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'All frocked up in purple': Rosie Casals, Virginia Slims, and the politics of fashion at Wimbledon, 1972

ABSTRACT

In 1972 Rosemary (Rosie) Casals, an established player in women's tennis and winner of several doubles championships at Wimbledon, appeared on the court of the staid English event in a tennis dress with a purple design with a 'VS' (Virginia Slims – a cigarette brand marketed to a female audience) embroidered on her outfit. The next day she appeared on the number one court for the women's doubles semi-final match with the cigarette insignia clearly displayed across the front of the athletic wear. Instructed to adhere to Wimbledon's dress code of 'predominantly' white outfits, officials warned Casals would be banned from further play if she did not comply. Forced to obey Wimbledon dress codes, Casals conceded, though not without a verbal assault directed at tournament officials. In this paper we argue, analysing oral history as well as various press reports in the US and abroad, that Casals' ensemble and the reaction by officials and those in the media symbolized far more than a perceived fashion faux pas by the tennis star. Rather, Casals' attire and public reaction to it throw into sharp relief debates around equal rights and

KEYWORDS

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female independence that raged throughout society during the late 1960s and 1970s. Importantly, the discussions and tensions in relation to Casals' tennis outfit did not simply mirror these broader conversations they contributed greatly to them. The dress, like Casals, challenged rules of conduct on the court – and social convention off it. The attire was, for her, a form of self-expression, which personified a style she was eager to portray to a public, some of whom were not necessarily similarly keen on its exhibition.

In 1972, Rosemary 'Rosie' Casals, an established player in women's tennis and winner of several doubles championships at Wimbledon, appeared on Centre Court of the staid English event in a tennis dress with a purple design with a 'VS' (Virginia Slims – a cigarette brand marketed to a female audience) embroidered on her outfit. Instructed to adhere to Wimbledon's dress code of 'predominantly' white outfits, and reprimanded for advertising cigarettes on her clothing, officials warned Casals would be banned from further play if she did not comply. Forced to obey Wimbledon dress codes, Casals conceded, though not without a verbal assault directed at tournament officials. Others too, including many in the press, in the United States and beyond, took note of and commented on Casals' fashion choice and the tennis establishment's response. Rather than scuttle away after this reprimand over her choice of dress, Casals instead, in her characteristically brash style, did the opposite. The very next day, Casals' decision to wear a dress with an even more overt nod to

Figure 1: Rosemary Casals' 'Purple VS' dress (c. 1972), designed and created by Ted Tinling. Photo courtesy of the International Tennis Hall of Fame, Newport, Rhode Island.

Virginia Slims earned her a second admonishment from tournament officials, along with the threat of a lifetime ban from Wimbledon.

Rosie Casals was born in San Francisco, California, on 16 September 1948. Her parents, of Salvadoran descent, returned to El Salvador when Casals was an infant, leaving the future tennis great and her older sister, Victoria, in the care of their great-uncle and great-aunt, Manuel and Maria Casals. Manuel taught Rosie and Victoria how to play tennis at the Golden Gate Racquet Club, a public tennis facility in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Though only 5′2½″ tall, Casals' game was aggressive and her overhead smash was her biggest weapon.

These skills and traits served Casals well and by the age of 16, she was the top-ranked junior and women's adult-division player in Northern California. By the age of 17, Casals was ranked eleventh of women in the United States. The following year, 1966, Casals and Billie Jean King began their domination of women's doubles by winning eight Grand Slam women's doubles championships total together, all at Wimbledon and the US Open. Casals won one more women's doubles title at the US Open in 1982, teaming with Wendy Turnbull. Casals also won two mixed doubles championships at Wimbledon with Ilie Năstase (in 1972; she was reprimanded the second time for her clothing in their semifinal match en route to this title) and one US Open mixed doubles title with Dick Stockton. In singles, Casals was a two-time finalist at the US Open in 1970 and 1971. Casals' Grand Slam tennis career spanned over twenty years, 1964–85, and she was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 1996.

In this article, we argue, analysing oral history, as well as various press reports in the United States and abroad, that Casals' sartorial choices and the reaction by officials and those in the media symbolized far more than perceived fashion *faux pas* by the tennis star. Rather, Casals' attire and public reaction to it throw into sharp relief debates around equal rights and female independence that raged throughout society during the late 1960s and 1970s. Importantly, the discussions and tensions in relation to Casals' tennis outfit did not simply mirror these broader conversations they contributed greatly to them. The dress, like Casals, challenged rules of conduct on the court – and social convention off it. The attire was, for her, a form of self-expression, which personified a style she was eager to portray to a public. She was also communicating her involvement with the Virginia Slims tour, an organization set up to promote women's equal rights in tennis. Casals was caught between the politics of fashion and the mandates of the tennis establishment not once, but twice. These dresses show the significance of a moment in women's tennis when particular politics in relation to fashion, race and class merged.

WIMBLEDON, JULY 1972

It was two years after the Virginia Slims tour was established that Rosie Casals stepped out on to Wimbledon's Centre Court in a contest against long-time rival and friend Billie Jean King in the women's singles semifinal round of the storied tournament. The match seemed a mundane afterthought to the press who concluded that King would win simply out of 'habit', given her dominance over Casals in past match-ups (Bellamy 1972). As anticipated, King won the tennis match in decisive fashion, 6–2 6–4, with the press taking little notice of either woman's athletic exploits on the court.

The real story for the press, as well as Wimbledon officials it seemed was instead found in Casals' choice of dress for the contest. Casals' white dress, with a patterned 'VS' in purple (the VS signifying Virginia Slims – US cigarette

maker Philip Morris' brand marketed to women) across a portion of the outfit, drew attention and was cause for consternation among some observers. The official colours of Wimbledon are purple and green and, as such, women often wear tennis clothing there that is white with purple and/or green accents. Casals' outfit, however, was signifying a cigarette company within its design. Casals was forced to change before play could continue, and she received a 'dressing down' from Wimbledon leadership after the match, according to the *Boston Globe* (Anon. 1972a).

The issue Wimbledon officials were grappling with was a convergence of both their institutionalized policy mandating predominantly white clothing as well as their flexible rules against advertisements on clothing, which were both filtered through a lens of sexism and the tennis establishment mindset that was opposed to the ever-strengthening Virginia Slims circuit. This can be understood through a viewing of Casals' choice of wearing a near duplicate of the white dress with purple 'VS' ribbons, this one with white 'VS' ribbons (2017), which caused no qualm with officials when she wore it on Wimbledon's outside courts during the first week of the tournament. Centre Court, a court where royalty and English elites were seated, added another layer of politics to the dress.

Despite having lost to King, Casals still had the opportunity to play more tennis, though Wimbledon officials may have wished otherwise. Casals returned to Centre Court the following day, with partner Ilie Năstase, to compete in the mixed doubles championship, this time in a white dress with 'Ginny', the Virginia Slims tennis icon, explicitly embroidered across the front. What disturbed Wimbledon officials most was that 'Ginny', in her traditional pose, is holding a racket in one hand and a long-stem cigarette in the other. The tournament establishment would have none of it and threatened a Casals/Năstase forfeit if the dress was not changed. Much like the first dress, this second ensemble unsettled Wimbledon sensibilities and thus was deemed inappropriate for its departure from traditional and expected white attire, as well as its commercial message (MacKenzie 1972b; Anon. 1972c, 1972b). Casals conceded and left Centre Court to change. Two reprimands in two days led Wimbledon officials to seriously reconsider whether she should be allowed to play at Wimbledon in the future, which she was.

The Casals dress controversy was by no means the first (or the last) fashion statement to transgress the bounds of tennis propriety at Wimbledon or elsewhere within the game and its history. It is not our intention to suggest that here. Rather what we are interested in exploring is the myriad tensions in play at the particular historical moment that Casals (and her tennis outfits) took to the court in Wimbledon in 1972. Casals' attire and responses to it throw into sharp relief a range of cultural exchanges around gender, women's changing roles in society, and ethnicity, as well as perspectives on increasing commercial interests in tennis – driven as they often times were by class-based anxieties.

Clothing matters – it is of significance. This perspective, one most recently and very keenly articulated by Jaime Schultz, drives the assumptions that form the foundation on which our observations rest in this article. Clothing is, according to Schultz, imbued with 'powerful political symbolism' (2014: 21). That argument is perhaps nowhere more apropos across the expanse of sporting sites and times, than in women's tennis history. 'From the moment women first picked up their rackets', Schultz notes, 'their attire inspired questions of decorum, social distinction, physicality, and femininity' (2014: 16). Not surprising, then, that the All England Club's Wimbledon tournament long celebrated

as a 'bastion of tradition and reverence for proper form', according to Patricia Campbell Warner, has been home to several perceived fashion *faux pas* by athletes over more than a century (2006: 51). Early in the twentieth century, May Sutton's exposed wrists and ankles caused quite a stir, as did Suzanne Lenglen's petticoat-less one-piece cotton frock in the early 1920s. Female athletes' careers, even their entire lives, were sometimes defined by the outfits worn on the court decades before. Gertrude 'Gussy' Moran's lace undergarments, for example, worn at Wimbledon in 1949 remained the cause of her celebrity in the athlete's obituary 64 years later, as the *New York Times* headline opined, 'Tennis Star Who Wore a Daring Wimbledon Outfit, Dies at 89' (Williams 2013). These examples, as well as others, each representing, 'sartorial points of change' (Schultz 2014: 16), according to Schultz and are filled with historical import. Cultural tensions writ large on these dresses. The Casals Virginia Slims episode at Wimbledon and the aftermath in the press symbolized massive changes afoot in the sport of tennis and across US/British society in the early 1970s.

Gussy Moran's dress, as with the two dresses worn by Casals at the 1972 Wimbledon, were designed and created by the tennis couturier Ted Tinling (see e.g., Tredway 2016b). Tinling described his method for creating individualized dresses for each player when he stated that:

> You see, when you dress a player you must take into account both her personality and the way she hits a ball. I would never dare dress a player without seeing her play. And sometimes the person and the player can be quite contradictory. I originally objected when Billie Jean wanted frillier dresses, but I went along with her and put her into the sequin business — I called it my firefly collection — because she was big enough to pull it off. They said she looked like an aging rock queen, but in the context of her majesty, that was a compliment.
>
> (DeFord 1984)

Tinling crafted each dress to the personality and special requests of its owner, and no two dresses were alike.

Rosie Casals and the embroidered 'purplish pattern of squiggles' (Virginia Slim initials, VS) on her dress disrupted established tennis tradition (MacKenzie 1972a). Even in the years leading up to Wimbledon 1972, Casals' on/off the court actions and mere presence played havoc with the sports largely white male elite. Her identity, as a Latina who was raised in a working class community, challenged convention, affirming Casals' place on the sport's boundaries. Her outspokenness and unapologetic athleticism cemented Casals' outsider status, leading one observer to comment in 1974, that the athlete was 'a classic rebel [and] pugnacious outcast from the wrong side of the tracks' (Lichtenstein 1974: 52). Another observer, in the same year, spoke to Casals' direct style and the ways the athlete posed a challenge to the dominant gender order. Casals 'represents herself in a way that provokes antagonism. She hides behind no fluttering, mendacious "femininity". It is as though she collects everything that women are not allowed to be or feel and throws it all uncompromisingly beyond every stereotype' (Bell 1974: 40).

The ambivalent attitude that sometimes greeted Casals, as a result, did not slow her rise to elite levels in the sport, however. Casals' athletic talents quickly took her far from the public tennis courts in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park by the mid-1960s. By the 1972 dress controversy Casals had long

been among the top ten players in women's tennis, with five Wimbledon championship trophies in doubles events to her credit (International Tennis Hall of Fame 1996).

VIRGINIA SLIMS TENNIS

Casals was very much a central player on the court and off it in 1972, as several professional female tennis athletes battled with the United States Lawn Tennis Association for respect – largely in the form of a greater share of tournament prize money. The Virginia Slims tour began in late 1970 as a response to the severely inequitable space afforded women in tennis' fledging 'open' era – serving as a challenge to the USLTA's hegemony within and over the sport (Festle 1996: 145–47; Ware 2011: 32). The broader cultural forces of change driven by the women's movement also swept across elite professional tennis, with Rosie Casals and the world's number one player, Billie Jean King, as the rebellion's ringleaders of the Original 9, nine women who faced expulsion from tennis for their efforts in creating a separate tennis tour for women (see e.g., Tredway 2016a). Casals and King had little time or patience with those who refused to acknowledge what they believed was their right, the opportunity to play professional tennis and be compensated at a rate commensurate to the elite athletes they were. While other top female athletes were reticent in aligning publicly with the broader women's rights movement, Casals was eager to join the struggle. Unlike many of her peers early on, including Billie Jean King, Casals saw many parallels with the issues in women's tennis and those being battled over by feminists (Casals 2014a). Casals unabashedly made her case in a *Time* magazine article in December 1970 when she posited, 'We expend the same amount of energy as the men. We practice as much. We play just as hard. We contribute our share to the success of a tournament' (Anon. 1970). As Casals said later, she and the other female athletes could 'put fannies in the seats' and thus they deserved better and more equitable treatment from the tennis establishment (Casals 2014a).

By the summer 1972, the tensions between the United States (Lawn) Tennis Association and those in support of the Virginia Slims circuit were at their height as the two sides wrestled for control of women's professional tennis (Festle 1996: 144–53). Female players' demands for change were one aspect of a much larger transformation of the commercial landscape of tennis in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Television's ever more central and powerful place in sport, including tennis, ushered in an increasing valuable (and profitable) revenue stream. Corporate interest in sport, specifically tennis, 'proved its worth' beginning in the 1960s and tobacco companies featured prominently in that growth (Whannel 2009: 211). With the passage of laws prohibiting tobacco advertising on television and radio in Great Britain in 1965 and the United States in 1970, cigarette companies, including Philip Morris, moved more aggressively to direct sponsorship of sporting events. Phillip Morris' cigarette brand Virginia Slims was introduced in 1968 and marketed exclusively to women (Whannel 2009: 211). Philip Morris created the Virginia Slims, a cigarette longer and more slender than a regular cigarette, which was meant to appeal to women, as a balance to the Marlboro mystique of manliness.

By 1970, historian Ruth Rosen notes, the advertising industry, including those at Philip Morris, realized the women's movement was not only exciting but profitable and thus was eager to 'sell liberation' to women. Doing their part, Rosen contends, the media 'helped translate and transform American

feminism into a universe of goods and services that promoted liberation' (2000: 301). Perhaps there is no better illustration than the Virginia Slims slogan, 'You've Come a Long Way, Baby' which traded on feminist sensibilities and sold it back to women, creating one of the most successful advertising campaigns in years.

Women's tennis was not simply a market that could be exploited for corporate gains. Joseph Cullman, the CEO of Philip Morris, described his interest in increasing the diversity and changing tennis's reality as a largely upper-class sport. As he explains:

> I became interested in tennis as a 'project' in the 1960s, when the sport was dominated mostly by club types who played at restricted clubs. […] I was not happy with the lack of diversity – racial, religious, gender, and economic – of the players and those in the stands. There were a few outside the mold earlier – very few. […] More change was on the way, in the form of Pancho Gonzales, Althea Gibson, Arthur Ashe, Manuel Santana, Billie Jean King, and a host of other minority and women players. It was something like the situation Jackie Robinson faced in baseball after the war. I appreciated that it takes time for people to change attitudes, but tennis wasn't moving fast enough until the Marlboro CBS-TV national sponsorship changed things.
>
> (Cullman 1998: 173, 175)

Truth be told, it was not solely Marlboro advertising that began to create a change in people's attitudes, but the television broadcast of the US Championships more broadly. Cullman explains further:

> Now for my role in tennis, and my attempts to address some of the sport's problems. In 1968, I had become part of the tennis 'establishment.' I was active in helping get the U.S. Championship held at Forest Hills nationally televised for the first time on CBS and sponsored by Marlboro. This national TV broadcast of the U.S. championships changed tennis from a white shoe club sport to a sport for all Americans. In 1969 and again in 1970 I served as chairman of the U.S. Open.
>
> (1998: 174)

Indeed, the televised aspect of the US Championships is what changed people's perceptions, not Marlboro's involvement per se. It was Cullman's foresight to bring tennis to the masses through television that changed people's perception. Marlboro, through Cullman's positioning as the CEO of Philip Morris, was just the vehicle he used to put his ideas into action.

Cullman was eager to support the fledgling women's tennis tour with Virginia Slims sponsorship. Describing the original tournament in Houston, Cullman wrote:

> The women's tournament, to be held at the Houston Racquet Club, was originally to be called the Houston Invitational, but when Gladys – who was a good friend of mine – told me what was going on and that she was looking for corporate support, I saw a unique opportunity to support women's tennis. I saw the Houston tournament as a chance to support the women's game and as a unique sponsorship opportunity for Philip Morris. So we put up $2,500 and had the name of the event

> changed to the Virginia Slims Invitational. The tournament, which had total prize money of $7,500, was won by Rosie Casals and marked the birth of the women's professional tennis tour.
>
> (1998: 176)

The Virginia Slims Circuit was born when, as Cullman explains,

> within a week after the first Virginia Slims Invitational [in Houston] in November 1970, we were able to announce that Virginia Slims would sponsor eight women's tournaments, each in a sixteen-draw format beginning in January 1971. And the rest is tennis history. […] By the end of 1971 there were sixty-four women competing in tournaments for about $225,000.
>
> (1998: 177)

Furthermore, in exalting the success of the Virginia Slims tour, Cullman asserts,

> in 1972, with Virginia Slims' continued support, two $100,000 events took place, one in Boca Raton, Florida, and the other in Hilton Head, South Carolina. That same year Billie Jean King became the first female athlete in history to win $100,000 in prize money – a lot of money at that time – in a single year.
>
> (1998: 177)

Indeed, women's tennis was growing at an incredibly rapid pace, not only in terms of prize money distribution but with the increase in players as well. Cullman sums up the history of the tour nicely when he says, 'the Virginia Slims Tour, which culminated annually with the women's championship at Madison Square Garden, became one of the most successful promotions in women's sports history and lasted for more than twenty years' (1998: 177). In describing efforts to get the fledgling women's tennis tour to grow, Casals stated in retrospect that 'in many ways it was scary taking these chances but mostly it was exhilarating' (Casals 2014b).

Casals had little or no concern, then or now, regarding the cigarette company's sponsorship of the women's tour. Philip Morris had the 'muscle and the money', Casals concedes, when there were few other advocates for women's sport with deep pockets. She adds, it wasn't as though in exchange for financial backing Philip Morris wanted you to 'pick up a cigarette and smoke it' (Casals 2014a). Though the irreverent Casals did just that on at least one occasion. During a post-game press conference in the early 1970s after a match with Margaret Court, Casals reportedly took a cigarette out of the hands of an observer saying, 'a good athlete's got to puff' (Lichtenstein 1974: 65). Indeed, Casals, in describing her smoking habit, asserts, 'sometimes I drink a rum and coke, or a Bloody Mary. Oh, and Creme de Menthe, that's my favourite drink. And I like a beer after dinner, when I have the one cigarette of the day' (Murray 2013). This begs the question: is it advertising or personal preference. For Casals, it seemed, a happy comingling of the two.

THE FEMINIST POLITICS OF WIMBLEDON, 1972

It was into this moment in history that Rosie Casals, dressed as she was in Virginia Slims inscribed attire, stepped onto Centre Court at the All-England Club for her match against King. The press, particularly in Britain, jumped on

the story. 'Dress Row at Wimbledon' read the front-page headline of the *Daily Express* after the first incident. The embroidered VS script in purple, the daily noted, 'spelt advertising', thus the dress, and Casals if she wore it again, were to be banished from the tournament. Though the marketing of a US cigarette brand was of sufficient gravity to warrant a scolding from tournament officials, the paper added that the dress was also 'too colourful' for Wimbledon standards (MacKenzie 1972a). The 'blatant advertising' on her dress more so than its hue was clearly the issue the following day as Casals and her partner, Ilie Năstase took the court for their mixed doubles championship match. Năstase playfully attempted to use his racket to hide the Virginia Slims 'you've come a long way baby' motif centred on the front of Casals' outfit as tournament officials first took notice of the dress (MacKenzie 1972b).

Wimbledon officials, and referee Mike Gibson in particular, were not amused by Năstase's antics or Casals' choice of dress. Front-page headlines in the British press the next day made that clear. 'Miss Casals', opined the *The Times* of London, 'tried to flout the traditions of Wimbledon and if she tries it again I am sure the committee will withdraw her from the championships' (Anon. 1972c). Wimbledon's paternalistic tone in response to Casals' dress challenge was threaded through press reports as the *Daily Express* front-page image pictured 5'2" Casals standing across the net from the much taller Gibson with the headline 'Off to the dressing room, Rosie! This time her "Ad" outfit is rejected'. The referee looks down on the short statured athlete while the caption reads, 'Authority steps in' (MacKenzie 1972b). Never one to be silenced, Casals' sharp retort in press reports underscored the decision's hypocrisy, in her view. Casals, in pointing out the double standard, argued:

> Capt. Gibson [the head referee at Wimbledon] said he couldn't allow such blatant advertising but they can't have it both ways. […] If they won't allow Virginia Slims advertising then they shouldn't allow the Fred Perry leaf on shirts, the British Leyland cars that take the players to their hotels, or the Commercial Union results board giving the placings to date in the Grand Prix organized by the firm.
>
> (Anon. 1972b)

Indeed, Casals was not advertising cigarettes. She was advertising the Virginia Slims circuit. Its ever-growing success, however, disrupted the tennis establishment, which was still controlled by men.

Bud Collins, *Boston Globe* journalist and tennis commentator, was one of the more vocal critics of Wimbledon for its actions against Casals. In his *Globe* column, Collins mocked Wimbledon leadership for their unyielding adherence to an outdated dress code for athletes. 'To Wimbledon officials who reside comfortably in 1877', Collins chided, 'the dress was more purple than D. H. Lawrence's prose' (Collins 1972a: 30). However, in Collins' view Wimbledon's response to the dress was much more than simply an overreaction to a perceived fashion misstep. In an intensely satirical three-page essay in *World Tennis* entitled, 'All frocked-up in purple', Collins makes clear that the Wimbledon incident was a space in which Casals (and her purple frock) disrupted racial, gender and class arrangements of power. Unsettling the 'bland is beautiful' games-playing in England, Casals challenged the 'sartorial white supremacy' at the tournament according to Collins. As a result, the athlete was 'chastised chillingly'. In a parody of the Casals controversy, set in

Medieval England, Collins writes of observers' ambivalence expressed towards and about Casals. 'Once upon a turf', he begins, 'a soulful little girl named Rosie' captured the public's attention as her feats of 'uncommon agility' were entertaining to many. However, a critical mass of others disliked her 'carefree nature' believing it 'unbecoming a female', exposing her 'waywardness and wickedness' in the process (Collins 1972b: 23).

The gendered connotations were equalled, in Collins' view, by the racial and ethnic dimensions of the dress controversy. The presence of a non-white dress threw the crowd into a 'state of shock' as though they were seeing, 'a purple cow in Guernsey, a pink elephant in Tanzania, or a black legislator in South Africa' (Collins 1972b: 23). Casals represented a 'dangerous purple dragon' in Collins' medieval story – a dragon who 'imperiled' a 'way of life' (Collins 1972b: 25). Collins continued his story with Capt. Mike Gibson saying to Casals:

> It would be less serious, you understand, if you were a genuine, fire-breathing, air-polluting dragon in a white dress. Nobody would mind as long as you were predominantly white. 'Are you kidding?' retorted Rosie, 'Predominantly white went out with the crossbow. How come you let Evonne [Goolagong] and Arthur [Ashe] play?' 'Another matter entirely,' scowled Capt. Mike. 'Non-white complexions are now permitted because they are beyond the owner's control but apparel is controllable. You should have used self-control. This meadow is only for proper little ladies and gentlemen'.
>
> (Collins 1972b: 24)

Casals and her dress, as narrated in Collins' fable, signified difference and thus were perceived as threats to the dominant social order. In the fictive story's end, Casals is 'let off lightly' as Capt. Mike arranged for her to be a stowaway on a Spanish galleon. The dress (given all that it symbolized) suffered a violent end as it was drawn and quartered with an axe – and finally burned. The penalty a steep one for those, like Casals, who pushed and transgressed the grassy boundaries of Wimbledon.

Concluding the piece in the present-day moment, Collins says that Wimbledon authorities' warnings directed at Casals could not have been serious and thus must have simply been a publicity stunt. How else could such egregious actions be explained? Sarcastically Collins quips, tournament officials, 'wouldn't be so gauche as to try to dictate to a young woman what she should or should not wear in the year 1972, would they?' (Collins 1972b: 25). On one level Collins' remarks on the reaction to Casals' attire reflect debates around equal rights and female demands for respect that raged throughout society and within tennis. Importantly, as well, Casals' presence brought colour, in more ways than one, to a cultural site with incredibly narrow understandings of decorum, steeped as it was in class and race privilege.

The feminist politics that Casals' two dresses illuminated did not go unnoticed. As Scott Murray described,

> given that Virginia Slims were involved in tennis in the first place only because the likes of Wimbledon were refusing to pay the women anything close to equal money, it could be argued that the Captain was being a cheeky bastard.
>
> (2013)

Murray continues with his beratement of Gibson:

> The Captain – either interested in crisp, clear, traditional costume design or hell-bent on reinforcing the patriarchy, you make the call – ordered Casals to return to the dressing room and slip into something a little more comfortable for him. The player protested that she had already worn the dress twice at the championships. 'I said it must have been on a back court and had not been drawn to my attention,' sniffed the Captain later, 'because had it been, I would have ordered her to change it.' He clearly wasn't in the habit of looking very hard, because on the other side of the net Betty Stove of Holland was wearing a similar design, but with Casals in the firing line, she slipped under the Captain's radar.
>
> (2013)

Gibson was the public face of the men – it was only men at the time – who governed tennis. Thus, it is impossible to know whether Casals overstepped the dictates for acceptable fashion at Wimbledon, or whether her nod to Virginia Slims with two different dresses made the tennis establishment feel like their power to control tennis and the female players was unravelling.

CONCLUSION

Speaking recently about the events at Wimbledon 42 years earlier, Casals was quick to position the incident amid (and as a result of) the shifting landscape upon which tennis had rested for so long. The transition to open tennis and female athletes' demands for more money shook Wimbledon's core, in Casals view. Perceived as a provocateur who caused disruption to the 'sacred tournament' (Casals 2014a), Casals claims officials wanted to set an example and her dress served as the entry point for that to happen. The entire episode, Casals countered, gave the Virginia Slims circuit more publicity 'and I loved it!' (2014a).

At the risk of ending this article with a bad pun […] or two – let us reiterate the importance of 'unpacking the dress.' Casals' Virginia Slims attire helps to throw into sharp relief a deeply contested moment in history. Casals' dress and the responses it evoked cannot/should not be divorced from the subjective spaces she embodied as a woman of colour, raised in a working-class community. Moreover, Casals' Latina identity, coupled with her challenge to long-standing codes in tennis surrounding amateurism and commercialism, informs and adds depth to the political meanings attached to the purple swatches of fabric she wore on centre court four decades ago. The Virginia Slims dresses, then, serve as important conduits for a closer look at how various lines of power are negotiated and struggled over. In unpacking the dress we are much more fully able to explore material matters.

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