

Sports Aesthetics Scoring Big in High Fashion (2019–2024)

Introduction: Fashion's Ongoing Sports Obsession

High fashion has increasingly blurred the lines between the runway and the playing field in recent years. From 2019 through 2024, designers embraced the **aesthetics of actual sports** – not just collaborations with sportswear brands – bringing jerseys, tracksuits, boxing robes, riding helmets and more into the realm of couture. This trend goes beyond the old “athleisure” fad; it’s a full-fledged stylistic crossover where *sporting uniforms and gear* are reimagined as luxury fashion statements. As Vogue Business observed in 2024, **sports have become “key” for many designers**, inspiring new uses of performance materials, athlete collaborations, and even entire sports-themed fashion shows ¹ ². The result is a fashion landscape where a football (soccer) jersey can morph into an evening top on the runway, and a tennis skirt or golf polo is just as likely to appear in a luxury collection as a cocktail dress. Below, we break down how various sports – from team games like soccer and basketball to individual pursuits like tennis, golf, and boxing – have influenced high fashion’s silhouettes, styling, and culture from 2019 to 2024.

From Field to Runway: Football Jerseys and Team Sports Uniforms

One of the most striking integrations of sports attire into high fashion has been the **football (soccer) jersey**. Luxury house Balenciaga made headlines with its Autumn/Winter 2020 show by unveiling a series of full **soccer kits on the Paris runway**, complete with socks and cleats, as part of a fictional “Balenciaga Football Club” ³. Creative director Demna Gvasalia – himself inspired by growing up around “footballers and priests” – stripped the sport of its function to elevate the jersey to a pure fashion object ⁴. Models splashed down a water-soaked catwalk in **head-to-toe football uniforms emblazoned with Balenciaga logos**, blurring the line between a sports kit and couture ³. This bold move crystallized a broader trend: the **once-humble soccer jersey has become high-fashion fodder**.



Balenciaga's Fall 2020 show featured soccer-style shorts and kits on the runway, exemplifying the crossover of football uniforms into luxury fashion ³ .

Other designers have also elevated football gear into fashion statements. **Acne Studios**, for example, released a pink, satin-finish soccer jersey in 2024 with vintage-inspired stripes and floral jacquard, “a work of art” that “screams ‘fashion!’ more than it does ‘sport!’” ⁵ ⁶ . The jersey’s delicate detailing – from blooming flower motifs to lace-trimmed emblems – shows how a classic team kit can be reinterpreted with luxury fabrics and craftsmanship. A few years earlier, in 2019, sportswear giants even tapped avant-garde designers to reimagine women’s World Cup jerseys: Nike collaborated with designers like Yoon Ahn (Ambush), Christelle Kocher (Koché), Marine Serre and others to redesign soccer shirts, bringing high-fashion touches to on-pitch attire ⁷ ⁸ . Streetwear labels and sports teams likewise joined the dialogue – Parisian designer Koché’s partnership with Paris Saint-Germain in 2018 (just before our timeframe) was a precursor, and by 2020 **Balenciaga’s venture into football style** confirmed that “the fashion-infused football market” was thriving ⁹ .

It’s not just soccer: **basketball and baseball motifs** have found their way into luxury collections as well. Off-White’s late founder Virgil Abloh often referenced classic American sports in his designs – one 2022 overview noted “classic baseball motifs from Off-White, Louis Vuitton, Boss and Moschino (the latter even having a branded bat)” on runways ¹⁰ . In 2020, Virgil Abloh’s role at Louis Vuitton Men’s saw an official LVxNBA capsule, marrying **NBA iconography with luxury design** – think varsity-style leather jackets adorned with NBA logos and handbags shaped like basketballs – underscoring how basketball culture was being embraced by high fashion. Even American football (gridiron) made an appearance: Gucci’s Fall/Winter 2022 collection, via its collaboration with Adidas, sent out looks with exaggerated **football shoulder pads integrated into corset-like tops**, merging sports protection gear with couture tailoring ¹¹ ¹² . In Dior’s Fall 2022 collection, models wore futuristic white shoulder and chest guards – high-tech padding reminiscent of football gear – with bold stitching that subtly evoked the stitching on a football itself ¹³ . These examples illustrate how *team sports uniforms and equipment* (jerseys, varsity jackets, shoulder pads) have been reworked into imaginative high-fashion pieces.

Beyond the garments, **sports culture itself has been on the runway** in person: athletes have increasingly appeared as models and muses. Fashion shows began casting sports stars – for instance, models at a special Vogue World event in 2024 walked alongside **tennis champions Venus and Serena Williams (in custom designer outfits) and NBA player Victor Wembanyama in Louis Vuitton** ¹⁴. The presence of real athletes striding down catwalks in luxury looks drives home how entwined these worlds have become. As designer Simon Porte Jacquemus put it, “Athletes are heroes of our time... I try to always work with athletes, they often have amazing stories” ². The *athlete as fashion icon* concept means a footballer or basketball player might show up at a runway show or front a luxury ad campaign wearing reimagined sports attire – further reinforcing sportswear’s influence on high fashion aesthetics.

Court Couture: Tennis Skirts, Golf Polos and the Country Club Look

Traditionally genteel **racquet sports like tennis (and by extension, golf)** have exploded as fashion inspirations, giving rise to what some dub “*tenniscore*” or “*golfcore*.” Luxury brands have eagerly adapted these sports’ classic attire – pleated skirts, polo shirts, V-neck sweaters – for modern high fashion audiences. **Miu Miu’s Spring/Summer 2021 collection** was an early harbinger: it channeled the spectacle of athletic attire, featuring pieces that drew on “*the shape of jerseys, linear fits and bold color-blocking... elements borrowed from the world of sportswear*” ¹⁵. Miuccia Prada even sent out a quirky footwear hybrid: **kitten-heel shoes styled like soccer cleats**, complete with studs, capturing the “sports meets glamour” vibe ¹⁶ ¹⁷. She described that lineup as “*sportswear and eveningwear... a moment of reality, a moment of fantasy*,” encapsulated by a football-boot-meets-stiletto design ¹⁷. It was a statement that even traditionally *feminine* fashion can find edge and irony in sports gear.

By 2022, **tennis fashion truly surged in popularity** on and off the runway. The hallmark piece was the classic **pleated tennis skirt**, which made a “stealth comeback” and became ubiquitous from luxury runways to fast fashion ¹⁸. At **Miu Miu’s Fall/Winter 2022 show**, the brand gave its viral micro-mini skirt a *tennis whites makeover*, pairing it with cropped polo tops striped like sporty uniforms ¹⁹ ²⁰. The collection evoked imagery of a collegiate tennis tryout – complete with preppy sweaters and even leg warmers – mixing the youthful rebellion of a mini skirt with the clean-cut appeal of tennis attire. Other designers hopped on this trend: Tory Burch, for example, leaned into tennis references in her collections, and **Lacoste**, a label with tennis DNA, continued bridging athletic heritage with fashion (even designing athletes’ looks for the Vogue World show in 2024) ²¹. The “country club chic” aesthetic also extended to **golf-inspired styles**. We saw luxe interpretations of the **golf polo and argyle vest** enter seasonal trend reports, with Harper’s Bazaar noting that in Fall 2022 designers showed an “*affinity for upper-crust leisure activities: tennis, golf, and... equestrian*,” rolling out looks like knee-length pleated skirts and tailored polos that would suit a weekend on the green ²². This “*golfcore*” trend is essentially a dressier twist on athleisure – “*tailored pants, sporty polos, collared tops, and swingy skirts*” reminiscent of the clubhouse, but styled for the streets ²³.

Luxury houses have not missed the opportunity to capitalize on tennis mania in particular. **Gucci’s collaboration with Adidas in 2022** included retro tennis dresses and skirts emblazoned with both brands’ logos, which even made a cameo at Wimbledon, generating a social media storm and millions in media impact value for Gucci ²⁴ ²⁵. Meanwhile, tennis champions themselves became fashion ambassadors: *Louis Vuitton signed Naomi Osaka in 2021 and Dior signed Emma Raducanu*, leveraging their on-court style for off-court marketing ²⁶. Selfridges buyers noted that modern tennis apparel hits a perfect balance “*of sporty and chic, comfort and sexy*,” making it a natural evolution from the sweatsuit craze ²⁷. In short, the rise of tennis and golf aesthetics in high fashion has both driven, and been driven by, a cultural moment in which a

pleated white tennis skirt or a neat golf polo is coveted as everyday wear. High-fashion runways elevated these items with luxury fabrics and inventive styling, and consumers responded by embracing the refined athletic look in their own wardrobes.

Athluxury: Tracksuits, Trainers and Activewear Go Upscale

The 2010s concept of **athleisure** – athletic attire worn in casual settings – matured in the 2020s into something more luxurious and design-driven. Designers moved beyond basic yoga pants and sweatshirts, instead remixing **track suits, gym shorts, and performance fabrics** into polished runway ensembles. For Fall 2022, Vogue even dubbed it the “**sport couture**” trend: “*tracksuit-turned-dresses, knee-length pleated tennis skirts at Miu Miu, and varsity jackets*” were among the season’s key looks ²⁸. One example is Victoria Beckham’s inventive **tracksuit gown**, essentially a formal dress cut from track-suit material – a clever inversion of form and function. Another is **Gucci’s FW22 tracksuit-to-corset transformation**: on the runway, Alessandro Michele took Adidas’s iconic striped track jacket and fused it with Gucci tailoring, giving it a corseted, cinched silhouette while still bearing sporty stripes ²⁹. The ensemble juxtaposed the ease of a training jacket with the elegance of corsetry, exemplifying the new “*athluxury*” ethos.

Brands also played with the idea of **mix-and-match sports gear**. On runways in 2021–2022, it wasn’t unusual to see models in designer hoodies paired with silky basketball shorts or tearaway track pants layered over leggings. In fact, Balenciaga’s Fall 2020 show styled one look with *shiny blue soccer shorts worn over black track pants*, finished with a sleek handbag – deliberately clashing gym staples with luxury accessories ³. This kind of styling (which one might have once only seen in streetwear circles) signaled that comfort-first athletic garments were now fully embraced at the highest echelons of fashion. Designers also embraced **high-tech materials** from sportswear: Mugler’s Casey Cadwallader noted his love of “technology in sportswear” and how he engineers clothes “in a stronger way” for people who move ³⁰. Likewise, Julien Dossena of Rabanne cited “*performance fabrics*” and freedom of movement as sports-derived inspirations in his designs ³¹. The result has been runway pieces that *look* haute couture but *feel* like activewear – stretchy knit bodysuits, aerodynamic cuts, breathable mesh inserts – all elements once reserved for the track or gym, now fashioned into high-style outfits. Even heritage couture houses like Courrèges have added **leggings and workout-friendly separates** into collections, with the artistic director noting these items can be worn for Pilates or yoga just as easily as for fashion statements ³².

The footwear revolution also continues as part of this trend. Luxury sneakers became mainstay items over the past decade, and by 2019–2024 every major house had its take on trainers. But more novel was the **melding of sport shoe designs with formal footwear** – as seen in Miu Miu’s kitten-heel soccer boots or Gucci’s heeled boots shaped like Adidas’s Samba sneakers ²⁹. These hybrids perfectly encapsulate the high-fashion sports crossover: aesthetically athletic, functionally glamorous. In sum, *tracksuits, trainers and gym gear have undergone a couture upgrade*. The “*athluxury*” movement during 2019–2024 meant that a nylon windbreaker or a pair of running tights might be crafted from the finest materials and styled with couture pieces, erasing any remaining stigma around athletic apparel as “not dressy enough.” For consumers, this translated into newfound freedom – and encouragement – to incorporate sporty comfort into daily style without sacrificing sophistication.

High-Impact Gear: Boxing, Wrestling and Other Niche Sports Reimagined

Designers didn't stop at the obvious sports; they also found inspiration in the **high-impact aesthetics of boxing rings, wrestling mats, and beyond**. One unexpected hit was *boxing attire*. In a surprising turn for a house known for femininity, **Dior's Maria Grazia Chiuri showed boxing-inspired looks in her Spring 2022 collection**, complete with satin boxing shorts, matching robes, and even models' hands wrapped as if ready for a prizefight ³³ ³⁴. Critics noted this was "so not what we've come to expect" from Chiuri, yet it struck a chord – the neon-toned boxing silks and bra tops presented a vision of unapologetic empowerment, a fusion of couture and the boxing gym ³³ ³⁵. The message: a woman in a Dior boxing robe can be both fierce and fashionable, subverting expectations of what constitutes couture. Around the same time, Ludovic de Saint Sernin incorporated **baggy boxing shorts** with glam embellishments (flames and rhinestones) into his designs, and labels like *Off-White* and *Marine Serre* put out boxing glove-inspired handbags and accessories – further evidence of boxing's stylistic appeal.

Meanwhile, the avant-garde menswear scene toyed with **wrestling singlets**. In the Spring/Summer 2022 season, designers including Loewe and Lazoschmidl sent male models down runways in stretchy, body-hugging singlet silhouettes – basically the one-piece uniforms of wrestlers – but remixed with fashion flair like sheer paneling, metallic fabrics or bold cut-outs ³⁶ ³⁷. One Loewe look featured a glittery, disco-ready singlet, while Lazoschmidl showed a neon latex version held up by suspenders ³⁶ ³⁷. The effect was subversive and sensual, turning a sport associated with brute masculinity into an exploration of body-con style and gender-fluid dressing. This was highlighted in an i-D trend review which quipped that in 2022, designers had us wearing wrestling singlets off the mat – "*whether it's boxing looks or equestrian cosplay, each of these collections usurp the usual rules of who can wear these items*", breaking social dress codes tied to each sport ³⁸ ³⁹.

Even **motorsports and extreme sports** have made cameo appearances. Fashion houses like Balmain and Vetements dabbled in **racing-inspired jackets and biker suits**, plastered with sponsor-like logos, tapping into the edgy appeal of Formula 1 and motocross. Balenciaga, always one for subculture references, included "*protective motocross suits*" in its Fall 2020 lineup alongside the football uniforms ⁴⁰. Those leather biker jumpsuits and racing boots, lifted straight from auto racing gear, took on new life when styled with Balenciaga's dramatic silhouettes. And in a nod to equestrian sport (which we'll explore more next), **Gucci's collaboration with Adidas even featured riding helmet-like headgear** adorned with the famous three stripes ⁴¹, effectively merging horse-riding tradition with a streetwear logo twist.

What these niche sports inspirations demonstrate is fashion's voracious appetite for *all* facets of sports culture – not just the mainstream. By remixing boxing robes, wrestling uniforms, and racing suits, designers added theatrical flair and fresh shapes to their collections. They also challenged consumers to reconsider garments from these sports in a new light. A boxing robe, in silky neon fabric, can now be eveningwear. A wrestling singlet can become a daring party outfit. The cross-pollination of ideas expanded fashion's vocabulary and nodded to the broader cultural idea that **sports – even those once considered purely functional or masculine – can be deeply stylish**.

Equestrian Elegance and Heritage Sports Reborn

No survey of sports influence on fashion would be complete without mentioning the enduring allure of **equestrian style**. Long associated with luxury (think Hermès and its riding heritage), equestrian gear enjoyed a fresh revival in the early 2020s. In 2022, Chanel made a dramatic statement by opening its spring couture show with Monaco's Princess Charlotte on horseback, trotting around the runway in a Chanel riding jacket, jodhpurs, and **a sleek black equestrian helmet** ⁴² ⁴³. This spectacle underscored the *glamour* tied to riding attire – polished boots, tailored hunt coats, and jockey caps – positioning it firmly in the fashion spotlight. Shortly after, Chanel's Fall 2022 collection featured moss-green riding boots and derby hats, reinforcing that “horse girl” style was officially high-fashion again ²².

Off-White's final collection under Virgil Abloh (presented posthumously in early 2022) took the equestrian trope in a more experimental direction. The show included **“bulbous riding helmets”** as a major accessory motif – some plain, others covered in knit or sequins, and even some sprouting horn-like protrusions ⁴⁴. This surreal spin on the jockey helmet played with *code-switching*, as Abloh called it: blending the elegance of an English rider with the urban edge of a baseball cap (indeed, a couple of Off-White helmets literally grafted a baseball cap brim onto a riding helmet) ⁴¹. The result was a striking visual of two worlds colliding on the runway. Gucci, which has an equestrian streak in its DNA, did something similar in its Adidas mashup – presenting **protective headgear styled like retro helmets** but branded in Adidas icons ⁴¹. The **fusion of a riding hat and streetwear branding** spoke to fashion's power to take a storied sport uniform and make it feel of-the-moment and edgy.

Equestrian motifs also tie into **golf and country club fashions**, as they all evoke an air of heritage and elitism that designers like to both homage and subvert. As mentioned, Fall 2022 runways saw plenty of riding boots, tailored blazers, and jodhpur-style pants as designers tapped into that “*upper-crust leisure*” aesthetic ²². By pairing those classic equestrian pieces with contemporary garments (or unexpected twists like latex or sequins), the runway made riding gear feel new and provocative. It's a reminder that the *sartorial codes of horseback riding*, much like those of tennis or golf, carry a cultural cachet that fashion continually recycles – this time, however, with a more inclusive and imaginative spin. A riding jacket might be worn open over a tulle gown, or a pair of equestrian boots styled with a mini skirt, freeing these items from their old stuffy context and inviting anyone to adopt them as fashion, not just function.

Cultural Crossover: When Sports Become Fashionable Lifestyle

This melding of sports aesthetics with high fashion hasn't just created new clothes – it's reshaped **consumer behavior and cultural perceptions**. Wearing overt sports attire as everyday fashion has become widely accepted and even encouraged by luxury trendsetters. It's now normal to see a fashion-forward individual pairing a vintage soccer jersey with designer jeans and heels, or a logo-laden tracksuit with luxury sneakers and jewelry. What used to be confined to stadiums or gyms is now street style. The crossover has effectively democratized certain elite sports as style references (e.g. equestrian, golf), while also elevating once-casual athletic gear to statement pieces.

One big cultural shift is the rise of **athletes as fashion influencers and collaborators**. In the 2019–2024 period, sports stars moved front and center in fashion marketing: “*It's now common for athletes to walk in fashion shows, front brand campaigns and work as ambassadors for luxury houses*” ⁴⁵. We saw this with tennis phenom Emma Raducanu becoming a Dior ambassador, NBA legend LeBron James partnering with Louis

Vuitton, and football (soccer) players like Kylian Mbappé sitting front row at menswear shows. These figures bring sports style cred with them. For instance, when Burberry cast footballer Marcus Rashford in an ad campaign in 2021, he wore Burberry's tailoring – but the mere pairing of a star athlete with high fashion signaled that sports and luxury were converging on a cultural level ⁴⁶. Fashion editorials also started featuring athletes more prominently, often styling them in sporty-chic ways: British *i-D* put Manchester City's Phil Foden on a cover, and Prada was photographed on athletes like the young soccer star Declan Rice ⁴⁶. Such images reinforce the idea that **sports figures can be style icons**, and conversely, that sport-inspired fashion can project confidence, success, and cool.

Consumers, especially Gen Z and millennials, have eagerly embraced this movement. The late 2010s had already primed everyone to wear sneakers with suits and leggings as pants; by the mid 2020s, it went further. Now, rocking a **basketball short** or a **football jersey** as part of a daily outfit carries not just a casual vibe but also a *fashionable* one. Retail data backs this up – categories like tennis apparel saw huge sales jumps by 2022-2023 (with tennis skirts selling out and search terms for “tennis skirt” trending globally) ⁴⁷. Even those who don't play the sports began donning the looks, purely as style statements. This trend also coincided with pandemic-era comfort dressing, but unlike the sloppy sweats of lockdown, the sports aesthetic offered a sense of identity and statement. Wearing a soccer jersey from a famous club or a jacket emblazoned with a racing team's patches is a way to signal one's cultural interests and align with the *energy* of sports, all while looking chic.

Moreover, the fashion industry's embrace of sports has had a feedback effect: it's made sports themselves seem more fashionable. Events like the Olympics, World Cup, and Grand Slam tennis tournaments have received unprecedented fashion attention. In 2021, *Telfar Clemens (of brand Telfar) designed Liberia's Olympic team uniforms*, which were so popular they morphed into a commercial fashion line, blurring the line between official sportswear and ready-to-wear. In 2024, when **LVMH sponsored the Paris Olympics**, it involved luxury brands in everything from torch design to outfitting national delegations ⁴⁸ ⁴⁹. All of this reinforces to the public that sports are part of the style conversation. A young consumer might see their favorite tennis player posting “*Wimby whites but make it streetwear*” on Instagram ⁵⁰ or an F1 driver attending Fashion Week, and feel inspired to incorporate those athletic elements into their own wardrobe. The stigma around sportswear as “unstylish” is virtually gone – instead, wearing a piece of sports-origin clothing conveys *coolness*, *modernity*, and an active lifestyle.

Conclusion: A New Playing Field for Fashion

Between 2019 and 2024, the fusion of sports aesthetics and high fashion became not just a trend but a new norm. Designers turned stadium staples into runway revelries – adorning models in everything from **sequined soccer jerseys and tailored varsity jackets to satin boxing shorts and high-heeled football boots**. In doing so, they expanded fashion's horizons, introduced fresh silhouettes, and connected with audiences on a practical, personal level (after all, many of us have a favorite sport or team). This period witnessed high-profile runway moments – like **Balenciaga's dystopian football match of a show** or **Dior's empowered boxing-ring chic** – that will be remembered as paradigm shifts in design. It also saw sports culture permeate editorial and luxury marketing, changing who we see as style icons.

Most importantly, this aesthetic crossover has reframed how we think about clothing categories. Sports attire is no longer relegated to the locker room; it's celebrated on the catwalk. Consumers now comfortably mix athletic pieces with couture, and wearing a full kit outside of a match is a bold fashion statement rather than a faux pas. The broader cultural perception of sports has evolved: being a “fashion person” can mean

proudly wearing a team scarf or a tennis dress, and being an athlete can mean fronting a Vogue spread. The interchange has made fashion more inclusive and dynamic, injecting the *energy, movement, and unity* of sports into an industry built on expression. As we move beyond 2024, one thing is clear – the worlds of sport and high fashion will continue to play off one another, crafting new narratives and trends that appeal to our competitive, creative, and style-conscious spirit all at once.

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