

ORDER

TALL

Finding quality casual and business attire with the correct proportions for your body can be downright frustrating—for anybody! But it can be especially exasperating for tall women. Now some of the world's finest professional female sports stars are sharing their frustrations—and secrets—on how to win the dress battle.

Some get lucky at the local mall, while others—like WNBA star Lisa Leslie, who looks as sharp in a business suit or Versace gown as she does driving the lane—have their wardrobes designed by Elevee Fine Clothing in Van Nuys, Calif., the custom-clothing company that outfits a seemingly endless list of pro athletes, including LeBron James and Terrell Owens.

“Lisa is at the Women's Sports Foundation dinner every year, and she's there in these unbelievable gowns,” says 6-foot-3-inch pro volleyball player Kerri Walsh of the 6-foot-5 center for the Los Angeles Sparks. “I say, ‘Lisa, how do you do that?’”

Other people have also taken notice of Leslie, the 2003 Best Dressed ESPY Award winner. “My style off the court depends on my mood,” she says. “When I'm not playing, I like to wear something feminine because my job is so masculine.



FEMALE ATHLETES BLESSED WITH HEIGHT SHARE A COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE TO FIND THE RIGHT CLOTHES—

I love to wear a nice summer dress or a skirt and some heels.” Leslie is also a fan of Gucci pants that are tailored in-store according to your proportions. She recommends shopping for denim at Tall Etc. in Pasadena (and six other locations), and favors Lucky Jeans, available at Lucky Brand Stores and The Buckle, which feature inseams of up to 38 inches.

Walsh also likes the denim craze, and looks out for Chip and Pepper jeans, the vintage-inspired line that hit runways in the fall of 2003. “When I was in high school I literally wore shorts every single day because I couldn't find pants,” says the 2004 Olympic gold medalist in beach volleyball. “Things have gotten better, but they still need to improve.”

A self-professed shopaholic, Walsh recommends a big dose of patience for fellow tall shoppers. “I've come to the point where if I find something cute, but it's not quite long enough, I don't buy it,” she says. “I have so many clothes in my closet that I would love if they were a little longer.”

Although Walsh spends most of her time in a swimsuit spiking volleyballs, she still enjoys dressing up for special occasions. “[Tall Culture] sent me some dresses that I wore to the Association of Volleyball Professionals banquet last year,” she adds. “They were beautiful dresses. There's such a marketplace for tall clothing because girls are getting taller, and [their proportions make them] ideal people to dress.”

Ruth Riley, the 6-foot-5 star center of the WNBA's Detroit Shock, finds quality clothing at high-end department stores Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom. She also likes jean brands Silver, Rock and Republic, and Seven (aka Seven for All Mankind). “It's hit or miss, and you have to know which brands come in longer sizes,” advises Riley. “My suits are all custom-made because that's something you really want to fit right. The odds of finding something that matches your body from head to toe are pretty slim.”

Professional softball pitcher Jennie Finch is also familiar with those odds. The Olympic



WNBA stars (from left to right) Lisa Leslie and Ruth Riley, who are both 6-foot-5, are divas of the hardwood, while beach volleyball star Kerri Walsh (with fellow 'baller Misty May) enjoys dressing up for special occasions. Meanwhile, softball gold medalist Jennie Finch adds, "I'm glad flats are in."

AND THEY'RE TIRED OF IT By Jenna Sampson

gold medalist has perfected the art of striking out opponents, but strikes out at the mall when shopping for her 6-foot-1 frame.

"It is really difficult, almost to the point of where I can't walk into a mall and shop," says Finch. "Usually I end up in tears because nothing fits, so I get a lot of clothes custom-made like Lisa [Leslie]. I'm glad flats are in."

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Finch is sponsored by Mizuno for apparel, so they make some of her clothing and add extra length to her softball warm-up pants. She also frequents the women's activewear store Lucy to find workout pants in long lengths. For casual attire, Finch occasionally comes across a pair of Seven or Allen B. jeans, and claims C&C California extra-long T-shirts as a closet staple.

"James Perse shirts are another favorite," adds Finch. "They're really good as far as length and sleeves, and the material is super-soft and comfortable."

Jennifer Caputo, founder and CEO of TallCouture.com, has some additional advice for tall fashionistas. "If you're trying to minimize lankiness, avoid a solid color from head to toe or vertical stripes," she says. "Choose something that emphasizes the waist to break up

the line, and don't be afraid of colors." Caputo's online company works directly with New York's top designers to provide stylish, quality clothing for women over six feet tall. "We work with designers who sell their collections in exclusive boutiques and department stores, but most of them don't normally offer tall sizes," explains Caputo. "They are specially fit

for us and proportioned to fit our customers."

TallCouture.com's Alvin Valley slacks, touted in fashion magazines for their fabulous fit, are offered in a 39-inch unfinished seam. The company can hardly keep denim on the shelves (Caputo notes that Seven for All Mankind jeans are a bestseller). "Spring was very bright this year, so designers have gone with a darker palette with really rich tones for fall," says Caputo. "Expect to see a lot of

denim with leather trim and accents, ponchos and shrugs with a slight twist in new colors and different fabrics, and gaucho-style pants in longer lengths."

Caputo is optimistic that designers will start to cater to tall female athletes even more. "After all," she says, "tall women have suffered long enough and deserve to be spoiled a bit."