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# International Tennis Hall of Fame

*By Nancy E. Spencer*  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

International Tennis Hall of Fame (194 Bellevue Avenue, Newport, Rhode Island 02840). Archivist: Mark S. Young II, tel. 401-849-3990. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., year-round.

As do most sports hall of fame museum visitors, I went to the International Tennis Hall of Fame as an avid fan. Tennis has been an integral component of my life. I came to the sport during the 1960s, just as the tennis establishment (finally) embraced open professionalism, and thereafter, became a teaching pro at the advent of the recent tennis boom. For me, journeying to the Tennis Hall of Fame was like coming home and tracing an imaginary family tree of long-lost relatives.

Not quite knowing what to expect one cold and windy January day, I encountered a snow-covered Heffeman court surrounded by an array of stately Victorian buildings. Adjacent to this revered court stood a statue of James Van Alen, pioneer of changes in the game's scoring system—most notably, the tie-breaker and the Van Alen Simplified Scoring System (VASSS). To the right of the center court are the dark green doors and white striped awning of the museum that is housed in the original, grand Newport Casino.

In 1880, the casino was commissioned by the *New York Herald* publisher James Gordon Bennett. That year, Bennett's membership privileges were revoked by the Newport Reading Room after he dared a friend to ride a horse into the stately clubhouse. In retaliation for the rebuff, Bennett contracted the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White to build the Newport Casino, now the home of the world's largest collection of tennis memorabilia.

In 1881, the forerunner to what is now the U.S. Open was held at the Newport Casino. Restricted to males, the early championships were dominated by Harvard men. As the annual championship grew in popularity, the Newport complex was unable to facilitate the growing crowds, and was moved to Forest Hills in 1915 and subsequently to its current site at Flushing Meadows. Nevertheless, Newport's claim as the "founding" location of modern tennis (despite the unresolved historical

controversy) retained its claim as the preferred site for the game's hall of fame. In 1987, following years of restoration, the site was named a national historical landmark.

The International Tennis Hall of Fame is the only such museum in the U.S. housed in a facility that actively hosts the sport it honors. It continues to undergo improvements on the current complex, which includes a museum, library, theater, and more than a dozen public grass courts. Contained within the historical archives is one of the largest collections of vintage tennis photographs and film footage (including rare footage of fragile film that has been converted into video and features tennis stars of the past). In an attempt to capture the interactive wave of the future, there is also a court on which observers can experience the "feel" of playing against current players such as the Jensen Brothers.

The entrance to the Tennis Museum is like a shrine, with a stained-glass window on one side, featuring a woman wearing a toga and carrying an old-style racquet. A trophy case is adjacent to the spiral staircase leading upstairs to the Enshrinement Room. Five adjacent cases contain trophies from Wimbledon and other major championships, many of which were donated by inductee Hazel Hotchkiss Wightman, the donor of the famous Wightman Cup trophy. At the top of the staircase, on either side of the entry to the Enshrinement Room, are huge photographs of Pete Sampras and Steffi Graf, the number-one ranked male and female players in the world.

Visitors to the Enshrinement Room encounter pillars containing histories of players inducted into the Hall of Fame. Since the official Hall of Fame was sanctioned, more than 160 people have been enshrined. Induction into the Hall is based upon overall record of play, sportsmanship, skill, character, and contributions to the game (on and off the court), which accounts for the inclusion of businessmen (Joseph Cullman and Lamar Hunt), historians (Bud Collins and Ted Tinling), and publishers (Gladys Heldman). In addition to Chris Evert, recent inductees include Czechoslovakian player Hana Mandlikova, who is described as a naturally gifted athlete; Molla Mallory, the only player to beat France's Suzanne Lengien after World War I; Stan Smith, who is depicted as a real American sportsman; Arthur Ashe, who is remembered as winner of five Grand Slam championships; Billie Jean King, outspoken advocate for women's tennis; and couturier Ted Tinling, noted for his unequalled graciousness and style.

The Enshrinement Room also chronicles the dawn of the open era of tennis (1968) as a time when the old order passed and a new age began in world tennis—a time when the bastions of the amateur game (most notably Wimbledon and Forest Hills) were opened to professionals. The changes of the "open era" in tennis just happened to coincide with other societal changes that fostered struggles for social justice, celebrations of personal liberation, and explorations of new frontiers in science and technology. As a result of the changes in tennis, a separate women's tennis tour emerged. The game was also forever changed due to technological innovations in racquets, equipment, and a more scientific approach to training.

As might be expected, most of the space in the museum is devoted to the history of the game, with narratives, film footage, and displays of original

equipment. However, there are attempts to address current issues, especially the early age at which tennis players begin to compete. A video made possible by the Phillip Morris Corporation explores the making of champions such as Michael Chang, Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, Monica Seles, and Pete Sampras, all of whom won Grand Slam titles as teenagers. It is noted that Chris Evert began to play at the age of five. Jennifer Capriati, once touted as the "next Chris Evert" is the youngest player to turn pro (at age 13). However, young girls also competed in women's tennis before the open era. In the 1890s, 15 year-old Lottie Dod won Wimbledon, while "Little Mo" (Maureen Connolly) captured the Grand Slam as a teenager. As the narrator of the video concludes, there is a fine line between pushing and burn-out.

More exhibits are displayed in an equipment room featuring early products of the Dayton Racquet Company. Also included are the lawn tennis room, Newport Casino Room, Grand Slam Room, Davis Cup and Court Tennis rooms, and a room devoted to an Evert display. The Evert display contained her Federation Cup tennis outfit made especially by Ted Tinling in 1986, her 1976 *Sports Illustrated* cover in which Evert was named "Sportswoman of the Year," and her autobiography entitled *Christie—My Own Story*. One case featured her seven French Open wins, three Wimbledon, three Italian championships, and six U.S. Open titles. At the time of my visit, the Evert display was being dismantled and will become a room dedicated to women's tennis in the future.

Although Davis Cup, Wightman Cup, and the Grand Slam tournaments have long been staples of the tennis season, several products of the open era are highlighted as well. Among them are the World Tennis Team Wall, which celebrates the attempt to market tennis as a team sport, a notion promoted by Billie Jean King and her ex-husband lawyer Larry King. Finally, with the addition of tennis to the 1988 Olympics, there is a display of the gold medal in doubles won by Pam Shriver and Zina Garrison. While the official museum tour ends here, one may use the library's extensive collection of historical materials so long as the researcher provides the library with a copy of their dissertation or other research product.