, mass communication, and world vision, due to its ability to attract people, its persuasiveness, and its ability to activate emotions. Therefore, in addition to being a sport, it is an international social phenomenon.

The basic economic model of the world is that of a society driven by the patterns of supply and demand. This means that we are both producers and consumers. Since pre-capitalist societies, tennis has become a mass phenomenon and globalised business.

As we have stated in the Introduction section of this research, Major Wingfield gave tennis a new social and economic vision when he filed with the patent office his invention - which was a modification of a Greek ball game called Sphairistiké²⁰ - consisting of a box which was sold for five guineas and which contained in addition to the above-mentioned elements a rule book²¹ which he exported to numerous countries, among others: USA, Canada, India, China, and Russia.

The great international evolution of tennis came from the split between amateurs and professionals and the fact that the multinationals perceived that there was business in tennis, both in materials and entertainment. In 1926, the sports promoter Charles C. Pyle and Charles Cash organised a professional tennis circuit selected from among American and French amateur players. He signed various contracts with the most iconic players of the time: Suzanne Lenglen, M.K. Brown, Big Tilden, Richards, Feret, etc. A year later, in 1927, the U.S. Pro Tennis Championships were created, called the U.S. Pro Tennis Championships²².

In 1980, technological changes in sports betting and materials emerged as a result of the socialisation of sport as it spread to social classes with less purchasing power than the bourgeoisie, as a form of entertainment among friends or communities, and grew to become a worldwide million-dollar industry.

A segment of tennis development has become an industry, and its followers are consumers. Although many sociological reports indicate that part of society disapproves of the commercialised nature of sport, its commercial vision

continues to grow since the first channel in the United States to broadcast exclusively sports content 24 hours a day, the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN), was launched in 1979. This is how a mass media network has grown around the sports phenomenon, which has reached our days in an overwhelming way. A good example is the incursion of Saudi Arabia²³ and its economic resources invested in exhibitions such as the one that brought together the two Spanish stars Carlos Alcaraz and Rafael Nadal, in the show held between them at the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas on 3 March 2024, christened "The Netflix Slam". Nowadays, the media are companies and sport is just another business.

The tendency of elitist and media sport to establish itself as the global image of sport is unstoppable. Unfortunately, this sports subsystem reveals counter-values such as hyper-competitiveness, narcissism, triviality, fame, and luxury. Elite sportsmen and women conquer their public through luxury, an alliance in which values and aesthetics come together to go from selling products to extolling new "idols", prototypes for society in the reproduction of values and social trends. Nowadays, sportsmen and women are the lure for high-end fashion, a concept baptised as "athleisure", which has little to do with the practice of sport, strictly speaking²⁴.

One example is the Richard Mille watch that Rafael Nadal has been wearing since 2020 at the Australian Open, which is valued at 997,000 euros. The ex-boxer Floyd Mayweather, nicknamed "Money", owns an exclusive million-dollar collection of watches, including one created by Jacob & Co, adorned with 313 diamonds and a 1.21-carat ruby, worth 15 million euros.

In addition to economic motivation, other variables can shape and even directly affect the future destiny of tennis, such as the biological, social, and economic aspects.

However, this current predominant vision of sport as a spectacle associated with tennis players as multimillionaire icons is one of the dangers of achieving the goal of developing high-level sportsmen and women, since their goal - in young people in training - orients their training to the ego and not to the task, which originates in sportsmen and women counter-values of sportsmanship, failure and abandonment, due to causes such as narcissism, early hypercompetitiveness, banality, etc.²⁵

This mercantilist reality is hidden through sports marketing whose strategy is to manipulate the emotions and feelings generated by sport to promote and sell products and services²⁶. For the links to last, an emotional relationship is created between the user and the brand (or sports club or athlete) so that they feel identified and proud of it, in this way, we follow the player and the brand. For example, Alcaraz pocketed between August 2022 and August 2023 the amount of 31.4 million euros, between ATP circuit prizes and advertising brand contracts, prioritising long contracts with brands related to tennis.

However, sport also brings countries closer together, and not everything in today's globalised world is about sporting commerce. In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

which contains a set of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals. Paragraph 37 of the Agenda states that:

We recognise that sport increasingly contributes to the realisation of development and peace by promoting tolerance and respect and that it also supports the empowerment of women and youth, individuals and communities, as well as health, education, and social inclusion goals.

Scope of the globalisation of tennis

Tennis is a global sport played on every continent except Antarctica²⁷. It is a sport that millions of players and fans around the world are passionate about and is constantly growing, in terms of the number of players, events, and tournaments²⁸.

The ITF released the Global Tennis Report 2021, which assesses the impact of the pandemic on tennis participation and other measurable metrics and reveals that tennis participation continues to increase globally, surpassing the 87 million player mark²⁹.

According to the United States Tennis Association's (USTA) U.S. Tennis Participation Report 2024³⁰, the percentage of the U.S. population playing tennis increased from 5.8% to 7.7% from 2019 to 2023. The largest increase in US tennis participation occurred in 2020 (from an increase of 5.8% in 2019 to 7.1% in 2020; in 2021, an increase of 7.4%; and in 2022, an increase of 7.7%).

In tennis, there is a circuit of competitions all over the world divided into different categories, as can be seen in the following charts organised by the ATP and ITF³¹.

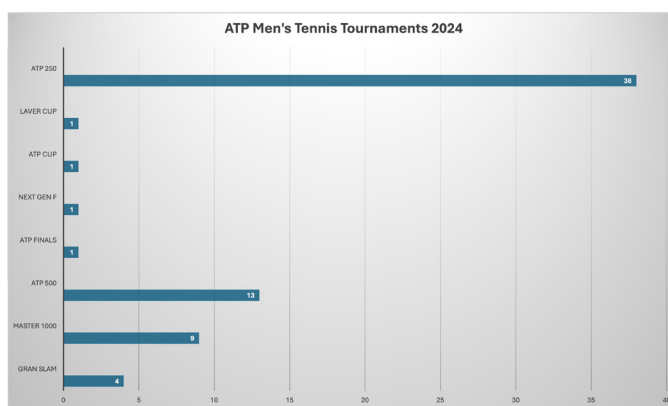


Figure 1. Men's Professional Tennis Tournaments 2024 ©José María Illán Fernández (2024)

These tournaments attract a large number of young people to tennis, who want to reach the highest competitive level. In addition, tennis is a recreational sport enjoyed by people of all sexes and ages.

One of the most important factors in this evolution is the multiplication of sponsors and, above all, the importance of their contributions over and above the resources of the tennis player's country of origin and the number of players or the number of federation licenses.

The increase in the number of tournaments leads to more competition and therefore more effort from the tournaments to achieve profitability.



Figure 2. Increase ITF Tournaments from 2022 to 2024 ©José María Illán Fernández (2024)³².

CONCLUSIONS

It should be internationally recognised by the relevant bodies that Thomas Henry Gem and Juan Bautista Augurio Perera, along with Walter Wingfield, should be listed as inventors of modern tennis and that they played an essential role in the international spread of the sport.

Tennis in the modern sense is a break with the "ancestors" of the games we now consider its antecedents. Today, tennis at the international level has deviated from its aristocratic beginnings. Thus, the perception of tennis has changed its status from its origins in royalty and aristocracy to a sport available to all levels of society.

The great international evolution of tennis came from the split between amateurs and professionals and the fact that the multinationals realised that there was business in tennis.

The dynamics of tennis socialisation are related to the global market, power relations, and mass communication. In addition to economic motivation, other variables can shape and even directly affect the future destiny of the tennis player, such as biological, psychological, and social aspects.

The tendency continues to grow - in international tournaments - to be an elitist and mediatic individual player sport, as are other individual sports. This belief permeates today's society and is a global idea among fans and followers.

In the goal/ego orientation, the tennis player defines success or failure with the fact of winning and losing, and in the second, task orientation, both success and failure are defined by the player in personal terms, and in terms of individual improvement. This phenomenon is currently reproduced in all countries where tennis is practised.

The increase in the number of tournaments leads to more competition and therefore more effort from the tournaments to achieve profitability. Tennis also brings countries closer - not everything in today's globalised world is about sporting commerce.

In 2024, the global outlook for tennis continues to evolve, with new trends changing how fans compete and enjoy their favourite sports, as commercial companies seek to meet new demands. It is not only a sport, but also a great supermarket of

leisure and entertainment, combining health for the players and excitement for the spectators. In both cases, for millions of people, a process that continues to grow steadily.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FINANCING

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest and has received no funding to carry out the research.

¹In the 23rd edition of the academic dictionary (2014), a new meaning of gender has been added: "group to which human beings of each sex belong, understood from a socio-cultural rather than exclusively biological point of view".

²The sport of tennis is part of the globalisation process through a global network of interdependence between athletes and fans from different countries. International sports competitions are made up of the best tennis players from different continents. These competitions are financed by international entities and multinational companies that get involved in the sports structure in a mediatic way, trying to impose the consumption of this product called tennis.

³The purpose of the Hall of Fame is to gather and perpetuate the memory of tennis players who have influenced the sport, as well as to preserve and promote the history of tennis. The International Tennis Hall of Fame is based at the Casino in Newport (Rhode Island), USA. The International Tennis Hall of Fame was recognised by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) in 1986.

⁴From the Greek, "the art of playing with a ball".

⁵Wingfield played the sport in 1863 in India, exported from Bermuda. Wingfield remodelled the dimensions of the court of a Greek ball game.

⁶For the upper-class British who were being trained to be leaders in England in the 19th century, tennis was a form of training and education. From this derived the belief that the sport was essentially pure and good, and that whoever participated shared in that purity and goodness. This set of thoughts spread to North America and across Europe and globalised to the rest of the world. The so-called great sports myth, which considers that society in general has systematically denied any negative aspects of sport, a term coined by Jay Coakley, professor emeritus at the University of Colorado (USA). According to his criteria, what provokes an interest in sociological knowledge within sport is: the marked interest shown by the organisers of sport in the range of problems it generated; the growing popularity of sport, especially through spectacle; the political and economic interest that sport was beginning to arouse through sport.

⁷On 8 December 1874, Wingfield wrote a letter to Harry Gem, commenting that he had been experimenting with his version of lawn tennis for a year and a half.

⁸Research by Fernando Arrechea, Kirsty Hooper. Gem, in a letter to the weekly magazine "The Field", stated that the invention of tennis was the exclusive merit of his friend Perera.

⁹Clerk to the Birmingham Magistrates.

¹⁰In 1856 he applied for English nationality, stating in his application that: "The Memorial of Juan Bautista Augurio Perera... humbly sheweth... That your memorialist is a natural born Borne subject of the Kingdom of Spain... That he is of the age of thirty-four years. That he has resided in England for thirty years, viz. in London until the year 1836 and at Birmingham since that time". The act of naturalisation of Juan Bautista Augurio Perera, preserved in the National Archives of the United Kingdom, clearly states that "he is a native of the Kingdom of Spain", in this document signed on 25 February 1856. He married the Irishwoman Charlott Louisa O'Donnell on 1 June 1847 at St. Peter's Church in Lancaster.

¹¹Ampton Road, Edgbaston.

¹²It was initially called "Lawn Pelota" and "Lawn Racket" and finally christened "Lawn Tennis".

¹³A net four feet high (1.2 metres) and a rectangular playing field of 30x12 yards (approximately 11x27.5 metres).

¹⁴The club closed a few months later and the Edgbaston Archery and Lawn Tennis Society, the oldest lawn tennis club in the world, was established.

¹⁵His company was based at 28 Great Charles Street, Birmingham.

¹⁶The sociology of sport was first mentioned under this name in 1921 in a work entitled *Sociology of Sport* (Sociology of Sport, Heinz Risse, 1921), Vastorf, Merlin Verlag, 1984. Between 1964 and 1972, sociologists began to take an interest in sport, especially because of the obvious political and economic usefulness of sport (see *Sociology of Sport*, p. 10).

¹⁷Bourdieu, Pierre; Wacquan T, Loïc (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

¹⁸For Bourdieu, a person's participation in sport, in addition to being a leisure activity, is related to his or her resources and ability to access those resources, and takes a variety of economic, social and cultural forms.

¹⁹Year 2024.

²⁰Unsuccessful name.

²¹According to the price list published in 1874 by "Messrs. French & Co." London, consisted of: a wooden box priced at £6; a larger box, with press, extra rackets (bats) and balls for "several months" (210 shillings); men's rackets ("Full-sized Sphairistikè Bats") at £1 each; smaller women's rackets at 15 shillings; Indian rubber-soled tennis shoes at 18 shillings; and a dozen balls at 5 shillings.

²²The first edition was held at Ntlemek Courts in Brooklyn, on grass from 23-25 September 1927.

²³The ATP has reached an agreement with Saudi Arabia, through the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund (PIF), in 2024 to form a partnership to "accelerate the growth of world tennis for players, fans, tournament organisers and stakeholders in all aspects of the sport.

²⁴Athleisure is the mixing of sportswear with casual items to create an outfit outside the sporting arena.

²⁵Goal/ego/task orientations are the most relevant in sport contexts. In the goal/ego orientation the person defines success or failure in terms of winning and losing, and in the task orientation, both success and failure are defined in terms of personal and individual improvement.

²⁶The Wilson tennis racquet class action case is *Andelson v. Wilson Sporting Goods Company*, Case No. 13-cv-01681, U.S. District Court, Central District Court of California.

²⁷This is natural given the almost impossible conditions due to the wind and cold, and there are no permanent residents.

²⁸The ITF World Tennis Masters Tour 2023 was the record year for tournaments, rising to 552 tournaments in 68 countries compared to 508 in 61 countries in 2022. In total, 42,300 players, spread across Europe, Africa, North America, South America, Central America, Oceania and Asia.

²⁹The ITF Global Tennis Report was published by the ITF in October 2019 (<https://www.itf-academy.com/?view=itfview&academy=103&itemid=1473>). A new, updated edition was released in August 2021 (<https://www.itf-academy.com/?view=itfview&academy=103&itemid=1474>).

³⁰<https://www.usta.com/content/dam/usta/2024-pdfs/national-tennis-participation-report.pdf>.

³¹Data obtained from the official ATP website <https://www.atptour.com/en/tournaments>. Accessed 11 April 2024, 3, 51 hours.

³²Data obtained from the official ITF website <https://www.itftennis.com>. Accessed 11 April 2024, 17.50.

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