

Wimbledon: More Than Just Tennis

[B2]

Più che un semplice campionato di tennis, è uno dei grandi eventi della stagione sociale del Regno Unito, avvolto in una serie di tradizioni uniche che attraggono celebrità di ogni tipo.

The Wimbledon Championships are a quintessential date in the British social season. Like Royal Ascot and the Henley Regatta, the tennis tournament is [steeped in history](#) and tradition. Since 1877, it has been [held](#) at the All England Lawn Tennis Club in Wimbledon, London, at the end of June and the start of July.

MAJOR EVENT

What started as a garden party competition is today a major international sports event. Along with the Australian Open, Roland-Garros in France and the US Open, Wimbledon is one of the world's four Grand Slam tournaments and the only one played on grass. It ends on the second weekend, with the women's and men's singles finals [held](#) on Centre [Court](#). The British summer being what it is, Centre [Court](#) was equipped with a [retractable roof](#) in 2019, so play can continue when it rains. Fans [fondly](#) remember pop legend Sir Cliff Richard giving an [impromptu](#) concert in 1996. He kept people entertained by singing a cappella when rain halted the men's quarter final match between Pete Sampras and Richard Krajicek for hours. The event has always attracted a [high-profile crowd](#). Ordinary people are joined by celebrities and royalty, who come for the full Wimbledon experience. It is more than just tennis; it is [rife with](#) customs, both famous and obscure, reflecting the [charms](#) and idiosyncrasies of British culture.

THE QUEUE

The British are famous for their ability [to queue](#) calmly and patiently. This is demonstrated every year at Wimbledon. The tournament is one of the few major sporting events where premium tickets can be bought on the day. Each day, people queue to buy a Show [Court](#) ticket or a Grounds Pass, which gives access to [Courts](#) 3-18. The Queue (with a capital Q) often starts the evening before, with people camping overnight. Those who arrive at 6am will have at least an hour's wait. Queue Cards are [issued](#) to prevent people pushing ahead of their place.

STRAWBERRIES & PIMM'S

No Wimbledon experience is complete without strawberries and [cream](#). It is said that King George V introduced the custom, but it actually dates back to the first tournament in 1877. Strawberries were in season and were therefore a convenient court-side snack. Today, nearly two million [hand-picked](#) strawberries are consumed during Wimbledon, along with the traditional beverage, Pimm's and lemonade. A fruity gin-based [spirit](#), Pimm's is mixed into a number of cocktails, including the favourite: the Pimm's No. 1 Cup. Over 280,000 glasses of Pimm's were served throughout The Championships last summer.

WHITE UNIFORMS

Wimbledon is also famous for its strict dress code. Players must wear white. The rules state that "white does not include [off white](#) or [cream](#)," although "a single [trim](#) of colour around the [neckline](#) and around [the cuff of the sleeves](#) is acceptable, but must be no wider than one centimetre." The code was introduced during Victorian times, when [sweat](#) marks were considered [unsightly](#). Last year, the rule was relaxed for female players, to relieve anxiety around their periods. They can now wear dark [undershorts](#), as long as they are no longer than their shorts or skirt.

BALL BOYS AND GIRLS

Wimbledon's ball boys and girls (BBGs) are much admired for their discipline and dedication. [Crouching](#) by the [net](#) and standing at the back of the court, they [swiftly retrieve](#) tennis balls after each play and provide the players with new ones. With an average age of fifteen, 250 BBGs are chosen from around a thousand applicants. The ball boy system was introduced in the 1920s. The boys all came from Shaftesbury Homes, a charity for [destitute](#) children. From 1946, they were volunteers from local schools and institutions and, since 1977, they include girls.

ROYALS & CELEBRITIES

Wimbledon has long enjoyed royal [patronage](#). The first was the Prince of Wales in 1907. The future King George V presented the winner's trophy and agreed to become the Patron of the All England Club, a tradition that continues to this day. Catherine, Princess of Wales, is the current patron. King George VI even competed in the men's doubles in 1926. He was eliminated in the first round. The Royal [Box](#) at Centre [Court](#) was added in 1922 and has hosted both royals and celebrities, including Hollywood stars like Daniel Craig. Celebrities can often be found in the audience, too. Idris Elba, Andrew Garfield and Ariana Grande have all been

spotted in recent years. Unfortunately, American actors do not always follow the local customs. Brad Pitt was seen eating, not strawberries and [cream](#), but a bag of [crisps](#), at the 2023 men's finals. The video footage went viral, as fans tried to guess the flavour, [stealing the limelight](#) from the spectacular match being played on Centre [Court](#).

HOMEGROWN CHAMPIONS

Wimbledon has hosted the biggest players from around the world, but remarkably few from home. Only one British male has won The Championships since Fred Perry in 1936. Roger Taylor reached two semifinals in the 1970s and Tim Henman reached four semifinals between 1998 and 2002. But it was not until 2013 that a Brit reclaimed the cup, in a [nail-biting](#) final against the world's number one player, Novak Djokovic. Andy Murray won the title, the first Scottish Wimbledon champion since Harold Mahony in 1896. He did it again in 2016, beating Canadian Milos Raonic, in the presence of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, London Mayor Sadiq Khan and [avid fan](#) Benedict Cumberbatch. He accepted the trophy in a very un-British [flood of tears](#). No British female player has won since Virginia Wade in 1977. She broke a fifty-year hiatus after Dorothy Round Little's win in 1937. Last year's champions were from Spain and the Czech Republic. This year — the 137th championships — will see Carlos Alcaraz and Markéta Vondroušová defending their titles, from 1-14 July. They and their [fellow](#) players will be watched by hundreds of thousands of visitors, who no doubt will include [scores](#) of royal and celebrity fans. www.wimbledon.com (1-14 July)

Glossary

- **sweat** = sudore
- **net** = rete
- **nail-biting** = emozionante (lett. mangiarsi le unghie)
- **steeped in history** = impregnato di storia
- **impromptu** = improvvisato
- **neckline** = scollatura
- **the cuff of the sleeves** = il polsino delle maniche
- **stealing the limelight** = rubare protagonismo
- **held** = tenere
- **charms** = fascino
- **spirit** = superalcolico
- **trim** = bordura
- **retractable roof** = tetto retrattile
- **unsightly** = antiestetico
- **flood of tears** = fiume di lacrime
- **scores** = un mucchio
- **destitute** = bisognosi
- **patronage** = appoggio, patrocinio
- **crisps** = patatine fritte
- **avid fan** = tifoso accanito
- **Court** = campo
- **to queue** = fare la fila
- **cream** = colore crema
- **off white** = bianco sporco
- **fondly** = affettuosamente
- **high-profile crowd** = pubblico di alto profilo
- **undershorts** = biancheria intima
- **Box** = palchetto
- **fellow** = colleghi
- **rife with** = pieno di
- **issued** = rilasciare
- **hand-picked** = raccolte a mano
- **swiftly** = rapidamente
- **Crouching** = accovacciarsi
- **retrieve** = recuperare