

The Regal Saga of Tennis

There is really no way to know the exact date of when the game of tennis began. In fact, there are a lot of different versions of the history of tennis. One of them dates back to the time of kings and pharaohs of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome who were said to have played different forms of this game. Although drawings and descriptions of "tennis-like" games have not been discovered, Arabic words dating back from ancient Egyptians are used as evidence. The theory says that the name tennis is derived from the Egyptian town of Tinnis which is on the banks of the Nile River, and the word racquet evolved from the word rahat, which means palm of hand.

Other than this theory of the words Tinnis and rahat from ancient Egyptians, confirmation for any form of tennis prior to those years is absent. In the history of tennis accounts, most historians attribute the first origin of the game to 11th and 12th century French monks, who started playing crude handball against their monastery walls or over a rope that had been strung across a courtyard. It was then known as jeu de paume, which means game of the hand because it was a court game where the ball was struck by the hand. Other historians claim that the name tennis came from the French tenez which meant, roughly translated, "take this" as one player would serve to the other.

As the game became more popular, playing areas were modified from courtyards to indoor courts, where the ball was still played off walls. However, since bare hands were found to be too painful, players began using either a glove with webbing between fingers or a solid paddle, which was followed by using webbing attached to a handle, fundamentally a racquet. The ball was a clump of hair, wool, or cork wrapped in string and cloth or leather. Later on, it was hand stitched in felt that looked something like the modern baseball.

The sport of tennis was passed on from the French monks to the nobility who learned the game from them and tennis soon gained popularity. It's been stated that as many as 1800 courts were built for this game in France throughout the 13th century. The game became such a popular distraction that both the pope and Louis IV attempted to ban it but failed. It soon spread to England where both Henry VII and Henry VIII were devoted players who encouraged it by constructing more courts.

The history of tennis states that the game's popularity decreased during the 1700s, but in the 1850s when vulcanization of rubber was introduced by Charles Goodyear, players started experimenting, using bouncy rubber balls outdoors on grass courts. Because playing tennis outdoors was very different from playing it indoors where it was only played off a wall, several new sets of rules were put together.

Some people would credit the history of tennis to Major Walter Clopton Wingfield, a British army officer who developed the game in 1873. Wingfield in search for a game more dynamic than croquet, which was very popular at that time, thought of an activity that was a mixture of badminton and "court tennis." In 1874 in London, he patented the equipment and rules for the game closely related to our modern day tennis.

Today, tennis has become a very popular sport and has produced many great athletes who have become legends of the sport, including Andre Agassi, Pete Sampras, Rod Laver, Andy Roddick, Jimmy Connors and John McEnroe among men, and Steffi Graf, Martina Navratilova, Chris Evert, Serena and Venus Williams, and Martina Hingis among women. Wherever or however the history of tennis is told, one fact remains to be true # that the history of tennis has led it to become one of the world's most popular sports.