

# English tradition served American style

The Wimbledon tennis tournament may be an international event that attracts the world's top tennis players and be watched by millions around the globe, but it has always maintained its quintessentially English style, right down to the rain that so often stops play and the high-priced strawberries and cream served at the venue. But this year's event saw a change. Whilst the uniforms and outfits worn by the officials and ball girls and boys continue to epitomise English tradition, the new uniforms have been given an 'American' twist thanks to Polo Ralph Lauren.

The US apparel designer has been appointed official outfitter of Wimbledon for a five-year period through to 2010, and made its debut on court in June this year, making Polo Ralph Lauren the first designer in Wimbledon's 129-year history to create and outfit all on-court officials including chair umpires, line umpires and ball girls and boys.

## Not the first

What has made the new arrangement different is the inclusion of outfits for the ball girls and boys, all of whom come from local schools. In the late 1970s, Wimbledon went 'commercial' with a major sponsorship with ICI, then a major international player in a broad range of industries including fertilisers, paints, plastics and fibres, as well as pharmaceuticals. As part of the overall sponsorship, it was agreed that all of the umpires would wear the same blazers, all produced in ICI's Terylene/worsted fabric.

*Wimbledon's new look ball boy and girl outfits.*
*Ralph Lauren*



ICI had the special green fabric woven and the long-established fashion house, DAKS-Simpson, a company that had invented self-supporting, adjustable waistband trousers in the mid-1930s, was asked if it would make the bespoke blazers. The person handling the negotiations assumed that there were only some 20 or 30 umpires needed to control Wimbledon and agreed to take on the project.

Imagine his astonishment when told that all the officials on court were umpires and that they came from around the globe to spend their annual holidays officiating at the home of tennis each year. The problem then became one of how to get the over-200 officials measured accurately and convert them to match the individual shapes and sizes of the men and women descending on west London. There would be little or no time to make adjustments and this was before sophisticated CAD/CAM, body mapping and instant communications were available.

The job was done, and it wasn't the first time DAKS clothing had made the centre court at Wimbledon. Photographs of champions in the late 1930s clearly show that players were already playing in DAKS long white flannels taking full advantage of the then new waistband technology.



*Fred Perry (1909-1995), the last British tennis player to have won the Wimbledon men's singles title, in stylish action in July 1935, wearing DAKS trousers. Besides his three Wimbledon titles, he won the US singles three times, as well as the Australian and French championships*

*Science & Society Picture Library*





*Ralph Lauren's 'English' styling as featured in Wimbledon's new range of on-court uniforms.*

Ralph Lauren

## All England goes abroad

Some traditionalists criticised the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, which stages the event, for choosing an overseas supplier. And some of these cynics may believe they have been proved right, following a slight problem with the linesmen's trousers. These officials spend most of their time during matches bent over, watching the lines in order to call if a ball is out – the fact that some 60 pairs of the new trousers ripped in the first few days of the tournament due to the repeated bending action has caused a few, er… red faces. The problem was easily resolved by the arrival of an on-site tailor, but this highlighted the problem of combining fashion with function—not always as easy as it may appear.

In terms of the styling, however, the cynics have no reason to gripe and PG Wodehouse's Jeeves and Bertie Wooster would have approved. The collection produced by Polo Ralph Lauren is possibly more 'English' in appearance than that of any domestic brand. It reflects the history, heritage, and elegance of English tennis along with the traditions of the world's longest-standing tennis tournament, adding a contemporary twist on old-fashioned style.

All of the on-court officials wore rich navy and cream, combined with subtle accents of Wimbledon's signature purple and Bentley green. Umpires' uniforms included navy blazers with Concorde cream piping paired with cream trousers or skirts. The ball girls and boys wore uniforms in navy with sporty white striping. All of the uniforms also featured a newly designed Ralph Lauren/Wimbledon crest.

Inspired by this collaboration, Ralph Lauren has also launched an extended collection of men's, women's and children's casual sportswear with the signature Wimbledon colours adding a novelty finish to sportswear in crisp white and cream.

It seems that you don't have to be English to create 'le style anglais' and it can even be served with an American spin.