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Women in tennis – a history of the struggle for equality

Abstract

Women's sport has development significantly in the recent decades, with professionalisation and increasing interest from the public visible in many disciplines. Nonetheless, the earnings of female athletes in virtually every discipline are lower than those of male athletes. Tennis is regarded as a sport at the forefront of fulfilling the equality aspirations of female athletes. The purpose of this article is to present some of the key moments in the history of women's tennis, describing the struggle for a better status for female tennis players and the resistance these efforts encountered. It must be emphasised that there is still significant gender wage gap in tennis. Although an attempt has been made to explain these inequalities, it should also be pointed out that inequality is not only about wages. The article describes the different levels of tennis tournaments and the inequality of opportunity entrenched in this system, as well as the formal problems faced by female tennis players. The conclusions show that a lot has been achieved in tennis when it comes to gender equality, but nevertheless discrimination against women can still be observed. The fight for equal treatment is not over and should be led, as history indicates, by female tennis players themselves.

Keywords: gender inequality, sport, tennis, wage gap, women

Introduction

In the world of sport, competing in a division between women and men is commonplace. Even in precision sports, where physical strength is not important, it is rare for women to compete alongside men. The exception, to some extent, may be darts. Although most often women and men compete in separate tournaments, in recent years the best female darts players have been competing against the world's male leaders in the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) World Championships, among others. In 2020, English female darts player Fallon Sherrock became the first woman to enter the third round of this Championship [Guy 2019].

In most disciplines championships are still divided by gender, generating large wage inequalities between men and women (in favour of the former group). This is particularly visible in the case of foot-

ball. In 2022, it was estimated that the average annual salary of a Premier League football player was around GBP 2.8 million. By comparison, the average salary of a female player at the highest level of the British league (*Women's Super League*) was just GBP 30,000 a year [Ovaisi 2019]. There has been a debate for many years about the validity of these differences, with the argument related to the decidedly lower popularity of women's football repeatedly coming up. Those using this argument point out that the reason for the lower earnings of female football players is that they are less attractive due to their inferior skills and physical strength, which in turn results in lower viewership and fewer tickets sold. On the other hand, it is emphasized that the effort put in by female athletes is no less than that of male athletes, and the limited popularity is not so much due to less spectacle, but to less promotion of women's sport, which hinders the faster development

of female sports disciplines [Fink 2015]. Against this backdrop, tennis is cited as a positive example, where wage disparities are significantly smaller than in football, although they are still prominent [Flake et al. 2013: 366–376].

The purpose of the article is to describe the inequality between men and women in sport, and to introduce the most important and landmark moments in the history of women's tennis, which will help illustrate the current situation in which the sport discipline finds itself and point to possible directions for change to reduce discrimination against women. The article highlights the significant role of leading female tennis players in the struggle for equality and a better status for female tennis players.

Inequalities in sport

The phenomenon of the increasing presence of women in professional sport is the subject of research and scholarly publications on gender inequality. This unequal treatment generally relates to differential media coverage, within which less attention is paid to female athletes [Bernstein 2002, Buysse and Embser-Herbert 2004, Duncan and Sayaovong 1990, Messner et al. 1996, Stevenson 2002, Weber and Carini 2012, Yip 2018, Bruce 2016, Vincent et al. 2007]. An analysis of the coverage in three British newspapers (“The Times”, “The Sun” and “Daily Mail”) of the 2000 Wimbledon tournament leads to the conclusion that the descriptions used by the journalists (mostly men) devalued or marginalized the achievements of the female tennis players, instead alluding to their appearance [Vincent et al. 2007: 281–300]. These British newspapers paid special attention to the beauty of Anna Kournikova, who was portrayed as a kind of sporty “Lolita”. Serena and Venus Williams, on the other hand, were referred to as “Amazons” and experienced racist bigotry, according to the researchers. The physicality and alleged androgyny of the Williams sisters were highlighted. Reports also noted that journalists favoured white female tennis players. Analogous conclusions were drawn from an analysis of U.S. media articles (“The New York Times”, “The LA Times”, “USA Today”, “FOX Sports”, “Sports Illustrated”) about the US Open 2007. The results showed that both newspapers and online media minimized the athleticism of female tennis players [Kian and Clavio 2011: 55–84]. Recent studies confirm the prevalence of negative

stereotypes of female tennis players in the media. Yip [2018] analysed news articles about the 2015 Australian Open, posted on the tournament's official website and on ESPN, and concluded that the coverage focused on the physical weakness, technical deficiencies, and perceived mental fragility of the female players.

The literature presents several potential reasons for the existence of a gender wage gap. These main reasons are women's lower wage expectations [Chevalier 2007, Magda et al. 2015], occupational segregation [Ngai and Petrongolo 2017] or cultural norms [Fan and Marini 1997, Jacobs 1989]. Determinants of the gender wage gap most often include age, number of years in education, number of hours worked per month/week, occupation, company size, as well as characteristics such as marital status, migration status, skin colour, type of employment (full-time/part-time), family status, union membership, sector [Leythienne and Ronkowski 2018, Meara et al. 2019]. However, professional sport is a special case. Previously, the racial wage gap has been analysed [Hamilton 1997: 287–296, Kahn and Shah 2005: 444–462, Szymanski 2000: 590–603], as well as earnings and career paths among athletes in U.S. colleges [Dufur 2008: 137–158, Humphreys 2000: 299–307, Knoppers et al. 1991: 1–20]. Research on the wage gap among male and female athletes is still relatively scarce. Some point out that in the case of tennis, some of the inequality in wages can be explained by productivity differences, but after controlling the calculations in terms of this variable, the wage gap was still apparent, which the authors believe was a direct result of unequal prize pools in mid- and low-level tournaments [Flake et al. 2013]. According to Cepeda's [2021] study, on the other hand, the wage gap that exists in tennis can be explained entirely by the different productivity of the men's and women's games. In his opinion, the difference in generated income is responsible for the lower earnings of female tennis players, and there is no explicitly discriminatory component. At the same time, the author points out that discrimination in tennis is present and manifests itself, for example, in the smaller number of men's games refereed by women, as well as the almost complete lack of female coaches at the highest level. Jakubowska [2014], on the other hand, notes that sources of funding for sports events can be public or private funds. The latter have no obligation to treat the women's and men's games equally. The author concludes that a way to address financial disparities in sport may be to in-

crease interest in sport among women, which could result in increased support for women's sport from sponsors. Jakubowska [2012] cites Tyrała [2005] and Podgórski [2011], who point out that the very idea of sports competition does not mean challenging the idea of equality. This is because sport refers to differences at the level of the body, i.e., biological [Tyrała 2005]. In her article, Jakubowska considers the arguments for and against the persistent disparity in earnings between men and women in sport. The first concerns the proportionality of the prizes to the effort expended. This is an argument often cited in the context of tennis, as in Grand Slam tournaments women play singles matches to two sets won, while men play to three. So, on average, the men spend more time on the court in pursuit of the title, and the prizes are of equal size. This argument, however, is not raised in comparing prizes in other sport disciplines, such as the efforts of an archer and a weightlifter. The length of the competition is therefore not always a determinant of the size of the prizes. Another argument is the belief that differences in prizes are derived from differences in sports achievements. The argument in this case is based on the statement that since female athletes are unable to beat male athletes in a particular sport discipline, they should receive smaller prizes. However, the ability to achieve such sports results is often dictated by physical differences between men and women, i.e., something beyond their control (in principle). Other arguments are related to the incidence of less competition in the sport disciplines in question on the women's side and the belief that sport is subject to market rules. Jakubowska makes various suggestions for improving the current situation. She cites, for example, English's [1978] proposal to level the playing field by subsidizing women's sport more heavily, as well as the controversial demand to make pay independent of performance or popularity of a given sport discipline. Among the arguments for equality in rewarding the achievements of men and women in sport is one referring to Rawls' [1994] concept that the gains/benefits achieved are due to the distribution of natural traits and skills independent of the individual.

The first years of women's tennis

The origins of modern tennis date back to the 19th century. The first edition of Wimbledon, considered the most prestigious tennis tournament in the world,

was played by men in singles in 1877 [Little 2006], and just seven years later the first women's tournament was held, but only after the men's competition had ended [Barrett 2014]. The inaugural edition of the tournament featured 13 British women, the best of whom was Maud Watson. For her victory, she received a symbolic prize in kind worth 20 guineas [Tingay 1977]. The winner of the inaugural edition of the men's competition, Spencer Gore, received prizes worth a total of 37 guineas [Little 2013]. It should be remembered that we are talking about an amateur sport, so it is assumed that the motivation of female and male tennis players was not to earn money. However, even under these circumstances, existing inequalities can be observed.

Suzanne Lenglen began her career in the 1920s. The French female tennis player is considered one of the world's first tennis champions. In her career, Lenglen has won 83 singles tournaments, including the French Open twice and Wimbledon six times. In total, she won 21 Grand Slam tournaments [Little 1988]. Many matches involving the Parisian woman filled the stands, including the Wimbledon final against Lambert Chambers in 1919, during which attendance more than doubled the capacity of centre court [Engelmann 1988: 27]. In 1922, the organizers of the Wimbledon tournament decided to change the venue from Worple Road to its current location on Church Road. One of the reasons for this decision was precisely because the old facility could not accommodate the throngs of fans who came specifically to watch Lenglen [Wertheim, Feldman 2019]. Such widespread fascination with female athletes in years when women still lacked suffrage in many countries sets tennis apart from other sports. The female tennis player from Paris has set many trends throughout her career. Lenglen was instrumental in changing the outfits of female tennis players to those more suited to tennis. Jean Patou designed her costumes to be both stylish and to allow her to move freely, including her signature balletic leap. Unusually for the time, the French woman's blouse was sleeveless, and the skirt reached only to the knees [Engelmann 1988: 24–25, Little 1988: 26]. Lenglen was also the first top female tennis player to abandon amateur tennis by switching to professional tennis [Collins 1994]. The showcase tournaments she played in the United States from 1926 to 1927 were the first of their kind in the history of this sport discipline. She established a format that was used for the next four decades, until the beginning of the open era.

Open era

In 1968, the open era began in tennis, meaning that professional and amateur tennis players could participate in any tournament and were paid for their performance. At the same time, the prizes for women were significantly smaller than for men. In 1968, Wimbledon winner Rod Laver received GBP 2,000, while the women's tournament winner received GBP 750 [Little 2013: 128, 327–334]. The first winner of the open era on Wimbledon lawns was one of the most prominent figures of that time – Billie Jean King, who from the beginning of the open era pushed for equal pay for female tennis players. King was the first female athlete to earn a total of more than USD 100,000 over the course of her career. The American woman was making efforts to create the first professional women's tennis tour².

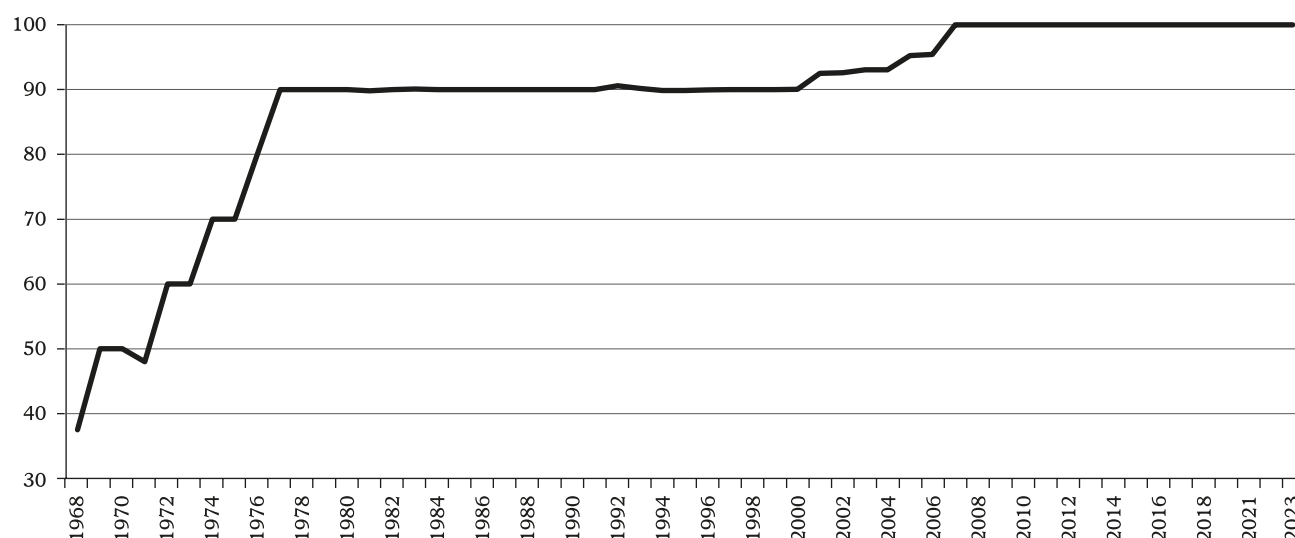
Billie Jean King, along with eight other female tennis players – Rosemary Casals, Nancy Richey, Peaches Bartkowicz, Kristy Pigeon, Valerie Ziegenfuss, Julie Heldman, Kerry M. Reid and Judy T. Dalton (the so-called Original 9) – have partnered with World Tennis magazine publisher Gladys Heldman to seek her support in negotiating gender equality in prize money. The players put their tennis careers at risk because the USLTA (United States Lawn Tennis Association) did not support their demands [Dolan 2011: 48, 69]. Gladys Heldman and a group of nine female tennis players decided to pursue the elimination of the wage gap at the Pacific Southwest Championships tournament, held in Los Angeles. The prize pool for female tennis players there was eight times smaller than for male tennis players. Heldman tried to convince the head of the tournament, former professional tennis player Jack Kramer, to reduce the wage gap. Kramer, however, refused, leading the Original 9 to declare a boycott of the tournament. The participation of female tennis players in a tournament held under the auspices of the newly established Virginia Slims Circuit organization was also announced. The tournament had a prize pool of USD 7,500 and was held in Houston, Texas, in September 1970. The formation of this independent professional women's organization provided greater prize money [Roberts 2005]. The USLTA has suspended all the players who made up the Original 9 and banned them from participating in tournaments. Nevertheless, by the end of the year, the Virginia Slims Circuit had increased the number of female members from nine to forty, allowing a full

season to be played in 1971. [WTA 2008]. In 1973, the Virginia Slims Circuit evolved into the Women's Tennis Association (WTA), which is still known today and organizes women's tennis tournaments.

Billie Jean King winning the US Open in 1972 received USD 15,000 less than the winner in the men's competition, Ilie Năstase. King declared that she would not participate in the next edition if the prize money was not equal [BJK Firsts and Facts 2010]. Trying to avoid a boycott of the tournament in 1973, the US Open became the first major tournament to offer equal prize money for men and women and the first Grand Slam tournament. In September 1973, King faced Bobby Riggs, then 55 years old, a 3-time Grand Slam champion and winner of more than 100 tennis tournaments, in an exhibition match named the “battle of the sexes”. Riggs has repeatedly spoken negatively about women's tennis and claimed that despite his age, he can beat any top female player [Time 1973]. It is worth noting that this was not the first iteration of the “battle of the sexes”, as on 13 May 1973, there was a meeting between Margaret Court from Australia and Bobby Riggs. Court then suffered a 6:2 6:1 defeat. The match took place on a day when Americans celebrate Mother's Day, which is why it was named the “Mother's Day Massacre” [Drucker 2021]. Four months later, Billie Jean King defeated Riggs 6:4 6:3 6:3 [Kirkpatrick 1973]. The match was watched in the stands of the Houston stadium by 30,500 people, while it was watched on TV by 50 million people in the US and 90 million worldwide [Culpepper 2017]. The American female tennis player later stated that her victory was important for both women's tennis and the emancipation movement as a whole [Blattman 2013]. Billie Jean King, through her stance in the fight for equal pay, through her victory over Riggs and through her coming out as a homosexual, became an important figure in the second wave of feminism [Sweeney 2008]. She demonstrated emphatically that sometimes radical steps are needed to pursue equality demands. It is worth noting that the entire Original 9 quickly concluded that it was necessary to build a separate institution to look after the interests of women in tennis.

Despite pressure from King and other female tennis players, the other Grand Slam tournaments did not immediately follow New York's lead and equalize prize pools for men and women. Of the four major tournaments in tennis, the second to introduce pay equality was the Australian Open, but this did not happen until the advent of the 21st century, 28 years after the US Open. The French Roland Gar-

Figure 1. The amount for winning the women’s singles tournament at Wimbledon as a percentage of the amount won by the winner of the men’s tournament



Source: Own compilation based on Wimbledon data.

ros tournaments were the most resistant and the most entrenched in the traditions of Wimbledon³. In the Wimbledon tournament, female winners initially received less than 40% of the amount set aside for the winners. In subsequent years, this disparity decreased significantly, but it remained prominent until 2007 (Figure 1).

In this context, the role played by five-time Wimbledon winner Venus Williams is noteworthy⁴. An article by her published in “The Times” on the eve of Wimbledon in 2006, in which she called for equalizing the prize pools for men and women, proved to be extremely significant. She said that by allowing unequal wages, Wimbledon is putting itself “on the wrong side of history” [Williams 2008]. There was a positive response from then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and many members of the House of Commons [BBC 2006]. That same year, the WTA and UNESCO launched a campaign to promote gender equality in sport, inviting Williams to be the face of the campaign [International Herald Tribune 2008]. Wimbledon, being under a high pressure, announced in February 2007 that it would award equal prize money to all players in all rounds, and Roland Garros organizers made a similar announcement a day later. The Chicago “Sun Times” pointed out that Williams helped to “change the minds of the boys” and added that “her willingness to express her opinion publicly sets her apart not only from most of her female peers, but also from (...) the most famous male athletes” [Slezak 2007].

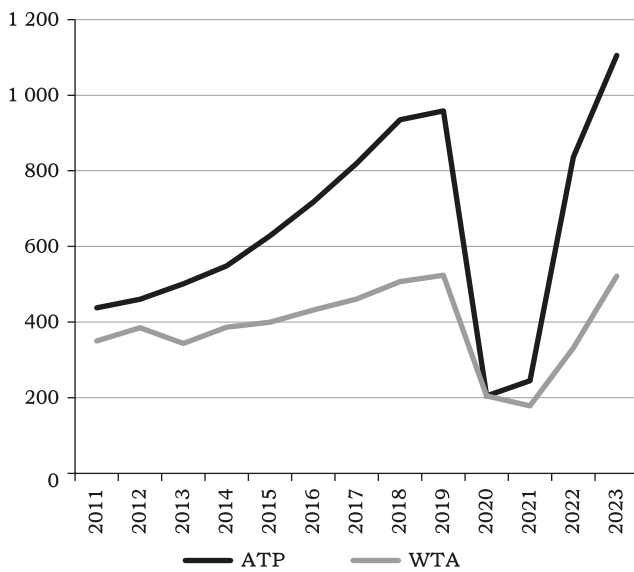
Unfinished battle

Despite the efforts outlined above, full wage equality in tennis has not been achieved. The tennis season consists of many tournaments, not only Grand Slams, but also WTA tournaments⁵ or lower-level tournaments⁶. Disparities increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when sports games around the world were halted for months, and the return to tournament play first involved playing with empty stands and then with a limited number of fans. This has caused financial problems for the organizers of many tournaments, as suddenly the source of a huge portion of their income has been significantly depleted [Shmarler 2022]. Most organizers could not count on the compensation that Wimbledon, for example, received, which was insured in case the tournament was cancelled for the reasons beyond their control [Tennis 365, 2020].

Many tournaments that are theoretically of the same level, played at the same time and on the same courts, such as the Italian Open⁷, still have different prize pools for men and women. In the case of the tournament held at the Foro Italico in Rome, the organizers announced that they intend to introduce equal prize pools in 2025. By winning the tournament in 2022, Iga Świątek earned more than twice as much as Novak Djoković – the winner of the ATP tournament⁸. It is worth noting that the disparity between the earnings of the male winners and female

winners of the Rome tournament grew continuously until the pandemic⁹ (Figure 2). In 2020 and 2021, the prize pools decreased significantly, but in the following two years we can see a return to the pre-pandemic trend.

Figure 2. The prize money for the male winner (ATP) and female winner (WTA) of the Rome tournament (in thousands of EUR)



Source: Tennisplanet [2023].

An analogous situation applied to the tournament in Washington. In 2023, the men's and women's competitions were held there simultaneously. Both tournaments were of the same level, yet the winner Coco Gauff received only a little over 1/3 of the amount Dan Evans received. The amount for winning a WTA tournament was just over USD 120,000, which means that it was also lower than the prize provided for the loser of the final ATP tournament [Crim 2023].

Inequalities regarding earnings in professional tennis are also well illustrated in aggregate, as shown in Table 1.

If you only look at the top ten, you will notice a certain inaccuracy in such a comparison. Indeed, the top male players were Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djoković, who dominated men's tennis for more than the first two decades of the 21st century. At this time, they had won a total of 43 Grand Slam tournaments. Among women, only Serena Williams was similarly dominant. As at the beginning of 2017, she won 22 Grand Slam tournaments. The other female tennis players did not win with such regularity.

Table 1. Earnings of female and male tennis players ranked in the top 100 of the WTA/ATP rankings at the beginning of 2017 (in millions of USD)

Ranking positions	Earnings of male tennis players	Earnings of female tennis players	Total	Women's earnings in total
1–10	365	201	566	36%
1–20	538	353	890	40%
1–30	623	395	1 018	39%
1–40	703	428	1 131	38%
1–50	751	458	1 209	38%
1–60	771	514	1 285	40%
1–70	816	543	1 359	40%
1–80	850	561	1 411	40%
1–90	871	580	1 451	40%
1–100	887	607	1 494	41%
Total	7 176	4 640	11 816	39%

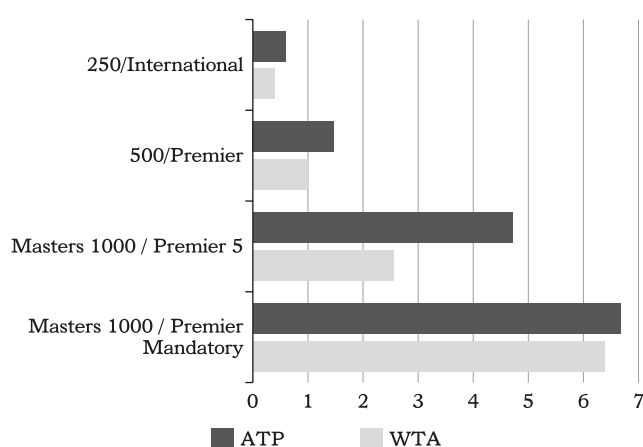
Source: [Cepeda 2021].

The presented year can also be considered as the beginning of a transitional period in women's tennis¹⁰, when the frequency of reshuffles in the top ten was particularly high. Hence, the relatively greater wage gap concerning the very tops. However, considering the entire top 100 at the time, one can see that the wage gap is not significantly smaller.

Inequalities are not limited to different prize money, but also relate to the ability to participate in competitions of a certain level. Tennis players who are not among the world's top players can take part in ATP 250 tournaments, for example – 38 tournaments of this level are scheduled for the 2023 season. In comparison, there are only 23 tournaments in the WTA calendar, with 280 ranking points to be earned. The situation is even worse when looking at lower-level tournaments, or so-called challengers. In men's tennis, 137 tournaments are scheduled for 2023 [ATP Tour 2022], and WTA 125 events¹¹ only 17 [WTA Tour 2022]. This means a huge difference in starting opportunities for female tennis players who are not at the top of the ranking. However, once a 125-level tournament is held, it involves more competition, making it more difficult for female players outside the top 100 ranking to reach the later stages of tournaments. This makes it more difficult for them to earn wages that would cover the costs associated with weekly travel, paying for hotels, trainers, or physiotherapists. Unequal access to lower-level tournaments and lower prize pools have

been problematic for many years. This was pointed out by Falke et al. [2013]. According to them, the differences in wages between female and male tennis players are not only due to different productivity (popularity of matches, ticket prices, TV ratings), but also to the underfunding of mid- and low-level tournaments. The BBC [2016] created a summary table with the average prize pools for tournaments of each level in 2016¹² (Figure 3). Disparities are evident at every level, but the largest are for the ATP Masters 1000 and WTA Premier 5 tournaments. This was because women's competitions were of a *de facto* lower level, i.e., with fewer ranking points to be earned, and therefore involved a lower prize pool. An example of this practice is the organization of tournaments in Cincinnati or Rome. The existence of tournaments of the Premier 5 level can be considered a kind of ploy that allowed large disparities in prize pools to remain. Since fewer ranking points are awarded to women, this also means less prestige and thus lower prize pools. At the end of 2020, there were changes in the names of WTA tournaments. Thus, the Premier 5 and Premier Mandatory tournaments became 1000-level tournaments, which corresponds to the same name in ATP tournaments [WTA 2020]. Nevertheless, the disparity in prizes did not disappear with the change in nomenclature, and in fact became even more pronounced.

Figure 3. Prize pools in ATP and WTA tournaments by levels in 2016 (in millions of USD)



Source: BBC [2016].

Gender inequality in tennis can also be seen in the regulations. In 2018, Frenchwoman Alize Cornet was spotted wearing a back-to-front blouse during her first-round match at the US

Open. She quickly pulled it off and put it on correctly. However, the chief judge punished her with a warning as the reason, citing “unsportsmanlike conduct” [Suganuma 2023]. According to the current Grand Slam regulations, female tennis players can change clothes during the so-called toilet break, or a break dedicated to changing clothes. However, the regulations state that this should be done using the bathroom each time. However, analogous regulations do not apply to men, who regularly change their outfits during regular breaks between games. There have been many voices in the tennis world highlighting the discriminatory nature of such regulations. Both the WTA and the USTA (organizer of the US Open) have apologized to Cornet for such treatment. The financial penalty was also dismissed [Kelner and Lutz 2018]. This situation, however, showed how entrenched unequal treatment can be, even in such a simple matter as changing a shirt worn back-to-front. The issue of outfits is also controversial in women's tennis in another context. Wimbledon is known for its strong commitment to tradition. One such tradition is the all-white attire required of female tennis players [Tredway and Liberti 2018]. The female players pointed out that the rule should be modified because of menstruation. In 2023, Wimbledon organizers made their first-ever change to the rules and allowed female tennis players to wear underwear of a colour other than white [Bramley 2023, Wamsley 2022].

The status of women's tennis is also affected by the way the media report on the struggles of female tennis players. The introduction cites literature on this subject more distant in time. However, for example, Cooky et al. [2021] note that there has been no significant change in the way women's sports were covered over the 1989–2019 period. Male disciplines still have a dominant position. This difference affects the popularity of women's games. Slightly different conclusions are drawn by Musto et al. from their analysis of television broadcasts over the 1989–2014 period. [2017]. According to them, there has been a change and now the way women's sports competitions are shown and commented on is still disappointing, but mostly not humiliating or derogatory. Bruce [2014], on the other hand, emphasizes the role of third-wave feminism in the discourse on female athletes entitled “pretty and powerful,” which has helped improve the way women's sports are reported. Fink [2015], on the other hand, emphasizes that while more and more sport disciplines are opening to women's com-

petition, the media's reluctance to cover some of the games still affects perceptions of female athletes' abilities. What particularly draws attention, both in sport and in other areas of professional life, is the wage gap between men and women.

No less important is the tennis world's approach to motherhood. In the past, there was an opinion that getting pregnant would most likely mean the end of the female tennis player's career. This involved difficulties in rebuilding pre-pregnancy form or limited ability to provide childcare. This care is further complicated by almost weekly travels for 10–11 months of the year. Female tennis players who decided to return to the discipline after maternity leave had to start from scratch. For eight tournaments, female players could count on a so-called frozen ranking, but only on the condition that they would return to competition no later than two years after their last start [WTA Tour 2018]. Such a solution penalized female tennis players who wanted or were forced, for example, by complications related to childbirth, to postpone their return to competition for a slightly longer period. It was not until Serena Williams' pregnancy and her open defiance of the existing rules that the situation improved [Martin 2018]. At the end of 2018, WTA announced that with the start of the new season, the use of the "frozen ranking" will be possible for three years in case of pregnancy or long-term injury. Still, such a freeze does not entitle¹³ to be placed in the tournament ladder, but it avoids a female tennis player being seeded in the first round. The key, however, is an additional year to return, without which the female players would be forced to rely on the goodwill of the organizers of individual tournaments, who could hand out so-called "wild cards," i.e., special passes entitling them to compete regardless of ranking. However, not every female tennis player could count on such a privilege.

Conclusions

Women in tennis still face inequalities in both pay and their chances of success. Successive generations of female tennis players are trying to influence the tennis authorities to make equality demands a reality. Among others, Iga Świątek expressed regret concerning the inequality that still exists in tennis and said the WTA must fight harder to equalize wages [Reuters 2023]. In the case of men's tennis, there are still misogynistic comments disparaging fe-

male players [Moore 2012], but even in this field there is some improvement, bearing in mind the statements of Andy Murray or Denis Shapovalov. The former has made a name for himself by hiring a woman – Amelie Mauresmo – as his coach, he makes sure not to overlook women's achievements in tennis discourse and declares himself a feminist [Bolton 2015]. The latter openly called for equalization of wages for female tennis players at all levels of the game [The Canadian Press 2023]. While the support of men is important, the most important thing is still the involvement of those affected. It should also be noted that only inequalities closely related to sports competition were addressed. However, a separate issue is the question of advertising contracts' value, which in the case of male athletes can be many times higher than that of female athletes¹⁴. The commercialization of sports exacerbates the disparity and means that aggregate earnings can depend much more on advertising contracts than on sports performance.

Women's tennis has come an extremely long way and is in a much better position than most other sports. Figures such as Suzanne Lenglen, Billie Jean King and the Williams sisters have worked for decades for this status of the discipline. However, female tennis players still must deal with wage discrimination and fight for their rights.

¹ 1 guinea in current pounds equals about GBP 1,05.

² A tennis tour is an organized competition that is played in a different location around the world each week.

³ To this day, it is the only tournament in which all tennis players must play in white attire.

⁴ Her younger sister Serena is the winner of a record 23 Grand Slam singles tournaments.

⁵ Levels: 1,000, 500, 250 (the numbers denote the ranking points that the male winner/female winner of the tournament receives, although the distribution of points still looks a bit different in the case of the WTA due to the recent change in level names).

⁶ Tournaments organized by the ITF (International Tennis Federation).

⁷ Both the ATP tournament (Association of Tennis Professionals), as well as the WTA are of a 1000-level, i.e. the winner is awarded 1,000 ranking points.

⁸ She received just over EUR 520,000, while he received more than EUR 1.1 million. The prize pool for the ATP tournament was about EUR 6 million, while the WTA tournament – EUR 2.5 million.

- ⁹ The Rome tournament was presented as an example. Analogous phenomena can be seen in other ATP and WTA tournaments, where wage equality has not been introduced.
- ¹⁰ In 2017, Serena Williams did not participate in tournaments due to her pregnancy. Since her victory at the 2017 Australian Open until the end of 2021, women's tennis has added 10 new Grand Slam champions (i.e., female tennis players who have won a Grand Slam tournament for the first time in their careers). In comparison, between 2012 and 2016, there were only 5 new winners.
- ¹¹ This is the official name for tournaments that are a level below the 250-level tournaments, which are considered the equivalent of ATP Challenger tournaments in the women's game.
- ¹² At the time, the levels of the WTA tournaments were as follows (starting with the lowest): International, Premier, Premier 5 and Premier Mandatory. Some of the men's and women's competitions held at the same locations were of different levels. Hence the comparison between the ATP 1000 and the WTA Premier 5.
- ¹³ Seeding means that in the early stages of the tournament (usually in the first two rounds) you miss the other seeded female players, i.e., those who enter the tournament from the highest-ranking positions.
- ¹⁴ The top 10 highest-paid athletes in 2023 did not include a single woman [Knight 2023].

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