

When Do Tennis Players Reach Their Best Ranking? ATP vs. WTA, 1990-2019

An analysis of 1,074 Top 100 careers with ranking peaks from 1990 through 2019. Women broke through and reached their career-best ranking earlier, while the typical peak moved later on both tours.

Published August 6, 2026 Updated August 6, 2026
Data as of August 6, 2026 7 minute read

TENNIS-DB.COM RESEARCH

When do tennis players reach their best ranking?

1,074 completed Top 100 careers - 1990-2019

ATP

25.5 years

WTA

23.4 years

Median age at first career-best weekly singles ranking

TD BI. Tennis-DB.com

KEY FINDINGS

- The median WTA player reached her career-best ranking at 23.4 years old, compared with 25.5 for the median ATP player.
- The first Top 100 appearance also came earlier on the WTA Tour: 20.0 versus 22.2 years old.
- Career-best rankings moved more than two years later from the 1990s to the 2010s on both tours.

tennis-db.com/research/when-do-tennis-players-reach-their-best-ranking

Abstract

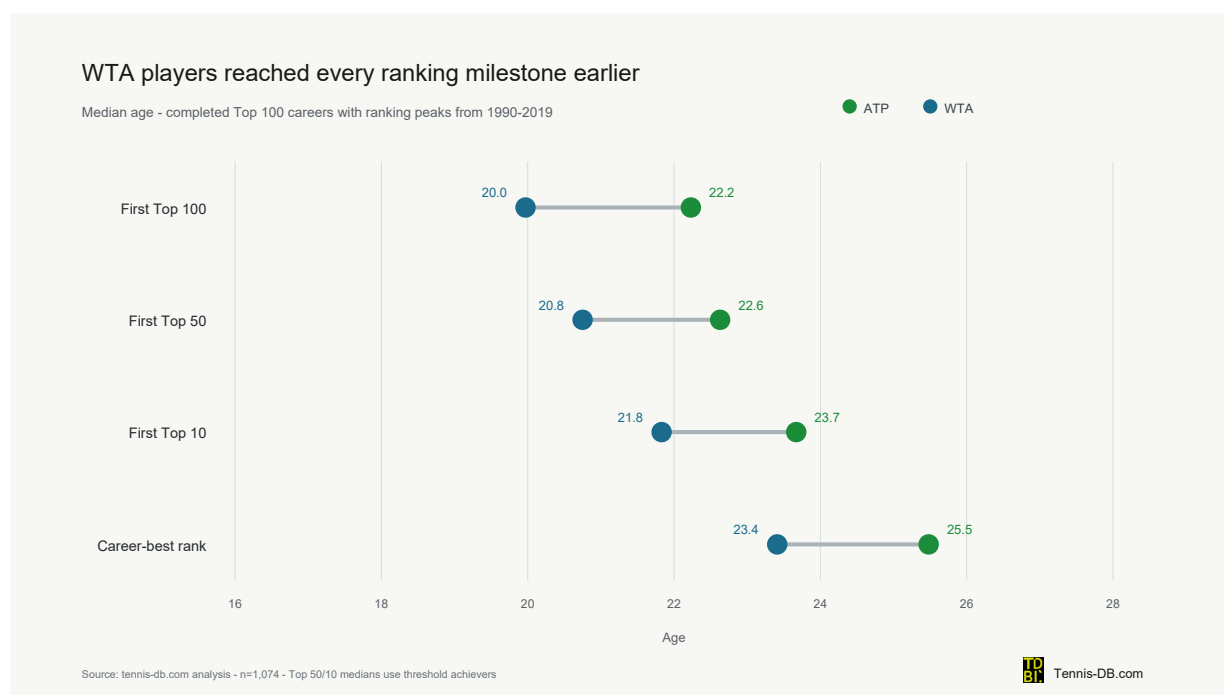
There is no single age when a tennis player peaks. A first week in the Top 100, a best ranking, a best season by win rate, and a last deep Grand Slam run can all happen years apart.

One measure provides a consistent view across thousands of careers: the age at which a player first reached the best weekly singles ranking of their career.

On that measure, the typical WTA player peaked about two years earlier than the typical ATP player.

- The median WTA player reached her career-best ranking at **23.4 years old**.
- The median ATP player reached his career-best ranking at **25.5**.
- The difference was **2.1 years**. A 20,000-resample bootstrap put the 95% confidence interval at 1.6 to 2.7 years.

The gap began well before either player reached a career high. The median first Top 100 appearance came at 20.0 on the WTA Tour and 22.2 on the ATP Tour.



Top 50 and Top 10 medians include only players who reached those thresholds. Career-best and Top 100 figures use the full primary cohort.

The tours have different age profiles

The median tells only part of the story. The distribution around it is just as different.

Nearly half of the WTA cohort - **45.5%** - had already reached its best career ranking before turning 23. The ATP share was **17.7%**.

At the other end, **22.4%** of ATP players peaked at 28 or older, compared with **9.4%** of WTA players.

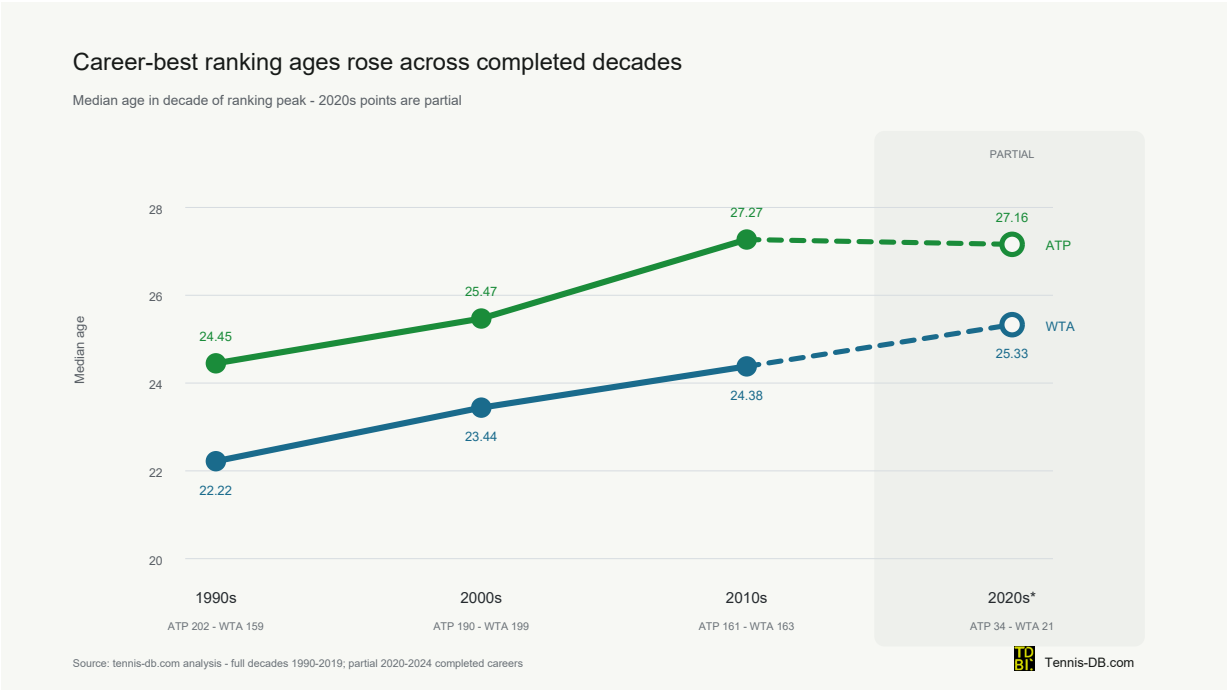
Ranking-peak measure	ATP	WTA
Players	553	521
Median age	25.48	23.41
Middle 50% of players	23.54-27.72	21.06-26.03
Peaked before 23	17.7%	45.5%
Peaked at 28 or older	22.4%	9.4%

This does **not** mean a woman is physically past her prime at 23 or a man at 25.5. It means that, among these players, this was the typical age of the first week at their best career ranking. A ranking is a trailing measure of competitive results, not a laboratory test of athletic capacity.

Peaks moved later on both tours

The ATP-WTA difference is clear, but the direction of change is shared. Players on both tours reached their best ranking later in the 2010s than in the 1990s.

For ATP players, the median rose from **24.45** in the 1990s to **27.27** in the 2010s - a shift of 2.82 years. For WTA players, it rose from **22.22** to **24.38**, a shift of 2.16 years.



Decade of career-best ranking	ATP median (players)	WTA median (players)
1990s	24.45 (202)	22.22 (159)
2000s	25.47 (190)	23.44 (199)
2010s	27.27 (161)	24.38 (163)
2020s to date*	27.16 (34)	25.33 (21)

The 2020s figures are provisional. They include only players whose observed career-best ranking occurred from 2020 through 2024 and whose final Top 100 appearance was at least two years before the data snapshot. This selects completed careers and excludes active or recently ranked players, so the figures are not yet comparable with a full decade.

Bootstrap intervals were consistent with a later peak in this defined cohort. The estimated 2010s-minus-1990s change was 2.24 to 3.62 years for ATP players and 1.29 to 3.40 years for WTA players at the 95% level.

The data establish the change, not its cause. Longer careers, changes in tour depth and access, sports medicine, training, equipment, playing style, economics, and unusually durable generations are all plausible contributors. Separating those explanations would require match-performance, participation and injury measures beyond the ranking histories used here.

World No. 1 players are an early-arriving exception

The small group who reached No. 1 followed a different path from the rest of the Top 10.

Among the 18 ATP and 18 WTA No. 1 players in the primary cohort:

- The median first Top 100 age was **18.24 for ATP** and **16.74 for WTA**.
- The median age at first reaching No. 1 was **22.87 for ATP** and **22.66 for WTA**.
- Half of the ATP No. 1 group and 55.6% of the WTA No. 1 group reached No. 1 before turning 23.

Players whose best ranking was No. 2 through No. 10 peaked later: the median was 25.43 on the ATP Tour and 25.39 on the WTA Tour.

That does not make an early Top 100 debut a promise of No. 1. It describes the pathway of the players who eventually got there. The result is still striking: the very top of both tours was disproportionately populated by players who became elite unusually young.

Conclusion

For the 1,074 Top 100 careers in this historical cohort, all peaking between 1990 and 2019, WTA players reached their career-best ranking at a median age of 23.4; ATP players did so at 25.5.

Women arrived earlier, from the first Top 100 breakthrough onward. Yet both tours moved in the same direction over time: the typical best ranking came more than two years later in the 2010s than in the 1990s.

The result is not one universal "prime age." It is a map of how elite tennis careers unfold - and how that map has changed.

Methodology

A player's ranking peak is defined as the **first ranking week at their lowest career ranking number**. A player whose career best was No. 7, for example, peaked on the first date they appeared at No. 7.

Rank is used rather than ranking points because point scales and ranking rules have changed. Ordinal rank is not perfectly comparable across eras - the tours, schedules and player pools also changed - but it avoids treating unlike point systems as if they were identical. Both tours use rankings

to help determine tournament entry and seeding, and their current formulas aggregate tournament results, as described by the [ATP](#) and [WTA](#).

Cohort definition

The main comparison includes only players who:

1. reached the Top 100;
2. had a high-confidence date-of-birth match;
3. first entered the Top 100 at least two years after that tour's ranking data began;
4. last appeared in the Top 100 at least two years before the latest available ranking; and
5. reached their career-best rank from 1990 through 2019.

The shared 1990-2019 window avoids comparing ATP's longer historical series with a shorter WTA series. The two-year boundary rules reduce incomplete careers at both ends of the data. Changing that buffer to one or three years left the central finding essentially unchanged.

The ATP result also has a useful point of comparison. A [2015 ATP-only analysis by Miha Mlakar and Tea Tušar](#), using a different aging-curve method and data from 1974-2014, identified 25 as the most likely career-peak age. That is close to the ATP median of 25.5, although the definitions and cohorts are not identical. The side-by-side tour comparison and the change by decade are the important additions here.

Limitations

This is a study of **ranking trajectories among Top 100 players**, not all professional tennis players.

- Players without a Top 100 appearance are outside the cohort.
- Missing birth dates exclude 8.5% of ATP and 4.0% of WTA players who appeared in the Top 100 in the source data. The included sample may therefore differ slightly from the full population.
- A career-best ranking can be influenced by who else was active, schedule strength, injuries, ranking-rule changes and unusual periods such as protected or frozen rankings.
- Weekly ranking snapshots make ages precise to roughly a week, but reporting hundredths of a year should not be read as biological precision.
- The analysis identifies when a best rank occurred. It does not establish when a player's serve, movement, win probability or underlying tennis level was highest.

These limitations explain the narrow use of "ranking peak." It is distinct from "athletic prime," but it is observable, reproducible and meaningful: it marks the highest place a player reached relative to their peers.

Data and attribution

Analysis: tennis-db.com. Historical ranking records are derived from Jeff Sackmann's [ATP](#) and [WTA](#) tennis datasets; those repositories state a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license. Birth dates were matched to [Wikidata](#) records. tennis-db.com normalized the records, applied identity and age-plausibility checks, constructed the cohorts and calculated all figures above.

The complete definitions, sample counts, sensitivity results and reproducible SQL specification are retained in the internal research record for this study.

Sources

1. [Jeff Sackmann ATP rankings data](#)
2. [Jeff Sackmann WTA rankings data](#)
3. [Wikidata](#)
4. [ATP rankings FAQ](#)
5. [WTA rankings explained](#)
6. [Mlakar and Tušar \(2015\)](#)

Publication record

Authors: tennis-db.com Research. Editorial review: tennis-db.com.

Methodology version: peak-ranking-age-v1. Aggregate results and chart assets are frozen and validated during release checks.

Questions about this study or requests for future tennis-db.com Research can be sent to contact@tennis-db.com or [through the contact form](#).