

Tiffany's Take On Tennis:

Are We Ready For the Comeback of Pleats?

By Tiffany Grayson of Coach Matt's Tennis & More,
the 2004 Nike Retailer of the Year

To pleat or not to pleat... what is the answer? Are we really reverting to the pleated skirts of old, or is there a new pleat in town? Well my friends, let me tell you – pleats are back, but beware of how you use them!



Chris Evert, Mary Jo Fernandez, Steffi Graff, and even Jennifer Capriati wore pleats... in the “old” days. We’ve spent the last five or more years phasing pleats out of our wardrobes to make room for the newer updated “athletic” fits of straight or a-line skirts with built-in compression shorts. Two years ago, we slid the pleated skirts even further into the back of our closets when manufacturers unveiled tennis shorts (some also with compression shorts) that could be worn on the court, in the gym, to lunch, and to run errands. Finally... a tennis outfit that could be worn around town without actually looking like we were living in our tennis togs!

But then there was Maria... Maria Sharapova, that is. Have you noticed her attire this year? Pleats. Pleated skirts and pleated dresses. The influence of the 1980s in the fashion world has accidentally leaked over into the tennis world and brought pleats back. Fortunately, they are not back with a vengeance, but with a flair for the fashion forward. Think low-rise and soft fabric. This is not the pleated skirt that gives even the skinny girl on your team a “bubble butt”. These skirts (and dresses) are designed for those who are interested in stepping slightly outside of the norm and adding fashion to their tennis game. These pleats are not the 360-degree-around, sitting high on your waist kind of pleats. They are often only partially pleated, pleated to one side for interest, mini pleats, or pleats that sit so low on your waist that they are attractive on almost any body type. And yes, I mean almost any body type. Even Serena Williams added some pleats to her wardrobe this year.

Now, just because pleats are making a comeback to tennis does not mean that we need to dig deep into our personal tennis archives and pull out “old faithful”, our favorite tennis skirt from the past. (Even if you are undefeated in it!) Leave the stiffer fabrics and bold geometric prints to the 1990s. The fabrics used for the skirts of this millennium are “performance-based” and are designed to absorb the moisture (sweat) that you are producing, thus keeping you cooler while you play. These fabrics are lighter-weight, softer, less binding than cotton, and easy to wash-and-wear. No ironing needed!

If pleats are not your fashion choice, there are still many styles to choose from. Soft flowing skirts are also making a comeback. Flirty, yet practical... although most of these do not come with built in compression shorts. There will also be the traditional straight skirt, a-line skirt, side-slit skirt, and border skirt (my personal favorite as it really does look good on ALL body types). You can also continue to find tennis shorts made by a variety of manufacturers and in assorted styles, colors, and cuts. All in all, there will be something for everyone. So back to our original question: Are we ready for the pleated comeback?

TRAINING TO PREVENT INJURY

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Injury prevention is one of the best reasons to add strength training to your workout. Yet, many people begin (or continue) to strength train in a way that does not reduce their injury risk. In fact, the way that many people strength train actually compounds their risk of injury, especially in key injury areas for tennis such as the elbow, knee, wrist and shoulder.

I see people on a daily basis who complain of pain from tennis (most often in their joints), yet they fail to comprehend that the strength-training workout they are doing is actually making it worse. An example of this is when people work their arms. Most gym equipment is designed for the masses, not the individual, so not all equipment is best for everyone. Some people, especially those with elbow issues, should stay away from bicep and tricep machines. While these machines are fine for many people, they do put added pressure on the elbow, which compounds the risk of injuring that elbow. There are lots of ways to work your arms more effectively. And, for the tennis player, you also need to focus on sports specific issues.

First, movements in your workout should emulate movements that you make on the court. Take your serve for example. The power movement that you make when you serve can be emulated with a cable pulldown. You want to ensure you are working your entire muscle group that supports that movement and you should do it on both sides, not just with your serving arm.

To learn more about how to train properly to get the most out of your tennis game and to prevent injuries, you should consult a personal trainer at your gym. Most trainers will offer you a free session to try it out. I wish you the same amazement with your game!

