

From the Archives – 12th December 2024

Tennis Star Suzanne Lenglen at Roehampton Club

100 years ago



Roehampton Club Member Geoff Newton OBE was kind enough to provide the Club with a copy of a recent article in *The Times* together with a photograph of Suzanne Lenglen – one of the greatest female tennis players of all time playing in an exhibition match at Roehampton Club in 1926 with Rene Lacoste.



Through her strength of character, athleticism, dominant success in the game and flamboyant choice of sporting attire she became an iconic figure in the sport teaming up with fashion designer Jean Patou to make a range of outfits allowing her the freedom on court to perform her trademark ballet style jumps in retrieving a shot.

The Wimbledon Tennis Championships in the 1920s had witnessed the arrival of a new generation of players bringing more media and spectator interest to the game. These players mentioned in *The Times* were prepared to challenge the decisions of the umpire and lose their temper in front of an audience more used to the gentle temperaments of pre-war players.

Suzanne Lenglen had been coached by her father to be strong in her desire to win. Her father taught her to serve the ball overhead just like the men and not like other lady players who served underarm. While the authorities may have been waiting to take action against the sight of bare legs and the behaviour of players towards the court officials, there was a more important controversy centered on the Qualifying Tournament at Roehampton Club.

The Civil & Military Gazette.

VOL. LI No. 662.

LAHORE.—WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 1929.

ONE ANNA.

WIMBLEDON TROUBLES.

The issue took several years to evolve before it was reported in the newspapers as splitting up the tennis world into opposing camps, or at least making for strained relations between players of a certain standard and the English Lawn Tennis Association.

The Civil & Military Gazette in June 1929 under the heading 'Wimbledon Troubles', referred directly to the 'energetic protests regarding the qualifying tournament at Roehampton.'

It seems that entries to play at Wimbledon had reached such a level that a preliminary eliminating tournament became essential for all players not nominated by their countries, or not deemed to be capable upon their record of reaching the last 16 in any event. These stipulations are not strictly enforced in the case of foreign competitions and thus home players of some standing are forced into the preliminary tournament and lose an opportunity of entering direct into the tournament proper.

The report goes on to refer to players who have withdrawn from the preliminary matches with one player in particular (unnamed in the report) who had beaten five Davis Cup Players in order to reach the final of a recent tournament.

Roehampton Club Members were privileged to see the exceptional skills of Ms Lenglen for themselves on certain occasions playing exhibition matches prior to the Wimbledon Championships and sometimes with Club Members such as Kitty McKane.

In 1922, the *Sunday Mirror* carried a picture of Ms McKane and Ms Lenglen at Roehampton Club together with a photo of her playing a shot with her ballet style jump.

The Roehampton Club Centenary Book by Elizabeth Hennessy also carries a picture of Suzanne Lenglen with Mrs Betty Nuttall taken in 1926.

In the same year, the Daily News publication featured a picture of Suzanne Lenglen (second from the right) alongside a number of other tennis stars on the eve of the Wimbledon Championships.

Steve Riedlinger, Club Archivist

MLLE. LENGLEN READY FOR WIMBLEDON



Mlle. Suzanne Lenglen (right) with Miss McKane, whom she regards as the best of the English women tennis players, at Roehampton yesterday afternoon.



HAPPY INTERNATIONAL LAWN TENNIS PARTY AT ROEHAMPTON.



Yesterday, the eve of the jubilee Wimbledon, the Roehampton Club laid their beautiful grounds for the International Lawn Tennis Club's overseas reception. Famous tennis stars photographed here—in infectious mood. Left to right, Miss Ryan, Mlle. Suzanne Lenglen, Mlle. Yvonne, Miss Lambert-Chaviers, Miss Joan Fry, Mercedes D'Alvarez, and Mrs. Godfree.



Mlle. Lenglen's famous style has lost none of its vigour.