

Tennis Following in the UK

After many of us have been engrossed in Wimbledon over the last couple of weeks, it is interesting to examine the following of The Championships in the UK, and the extent and degree to which Wimbledon followers engage with other professional tennis tournaments at home and abroad throughout the year.

Our primary source of data here is Sports Spotlight, the bi-weekly study of a nationally representative sample of 2,000 UK citizens, which we have run over a 12-month period together with our partner Populus Data Solutions. A summary of the findings of each fortnightly study is available on our website: <http://www.sportmr.co.uk>.

Following of tennis

At an overall level, tennis shows the third highest proportion of sports followed, just seven points behind football (often described as “our national obsession”).

Sport	Following
Football	44%
Athletics	38%
Tennis	35%
Motor Sport	27%
Gymnastics	26%
Rugby Union	25%
Swimming	25%
Snooker	24%
Cricket	23%
Cycling	23%

Interest in football, however, is at a higher level for most of its followers than interest in tennis or any of the other sports with a substantial following. Typically, two thirds of those saying that they follow football, say that they are ‘very’ interested in the sport. This contrasts with one third of those who say that they follow tennis. In terms of strong interest in following, football leads with around a third of the UK population with tennis attracting the strong interest of one in ten, along with athletics, motor sport, cricket and rugby union.

Who follows tennis?



What distinguishes the following of tennis from most other sports is the fact that there is an even male/female split among those who are ‘very’ interested. Men are three times as likely as women to say they are ‘very’ interested in motor sport, four times as likely to record strong interest in football and five times as likely to do so in respect of cricket. Anyone who has attended each of these sports live will recognise this from the observed profile of those around them. The even split among tennis fans must be attractive to sponsors seeking to target the female market.

Interest in following tennis is lowest amongst 16-24-year olds, although this, on the face of it, worrisome fact, needs to be considered alongside the fact that lower interest levels among young adults is reflected across most sports.

Pleasingly for tennis, interest levels are very consistent amongst all other age groups.

Wimbledon



Wimbledon is one of the very few events in the UK sporting calendar which outperforms its sport in terms of the numbers of people following it. Wimbledon interests 46% of the population, beaten only by Euro 2016 in terms of UK following over the last year. A quarter of people who follow Wimbledon, therefore, do not follow tennis to any significant degree throughout the rest of the year. No other major UK sporting event outperforms its own sport to anything like this degree.

In respect of Wimbledon following, the male/female split is again pretty even (52% male/48% female).

With an eye on targeting the young, the AELTC's 'In Pursuit of Greatness' campaign has been launched across digital and social media before hitting cinemas with 60-second films showing throughout the UK. The AELTC has said it will focus particularly on Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat in an effort to target the younger demographic.

It will also run out of home with ads at tube and railways stations local to the event. The campaign will also be launched globally as the Wimbledon brand seeks to penetrate the Asian market.



The Grand Slams



Wimbledon is in a league of its own in terms of the interest it generates among the wider population. One in six Wimbledon followers tell us that they are not interested in sport. The other 'Grand Slams' all attract high levels of interest but almost exclusively from sports fans.

Grand Slam	Following
French Open	26%
Australian Open	20%
US Open	19%

It is worth noting that the French Open has been covered by ITV in recent years and that it is held three weeks before Wimbledon and played at favourable times for UK audiences. Each of these is perhaps a contributor to the lead which Roland Garros has over the other two Slams, both of which are played in cities with a considerable time difference from the UK and, in terms of television coverage, have been covered only by Eurosport in recent years.

Beyond the Slams

The top six non-Slam UK tennis interest levels we have recorded over the last 12 months are:

Event	Following
Olympic Games Tennis	24%
GB v Argentina 2016 Davis Cup Semi	19%
France v GB 2017 Davis Cup Quarter	14%
ATP World Tour Finals	13%
ATP Shanghai Rolex Masters	8%
WTA Tour Finals in Singapore	8%

Those looking to change the format of the Davis Cup might like to note the popularity of the two key ties involving GB in the last 12 months. They would, however, probably point to the fact that levels of interest in ties not involving GB are markedly lower and that the equivalent truth applies elsewhere. There was, quite literally, dancing in the streets of Buenos Aires last December when Argentina claimed the Davis Cup for the first time by defeating Croatia. In the UK though, only 6% of the population recorded their intention to follow.

It is interesting to note also that the ATP World Tour Finals, though of interest to one person in eight, scores considerably below any of the Slams, despite being held in London, shown on the BBC and, in 2016, resulting in Andy Murray's elevation to the World number one ranking for the first time.

There is evidence of lower levels of interest in women's tennis than in men's tennis which is consistent with UK TV audience figures and event ticket sales. Contributors here may include the belief that men's tennis is experiencing a 'Golden Era' with a 'Big Four' arguably greater and more popular than we have ever seen, whilst the women's game may lack the long-term rivalries and style contrasts provided by Court v King, Evert v Navratilova and Graf v Seles. The achievements and popularity of Andy Murray must have helped too, contrasted with the relative doldrums of the women's game in

GB, until the very recent and encouraging achievements of Johanna Konta which have seen very pleasing TV audience figures for her matches.

The ATP Masters Series Events, effectively the second tier of men's tennis behind the Slams, attract the interest of 5-8% of the population. This is the 'hardcore' audience who, to some degree, appear to be following professional tennis most weeks. As with the broader group expressing strong interest in following the sport, these people are as likely to be women as men, an assertion very few mainstream sports can make.

Summary

For two weeks of the year, close to half the country will follow Wimbledon, though a quarter of these people will abandon their interest once the final ball has been hit at SW19 and resume their following when the defending champion plays the first point on Centre Court 50 weeks later.

Beyond this, however, there are one in five UK citizens who will follow the other Slams, with a substantial proportion also following GB's Davis Cup ties and the World Tour Finals.

The proportion following tennis most weeks is more like 7%.

These figures, whilst far behind weekly following of football, are bolstered by the even gender and age split that few sports enjoy and the relative affluence of the audience, which to the right sponsors, must look very attractive indeed. This is true even beyond Wimbledon which enjoys the luxury of being able to pick and choose its partners and has many partner relationships with extraordinary longevity. The current Championships are the 105th for Slazenger and 82nd for Robinsons, whilst Lanson is currently celebrating 40 years association with the event and has been the official champagne supplier for the last 16 years.

