

# The Courting of Suzanne Lenglen

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Suzanne Lenglen was considered by many authorities to be the greatest woman tennis player of her day. Her colorful antics, temperamental behavior and disregard for traditional dress impacted the game like no other player before her. Born in Compiègne, France, she began playing tennis as a child, pushed and promoted by her parents who saw her as their claim to fame. She started winning tournaments at age fourteen and by the time she was fifteen years old, Lenglen had won the World's Hard Court Championships in Paris in both singles and doubles. The ensuing World War I prevented more tournament play but she used the time for constant practice to refine her game.

When the Wimbledon Championships were resumed in 1919, Miss Lenglen entered and won both the singles and doubles and repeated these victories five more years in succession except for 1924 when she had to withdraw because of illness. Though she defeated the top American women champions, Molla Bjurstedt and Helen Wills, in Europe, she was forever remembered as the player who walked off the court at Forest Hills in the middle of her losing match to Bjurstedt.

Suzanne Lenglen quit amateur tennis after her 1926 season and was a member of the first professional tennis tour which played exhibition matches in the major cities across the United States. At the end of the year's tour she returned to France where her playing days ceased. This abrupt halt was due to the fact that as a professional she could not play in amateur tournaments and tennis exhibitions by professionals were not popular in Europe.

Plagued by illness all her life she died in 1938 at the age of 39 years. Her career had been exciting with many triumphs and tragedies. It is pure speculation what she might have accomplished had she not turned professional but for the time she played she was the *Grande Dame* of the tennis world that many have labeled the "Lenglen Era."