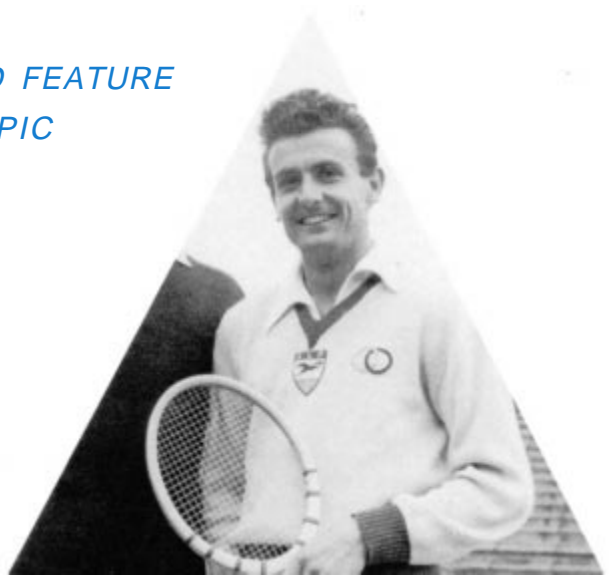


# Independent views

## WHY TENNIS SHOULD FEATURE AGAIN ON THE OLYMPIC PROGRAMME

by *Philippe Chatrier*,  
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Tennis ceased to be included in the Olympic programme after the Games in 1924. A quarrel, now long forgotten, had broken out at that time between the IOC and the International Lawn Tennis Federation. The latter, whether wrongly or rightly, had accused the former of inefficiency in its organisation of the tournament that had been held in Paris and announced its intention of handling matters itself in the future. The IOC for its part, considered it inconceivable that Wimbledon, the Roland Garros and other championships should not be suspended in Olympic years in order not to steal the limelight from the Olympic tournament. On the other hand, those in charge of Wimbledon did not look with a favourable eye on the possibility of competition from as glorious a title as "Olympic champion". The discussion became bitter, harsh words were spoken and, finally, doors were slammed : tennis was no longer an Olympic sport and has never become one since.

It must be admitted that those running the International Federation made no great efforts to have tennis reintegrated within the Olympic programme. The Anglo-Saxon influence was preponderant among them and the possibility of another tournament in

competition with their own supreme tournament did not exactly appeal to them. Even though other championships are held in the United States, France and Australia, Wimbledon nevertheless remains "the championships".

And yet, if any sport deserves its place in Olympism, it is tennis. In the first place it is universal : it is played in all countries of the world, wherever sport is possible. It is played in all latitudes, in all climates, on surfaces that can vary from grass to cement, by way of hard courts, wood and artificial materials but with the same rules, the same severity, under the supervision of national federations accepting the authority of an International Federation.

Secondly, it is gradually becoming a sport for the masses. It is undergoing a tremendous development and over a hundred million players of both sexes play it for enjoyment, relaxation and health.

Finally, tennis is a sport that can last a lifetime. Anyone who has held a racket as a child is unlikely to stop playing before a very advanced old age. Well-known examples abound : from the late King of Sweden to the very much alive former French champion Jean Borotra. It is a game that can be

played at every stage of one's life, but according to one's tastes, one's physical ability and one's leisure possibilities. It is in fact ideal for the top level athlete who is prepared to submit to the irksome slavery of daily training, the businessman who plays two hours a week for his health's sake, the enthusiast who, without being especially good, nevertheless devotes his holidays to small tournaments, or the grandfather who has such fun playing with his granddaughter on Sunday mornings. Although it is an individual sport, it is also a team sport and it is amazing to see the strength of the team spirit that develops in a small club when its team is playing that of another town.

What is it then that prevents tennis from being not only accepted but sought after by Olympism ?

The argument, and the only one to our knowledge, is that it is a professional sport. The players play for prizes, therefore for money, which is the negation of the Olympic spirit and the famous oath.

Admittedly tournaments—those of any importance at least—offer cash prizes. The Federation has the merit of being perfectly frank and open about this and has refused to tolerate the hypocrisy of under-the-table payments. Its conscience is clear, which is not perhaps the case with all federations.

This being so, it must be stated that it is not a federation of professionals but a federation that numbers a few professionals among its members, which is quite a different matter. What is the proportion in fact ? Fewer than one thousand players out of one hundred million.

As far as I know, boxing, football and cycling are also sports that have openly recognised the existence of professionals in their midst. Nevertheless they have their place under the Olympic flag, the oath is sworn in their name, they take part in the big world festival of sport. Why should the rule be different for tennis ?

I sincerely believe that this banning of one of the leading sports in the world cannot go on much longer and I look forward with confidence to millions of amateur tennis players of both sexes joining their fellow-athletes of other sports during the 1984 Games.

P. C.

