

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

By Simon Cambers

For a tournament that was first held 135 years ago, Wimbledon has always done a great job in holding on to its past while setting the trends at the same time. That combination is never more obvious than in 2012, when its history and its future will be very much on show.



It was the former Wimbledon chief executive, Ian Ritchie, who put it so well. "Wimbledon is renowned for its heritage and sense of tradition," he said. "But at the same time we are always looking to improve the presentation of The Championships by successfully blending that tradition with innovation."

Surely no other sporting event manages to marry the two quite so seamlessly. When the old No.1 Court was knocked down, many felt it would ruin the unique feel of the place but the Millennium Building which now stands on the old site looks as if it has been there for decades. So, too, the installation of the sliding roof over Centre Court, which despite its ambition caused minimal disruption to The Championships.

The 2012 Championships are no different with heritage and innovation sat side by side courtesy of a stunning exhibition of Olympic history on show in the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum, a ground-breaking new deal with American broadcaster ESPN and a brand new offering called Live @ Wimbledon, an interactive television and

radio service on the official website that hopes to set new standards for others to follow.

Visitors to the Museum have long been enthralled by the exhibits which work hard to enhance the fan experience. From the "ghost" of three-times champion John McEnroe to Martina Navratilova's 1990-winning dress among the Museum's attractions, the 2012 exhibition promises to outdo what has gone before as it charts the history of tennis in the Olympic Games.

As London prepares to stage the Games for the third time, having hosted it first in 1908 and again in 1948, London 2012 will have just three weeks to prepare from the end of The Championships until the first ball is struck in the Olympic tennis event.

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**HONOR GODFREY
MUSEUM CURATOR**

Above: Rafael Nadal's Olympic gold medal, 2008



Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer and Andy Murray will all be trying to get on the medal podium and if they need a reminder of just how far tennis has come since the early Olympic days, then perhaps they could pay a visit to the exhibition.

Both Nadal and Federer have loaned their Olympic gold medals from the 2008 Games in Beijing, while items belonging to players in both earlier Olympics will also be on show.

"What we've tried to do is to give a flavour of what each of those Olympics was like," says Honor Godfrey, who has been the Museum curator for 12 years. "I've tried all the way along to link the Games in to Wimbledon's history and what was happening in tennis at the time. If you've got the medals that go with some of the players then I think that's amazing. The two medals from defending champions from Beijing are fascinating objects to be able to show.

"We're hoping to display all the items that we have in our collections that relate to the Olympics. For example, there is a little showcase that's devoted to Kathleen McKane. She was given a series of five little Olympic pins in the 1980s and those are on display as well as her record number of five medals."

Godfrey has spent much of the past few years researching the unique stories associated with tennis in the Olympics. After the 1924 Games, tennis was not an Olympic sport again until 1988, when Stefanie Graf and Miloslav Mecir won gold.

"I've been interested in telling a story attached to each Olympics," Godfrey

said. "One of my favourites is about Richard Williams and Helen Wightman, who won the mixed doubles in Paris in 1924. Mixed doubles hasn't been played since (it's back in this time) so even though they're both dead, they're actually the reigning champions, which I think is a really nice story.

"Richard Williams survived The Titanic disaster after hours in the freezing water. He was rescued by The Carpathia and was in danger of losing both legs. But he walked and walked around the ship and restored the circulation in his legs and later was able to obviously play tennis and hit great heights again."

As the top players try to make their own pieces of Olympic history, Wimbledon will also be continuing to innovate. The Sony 3D exhibition and cinemas that captured fans' attention in 2011 are back, allowing people to test out the experience of watching tennis in 3D. But it is the landmark 12-year deal with American broadcaster ESPN which shows just how far Wimbledon has come and how far it is determined to push the boundaries of the viewing and listening experience.

The BBC and ESPN have joined forces with Wimbledon to create "Live @ Wimbledon", which will aim to replicate for fans the experience they would have if they were at the All England Lawn Tennis Club themselves.

Through the website and the Club's mobile applications, viewers in the UK and the Americas will be given an interactive experience never seen before at any of the Grand Slam events. For a

Tim Henman's Olympic silver medal, 1996

minimum of five hours per day, a live presentation will provide all the colour of the Grounds, whilst bringing live coverage of crucial moments from each of the most important matches.

Listeners from every country will be able to hear point by point coverage of everything that happens on Centre Court and No.1 Court, while reporters stationed around the Grounds will ensure that nothing is missed.

With their 12-year commitment to The Championships, ESPN will carry innovative features from "behind the velvet ropes" while Live @ Wimbledon will take The Championships' technological experience even further into the 21st century. And before too long, as the sport continues to expand around the world, it may well be possible to experience the Wimbledon website in both Mandarin and Spanish.

It is a blend of tradition and innovation of which Wimbledon can be proud. As Novak Djokovic, the defending champion, put it: "All this history and tradition which we have in Wimbledon, it's enough to just have a look. For me it's the most prestigious and the highest possible tournament in all of sports."

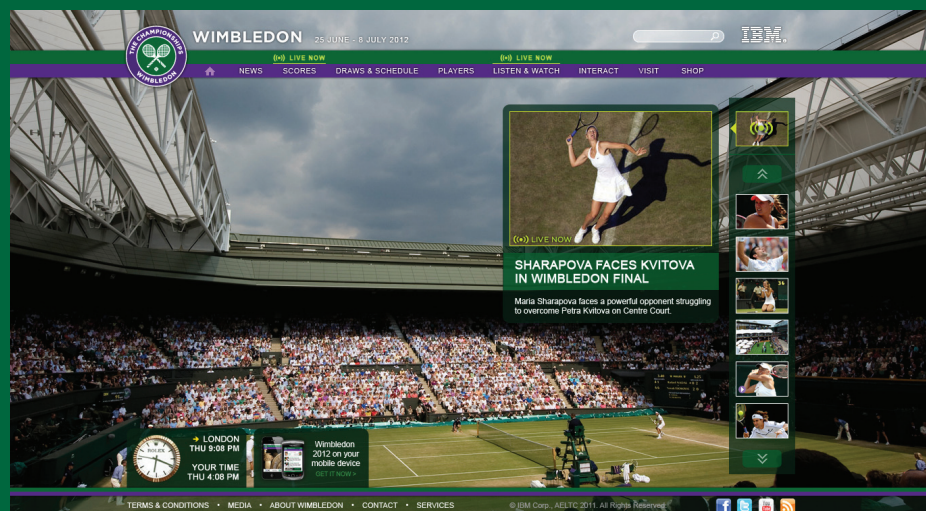
Wimbledon, it seems, is determined to make sure it stays that way.



WHAT IS LIVE @ WIMBLEDON?

A special interactive service on the official website and mobile applications, offering at least five hours per day of live TV coverage, and all-day radio coverage, also on local FM frequency, throughout The Championships.

Live @ Wimbledon TV, presented by Mats Wilander and Annabel Croft, is available to users in the UK and the Americas (excluding Brazil) only. **Live @ Wimbledon radio**, available worldwide, will be presented by Marcus Buckland and Mary Rhodes, with ball-by-ball commentary on Centre Court and No.1 as well as reports from around the Grounds.



Live @ Wimbledon is available from 9am on Wimbledon.com