



Milestones and impactful moments in the history of women's professional tennis

1968 > April 1: In a short-lived but impactful harbinger of things to come, **Billie Jean King**, **Rosie Casals**, **Ann Jones** and **Francoise Dürr** become the first women tennis professionals when they sign a contract to join McCall's National Tennis League alongside male stars including Rod Laver, Ken Rosewall and Pancho Gonzales

April 27: While retaining her amateur status, **Virginia Wade** wins the first tournament of the Open Era at Bournemouth, England, before **Nancy Richey** captures the first "Open" Grand Slam event at Roland Garros

1970 > Australia's **Margaret Court** completes her calendar year Grand Slam at the US Open

1970 > September 23: Frustrated by ongoing pay inequality of 8:1 or more and threatened with sanctions, the **Original 9** women pros break with the sport's establishment by signing \$1 contracts with promoter **Gladys Heldman** to compete at the groundbreaking Virginia Slims Invitational in Houston, Texas. The group – seven Americans and two Australians – comprises **Peaches Bartkowicz**, **Rosie Casals**, **Judy Dalton**, **Julie Heldman**, **Billie Jean King**, **Kerry Melville Reid**, **Nancy Richey**, **Kristy Pigeon** and **Valerie Ziegenfuss**

1971 > Building on the success of the Houston event, the first World Tennis Women's Pro Tour (better known as the **Virginia Slims Circuit**) of 19 events kicks off in San Francisco in January; by October, Billie Jean has become the first woman athlete to earn \$100,000 in a season

1972 > **Title IX** is enacted, meaning U.S. educational institutions receiving federal funding could no longer discriminate on the basis of gender – opening the way for greater access to sports-related scholarships and team funding for girls and women

1972 > Precursor to the WTA Finals, the first **Virginia Slims Championships** are held at Boca Raton, Florida. The \$100,000 purse is the largest to date for a women-only event, and the \$25,000 winner's check easily outpaces all the majors. **Chris Evert** wins the title but as a 17-year-old amateur, has to forego the record pay-day

1973 > On March 22, at a Virginia Slims event in Akron, Ohio, **Evert** defeats **Martina Navratilova** in the first of their 80 career meetings

1973 > In April, **Gladys Heldman** refuses to pay the high tournament sanction fees demanded by the USLTA in order to stage Virginia Slims events; the governing body responds by once again threatening to strip Heldman's pros of their official status – and by mounting a rival tour headlined by Evert, Wade, **Evonne Goolagong** and **Olga Morozova**

1973 > June 21: With most of the top women competing at Queen's Club the week before Wimbledon, **Billie Jean King** espouses strength in unity as she founds the **Women's Tennis Association** at a meeting of around 60 players at London's Gloucester Hotel. King goes on to capture the triple crown of singles, doubles and mixed doubles titles at The Championships

- 1973 >** The **US Open** becomes the first of the four majors to offer **equal prize money** – King’s bargaining power bolstered by the newly-formed WTA; Bristol Myers’ deodorant brand ‘Ban’ stumps up the extra cash
- 1973 >** September 20: With 90 million viewers worldwide, **Billie Jean King** defeats Bobby Riggs in the **Battle of the Sexes** at Houston’s Astrodome
- 1974 >** The WTA signs a **groundbreaking television broadcast** contract with American network CBS, a first for women’s sports, bringing non-Grand Slam events to new audiences
- 1975 >** November 3: The WTA launches **computer rankings** with **Evert** as World No.1, rubber-stamping a dominance that would take the popularity of tennis to new heights
- 1976 >** **Evert** becomes the first female athlete to pass **\$1 million** in career earnings
- 1977 >** In their sixth year, the Tour’s season-ending championships begin a two-decade tenure at New York’s **Madison Square Garden**
- 1979 >** In the semifinals at the Italian Open in Rome, **Tracy Austin** ends Evert’s six-year, 125-match clay court win streak – still the longest single-surface streak in the sport
- 1980 >** **Evonne Goolagong Cawley** becomes the first mother to win the ladies’ singles title at Wimbledon since 1914
- 1981 >** **Leslie Allen** wins the Avon Championships of Detroit, the biggest Tour-level win by an African American woman since Althea Gibson in 1958; defeats Grand Slam winners Virginia Ruzici, Mima Jausovec and Hana Mandlikova en route
- 1982 >** **Martina Navratilova** becomes the first woman tennis player to earn over \$1 million in a single season and begins to transform the game (and attitudes to women athletes) with her 360-degree approach to health and fitness
- 1983 >** After a sponsorship hiatus, **Virginia Slims** returns (replacing the likes of Colgate, Avon and Toyota) to sponsor the first unified circuit worth over \$10 million
- 1984 >** The **Australian Open** joins the US Open in offering equal prize money for its women’s and men’s events; **Evert** becomes the first woman to win 1,000 matches in the Open Era and is presented with a cake with 1,000 candles
- 1986 >** **Ted Tinling** is enshrined in the International Tennis Hall of Fame, in honor of his contribution to tennis fashion and building the women’s tennis brand from the early days of the Tour
- 1988 >** On June 10, **Diana, Princess of Wales** opens the WTA’s new European office, before playing tennis at London’s Vanderbilt Club with **Stefanie Graf**
- 1988 >** **Graf** becomes the first player to achieve the so-called Golden Slam by winning all four majors as well as Olympic gold at Seoul
- 1988 >** **Evert** and **Navratilova** play for the 80th and final time in their epic rivalry, the latter prevailing in the final of the Virginia Slims of Chicago, 62 62
- 1990 >** WTA Finals become the first \$1 million event in women’s sports history; **Seles** defeats **Gabriela Sabatini** in the first best-of-five sets final to go the distance (format in place from 1984-98, for first time since 1901 U.S. Championships)

- 1991 >** A dominating **Seles** earns more than the top-ranked male player, Stefan Edberg, a feat she repeats in 1992
- 1994 >** **Anne Worcester** is appointed CEO of the WTA, making her the first woman to lead a major sports organization; **Stacey Allaster** follows in 2009 and **Portia Archer** in 2024
- 1994 >** October 31: **Venus Williams**, 14, make a winning pro debut at Oakland, California
- 1995 >** The WTA Players' Association merges with the Women's Tennis Council to form the **WTA Tour** and new **age eligibility** rules and **professional development** programs are introduced to protect young athletes from injuries and psychological burnout
- 1995 >** **Serena Williams**, 14, makes her pro debut in WTA qualifying at Québec City, Canada
- 1997 >** **Martina Hingis** becomes the fastest woman player to earn \$1 million in a season and a day later (March 31), the youngest-ever WTA World No.1 (16 years, 182 days) – ending Graf's record reign of 377 non-consecutive weeks (either Tour)
- 2001 >** The **Australian Open** restores equal prize money, after a five-year break (1996-2000)
- 2001 >** The WTA makes its debut in the **Middle East** with events in **Dubai** and **Doha** (both won by Hingis); in 2005, Dubai becomes the third event to apply an equal prize money policy
- 2002 >** The Williams sisters, **Venus and Serena**, fulfill their father's prophecy by becoming the No.1 players in the world – first Venus in February, then Serena in July
- 2004 >** **Anastasia Myskina** becomes the first Russian woman to win a Grand Slam singles title, at Roland Garros, followed in quick succession by **Maria Sharapova** at Wimbledon and **Svetlana Kuznetsova** at the US Open
- 2005 >** **Sony Ericsson** becomes worldwide title sponsor in a \$88 million, six-year deal – at the time, the largest and most comprehensive deal in the history of tennis and women's sport
- 2007 >** With **Venus Williams** playing a vital campaigning role, **Roland Garros** and then **Wimbledon** offer **equal prize money** to women and men, bringing pay parity to all four majors for the first time
- 2008 >** The WTA opens its first Asia-Pacific headquarters in **Beijing**, heralding huge expansion in the region, while the WTA Finals move to Doha for three years
- 2009 >** In a sensational return to the US Open, **Kim Clijsters** becomes the first mother to win a Grand Slam singles title in three decades, on just her third tournament back
- 2011 >** January 31: For the first time in WTA history, **10 different nations** are represented in the world's Top 10 rankings, hailing from four continents
- 2011 >** China's **Li Na** becomes the first player born in Asia to win a Grand Slam singles title, at Roland Garros
- 2011 >** **Peachy Kellmeyer**, considered the first employee of the WTA, is inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in the contributor category, for her efforts to build women's tennis over four decades
- 2013 >** As the WTA celebrates its **40 Love** season, 25 players finish the year with prize money earnings in excess of \$1 million, from a record purse of \$118 million

- 2014 >** **Singapore** becomes the first city in Asia-Pacific to host the WTA Finals season finale, beginning a successful five-year tenure
- 2017 >** WTA Charities – later renamed the **WTA Foundation** – is launched as the WTA’s first unified, global philanthropic arm. With the mission to empower girls and women to live fully and support WTA communities worldwide through initiatives promoting equality, education, and health and wellness, key programs include ACEing Cancer, the Global Women’s Health Fund, and WTA Come Play presented by Morgan Stanley
- 2017 >** **Serena Williams** wins her 23rd Grand Slam title (a new Open Era record) at the Australian Open, later revealing she was pregnant with daughter Olympia at the time; defeats sister Venus in final
- 2019 >** The WTA Finals in **Shenzhen**, China offer record prize money of \$14 million, with champion Ashleigh Barty taking home \$4.42 million – the single biggest paycheck in tennis history to that point (men or women)
- 2021 >** The **Original 9** become the first group of players to be inducted into the International Hall of Fame as part of the Class of 2021
- 2022 >** Medical technology company and women’s health specialist **Hologic** is announced as new global title sponsor of the WTA Tour
- 2022 >** Tunisia’s **Ons Jabeur** becomes the first Arabic woman to crack the Top 10 and reach a Grand Slam final, at Wimbledon; **Serena Williams** announces she is to “evolve” away from the game, playing her last tournament at the US Open
- 2023 >** The 50th anniversary of the WTA is celebrated throughout the year under the banner **WTA50**; highlights include a reunion of WTA founding members led by Billie Jean King at London’s Gloucester Hotel in June, and a gala at the Ziegfeld Ballroom in New York ahead of the US Open
- 2024 >** **Riyadh, Saudi Arabia** becomes the second city in the Middle East to host the WTA Finals, with former World No.1 **Garbiñe Muguruza** appointed as tournament director
- 2025 >** The **PIF WTA Maternity Fund Program** is officially launched, in a partnership with Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF), offering players up to 12 months in paid maternity leave, as well as parental leave for non-birthing parents and grants for fertility treatments; on court, **Aryna Sabalenka** posts the first \$15 million season, besting Serena’s \$12 million prize money record of 2013
- 2025 >** November 17: American sports executive **Valerie Camillo** assumes post of WTA Chair, the second woman to hold the position, after Stacey Allaster
- 2026 >** January 1: Under the biggest deal in the history of women’s professional tennis, Mercedes-Benz begins the year as **Premier Partner of The WTA Tour Driven by Mercedes-Benz**
- 2026 >** In February, **Belinda Bencic** and **Elina Svitolina** make history as the first mothers to rank in the Top 10 at the same time; April’s **Credit One Charleston Open** doubles its total payout to \$2.5 million, establishing groundbreaking parity with ATP 500 events; **Serena Williams, 44**, makes a stunning comeback to the WTA Tour during the grass swing at Queen’s Club and Wimbledon