

WILLIAM “BIG BILL” TILDEN II

b. February 10, 1893

d. June 5, 1953

TENNIS CHAMPION

“Never change a winning game; always change a losing one.”

**He was the No. 1
player in the world
for six years, from
1920 to 1925.**

Bill Tilden is considered one of the greatest men’s tennis champions in history. He was the No. 1 player in the world for six years, from 1920 to 1925. During that time, he became the first American to win Wimbledon.

Born to privilege in Philadelphia, he first picked up a racket as a small child. By the time he was 22, he had lost both parents and his brother. Struggling with immense grief, he preoccupied himself with tennis, which became his primary means of recovery. He wrote about the game in several noteworthy books, including “Match Play and the Spin of the Ball.” By 27, he had attained championship status.

Tilden’s countless wins include 14 major singles titles: a World Hard Court Championship, 10 Grand Slams and three Pro Slams. He also won a record seven U.S. Championships. His all-time tennis achievements include a career match-winning record and winning percentage at the U.S. National Championships.

Tilden won his third and final Wimbledon in 1930 at age 37, before turning pro. He was the oldest man to win a Wimbledon singles title. He went on to tour and was notorious for holding his own against much younger players. When Tilden was 52, he and his longtime doubles partner, Vinnie Richards, won the professional doubles championship—the same title they had won 27 years earlier.

Tilden was considered quite flamboyant. He dabbled in acting on stage and in film, and rumors about his homosexuality circulated. When he was arrested and imprisoned twice for sexual misbehavior with teenage boys, his world collapsed. He was shunned by his fans and fellow players and banned from teaching tennis at most clubs. Questions remain about whether he was targeted because of his sexuality. At the time, homosexual sex was illegal.

In 1959, Tilden was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport, Rhode Island.



© ASSOCIATED PRESS

