

Great Moments

IN JEWELRY HISTORY

CHRIS EVERT MAKES A NAME FOR THE DIAMOND BRACELET

Tennis fanatics will remember Martina Navratilova as the champion in the women's singles division of the 1987 U.S. Open. But as far as the jewelry industry is concerned, the real winner at the event was De Beers. It was there that, with a slip of the wrist, tennis great Chris Evert unwittingly served up an endorsement that would turn an ordinary jewelry item into a big-selling, much-coveted classic: the diamond tennis bracelet.

All Evert did was stoop to pick up her bracelet — then commonly referred to as a diamond-line bracelet — which had fallen off during the match. The few seconds it took her to retrieve it were arguably as effective an advertisement as any 30-second Shaq Attack or Michael Jordan's multimillion-dollar mugging for Coke, Nike, McDonalds and countless other companies.

In fact, according to a report published in the trade magazine *New York Diamonds*, the tennis bracelet trend took off as a result of spontaneous consumer demand rather than an elaborate marketing campaign. Although some early ads capitalized on the Evert angle by showing the bracelets photographed with tennis balls, the report attributes the product's successful "re-staging" more to timing — the trend began during the notoriously materialistic 1980s — than to a barrage of advertising.

Of course, no one discounts Evert's influence. The association of the tennis

bracelet with a strong, independent, affluent role model undoubtedly got the ball rolling. (In recognition of her contribution, last July N.W. Ayer & Partners, De Beers' U.S. advertising agency at the time, donated a 51-diamond tennis bracelet to honor Evert when she was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame. The bracelet's retail value was \$25,000 — a small price to pay for the exposure tennis bracelets gained from Evert's accident.)

Unlike many passing fancies of the '80s — remember Izod shirts? Pac-Man? the royal marriage? — the tennis bracelet has staying power. It weathered a recession in the early '90s and boasted a 46% increase in sales in 1994. Its continued popularity is largely due to marketers' ability to make the most of the changing

times. Now that the ostentatious '80s have given way to the allegedly more modest '90s, the bracelet is promoted not as a showy status symbol but as a classic piece celebrated for its versatility. And prices have come down accordingly. When the trend began, the average price was \$5,000. During Valentine's Day sales in 1996, stores were advertising the bracelets for as little as \$100.

