

How Tennis Shoes Came to Be

The tennis shoe – also known as the “sneaker” – has its roots in the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s. With new materials like vulcanized rubber and new production methods like assembly lines, manufacturers could make shoes more cheaply and more efficiently (previously, each shoe had to be produced by hand by a shoemaker). While some of the brands we know today – Keds, Converse, Adidas – were introduced in the early Twentieth Century, tennis shoes stayed the domain of athletes until Hollywood picked up on the fashion, first in the 1930s, and then again in the 1950s. Since then, they have become part of the official uniform of kids around the world.



Early Tennis Shoe Timeline

1800s	The first inexpensive rubber-soled shoes, called <i>plimsolls</i> , were manufactured in England
1892	A little rubber shoe company named Goodyear – later known for its automobile tires – manufactures rubber and canvas shoes under different names, finally settling on Keds
1908	Marquis M. Converse establishes the Converse Shoe Company to make athletic shoes, thus revolutionizing the game of basketball and becoming an American icon
1917	Keds are the first mass-marketed athletic shoes in America; they become popular with boaters, cheerleaders and small children
1920	German shoemaker Adi Dassler begins producing handmade training shoes in his mother's washroom
1931	Dassler's new company, Adidas, produces its first athletic shoe
1935	Converse's new style of “tennis shoes” (made for tennis champion Jack Purcell) become a staple of early Hollywood and the “bad boy” crowd
1950s	Sneakers become a symbol of rebellion for teenagers around the world; the fashion is “officially” sanctioned when teen idol James Dean is photographed wearing denim jeans and white sneakers

Test Your Tennis Shoe Knowledge

Tennis shoes are called different names around the English-speaking world. Match the country with the shoe.

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|--------------------|-------------------|
| _____ England | 1. Runners |
| _____ Australia | 2. Takkies |
| _____ America | 3. Tennie Runners |
| _____ South Africa | 4. Sandshoes |
| _____ Canada | 5. Trainers |

Why did advertising agent Nelson McKinney call tennis shoes “sneakers”? Was it because...

- A. ... they were the same color as his favorite dog, “Sneakers”
- B. ... their soles were quiet and made no noise on any surface
- C. ... their first name, “squeakers” (after the sound they made on basketball courts), didn't catch on
- D. ... his house was burglarized by a man who wore the white shoes when he “snuck” into the house

Which three of the following are not popular brands of tennis shoes?

- | | | | | | |
|----------|------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|----------|
| Adidas | Nike | Fairweather | Arizona HiTop | New Balance | Scallion |
| Converse | Puma | Skechers | British Knights | Shambora | Reebok |