

Suzanne Lenglen (1899–1938)

Suzanne Rachel Flore Lenglen, who was born in Paris on 24 May 1899 and died on 4 July 1938, was a French tennis player. Nicknamed “the Goddess”, she was the first international star of women’s tennis, and the second show court at the Roland-Garros Stadium was named in her honour in 1997.

She revolutionised the game with the quality of her shots, her smash, her serve and her volley. She invented a new approach to clothing that enabled her to play better, and was the first female tennis player to wear short, pleated skirts that hit just above the knees, paired with a sleeveless cardigan and a tulle bandeau to keep her hair in check. She also bared her arms and her ankles.

Early tennis career

In 1910, when she was 11 years old, Suzanne’s father gave her a tennis racket so that she could play on the clay court at the family home. He quickly noticed his daughter’s skill and love for tennis and decided to coach her.

In 1914, at the age of 15, she won the World Hard Court Championships (the forerunner to the French Open) at Saint-Cloud, thus becoming one of the youngest ever female tennis champions. At Wimbledon in 1919, when she was 20, she faced British tennis star Dorothea Lambert Chambers, a seven-time winner of the tournament, in the final. To general surprise, it was Suzanne Lenglen who was victorious.

An astonishing list of records and achievements

Suzanne Lenglen scored two wins at the French Open, six at Wimbledon and the Olympic gold medal in the women’s singles competition at the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp.

She holds numerous records: 241 titles, a streak of 181 wins, and a 98% match victory rate (341 wins to 7 losses).

The reason the Monte-Carlo Country Club was founded

In 1925, having previously stepped away from the Monte-Carlo tournament, Suzanne Lenglen returned to compete in the Principality’s competition. George Pierce Butler, a rich American benefactor and tennis fan who greatly admired the world’s leading female player, felt that the Festa Club was not worthy of her talent.

The Principality’s tennis club had been moved from La Condamine to the roof of a garage in Beausoleil due to urban and real estate development in Monaco. Three courts had been built, along with several stands, a club house and a practice wall, and the venue had been officially opened on 28 January 1921 as the Festa Country Club.

So, the day after the 1925 tournament in which Suzanne Lenglen competed, George Pierce Butler lobbied the sporting authorities and the club’s owner, SBM, to build a new, more prestigious club.

The Club was officially opened with great pomp in February 1928 by H.S.H. Prince Louis II in the presence of various royals, including King Gustaf V of Sweden, an avid tennis fan, the Duke of Connaught, Prince Nicholas of Greece, Grand Duchess Elena and Grand Duke Andrei Vladimirovich of Russia. Ten months later, it was renamed the Monte-Carlo Country Club.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVOjBNwH-SM>