

This Day in History... August 25, 1927

Birth of Althea Gibson

Althea Neale Gibson was born on August 25, 1927, in Silver, South Carolina. Gibson made history by becoming the first African American to win a Wimbledon title. She's been called the "female Jackie Robinson" for her role in breaking the color barrier in professional tennis.

Gibson's parents were sharecroppers who struggled along with many other rural southern farmers when the Great Depression hit. Therefore, in 1930, they moved to Harlem, New York. Unhappy in school and often absent, Gibson first explored tennis by bouncing rubber balls off a brick wall until a one-armed coach taught her how to play. By the time she was 12, Gibson was the city's women's paddle tennis champion. Her neighbors then raised money to fund a junior membership at the Cosmopolitan Tennis Club.

In 1941, Gibson won her first tournament – the American Tennis Association (ATA) New York State Championship. She then won to national ATA championships in 1944 and 1945 and in 1947, won the first of ten straight women's ATA titles. Gibson moved Wilmington, North Carolina to finish high school and then went to Florida A&M University on an athletic scholarship.



Imperforate Althea Gibson stamp

Despite Gibson's talent and great success, she was barred from competing in her sport's top events due to her race. While the US National Championships (US Open) prohibited segregation, most of the qualifying tournaments were held at white-only clubs. Then in 1950, fellow tennis star Alice Marble wrote an open letter to protest this, and Gibson was permitted to compete in the US Open. She was the first African American player to be invited to the nationals. Though she lost in the second round, she received significant national attention.

The following year, Gibson won her first international title, the Caribbean Championships in Jamaica. That same year she became one of the first African-American competitors at Wimbledon, the oldest and often considered the most prestigious of all tennis championships. In 1955, she won 16 of 18 international tournaments against some of the world's best tennis stars.

In 1956, Gibson became an international star after winning the singles title at the French Open, making her the first African American to do so. The following year, on July 6, 1957, Gibson won the Tennis Championships at Wimbledon. She was again the first African American to achieve that high honor. 1957 was a good year for Gibson – she went on to win the US Open and was selected by the Associated Press as Female Athlete of the Year. She was the also the first African-American woman to appear on the covers of *Sports Illustrated* and *Time* magazines.

By 1958, Gibson had won 56 national and international tennis titles. However, amateur tennis offered no prize money and athletes weren't allowed to make endorsement deals. A talented singer and saxophonist, Gibson recorded an album and appeared in a movie. She also played exhibition matches before Harlem Globetrotters games and won the Pepsi Cola World Pro Tennis Championships.

Gibson became the first African-American woman to join the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) in 1964. She still faced discrimination, but performed well, breaking course records and tying for second at the 1970 Len Immke Buick Open. She left that sport in 1978. Gibson worked with the national mobile tennis project, bringing tennis equipment to under privileged areas. She also ran tennis outreach programs and coached several rising tennis stars.



Gibson has been called "one of the greatest players who ever lived."



Gibson was the 36th honoree in the Black Heritage Series.



Gibson won 11 Grand Slam tournaments during her career.

Gibson briefly served as New Jersey's athletic commissioner and later served on the State Athletic Control Board and supervised the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. She suffered from health issues in her later years and her former doubles partner raised awareness and money to help cover her medical expenses. Gibson died on September 28, 2003.

Gibson was one of the first inductees into the International Women's Sports Hall of Fame. A tournament has been named after her as well as a few sports complexes.

Mystic Stamp Company • Camden, NY 13316

This Day in History... August 25, 1927

Birth of Althea Gibson

Althea Neale Gibson was born on August 25, 1927, in Silver, South Carolina. Gibson made history by becoming the first African American to win a Wimbledon title. She's been called the "female Jackie Robinson" for her role in breaking the color barrier in professional tennis.

Gibson's parents were sharecroppers who struggled along with many other rural southern farmers when the Great Depression hit. Therefore, in 1930, they moved to Harlem, New York. Unhappy in school and often absent, Gibson first explored tennis by bouncing rubber balls off a brick wall until a one-armed coach taught her how to play. By the time she was 12, Gibson was the city's women's paddle tennis champion. Her neighbors then raised money to fund a junior membership at the Cosmopolitan Tennis Club.

In 1941, Gibson won her first tournament – the American Tennis Association (ATA) New York State Championship. She then won to national ATA championships in 1944 and 1945 and in 1947, won the first of ten straight women's ATA titles. Gibson moved Wilmington, North Carolina to finish high school and then went to Florida A&M University on an athletic scholarship.



Imperforate Althea Gibson stamp



Gibson was the 36th honoree in the Black Heritage Series.

Despite Gibson's talent and great success, she was barred from competing in her sport's top events due to her race. While the US National Championships (US Open) prohibited segregation, most of the qualifying tournaments were held at white-only clubs. Then in 1950, fellow tennis star Alice Marble wrote an open letter to protest this, and Gibson was permitted to compete in the US Open. She was the first African American player to be invited to the nationals. Though she lost in the second round, she received significant national attention.

The following year, Gibson won her first international title, the Caribbean Championships in Jamaica. That same year she became one of the first African-American competitors at Wimbledon, the oldest and often considered the most prestigious of all tennis championships. In 1955, she won 16 of 18 international tournaments against some of the world's best tennis stars.

In 1956, Gibson became an international star after winning the singles title at the French Open, making her the first African American to do so. The following year, on July 6, 1957, Gibson won the Tennis Championships at Wimbledon. She was again the first African American to achieve that high honor. 1957 was a good year for Gibson – she went on to win the US Open and was selected by the Associated Press as Female Athlete of the Year. She was the also the first African-American woman to appear on the covers of *Sports Illustrated* and *Time* magazines.

By 1958, Gibson had won 56 national and international tennis titles. However, amateur tennis offered no prize money and athletes weren't allowed to make endorsement deals. A talented singer and saxophonist, Gibson recorded an album and appeared in a movie. She also played exhibition matches before Harlem Globetrotters games and won the Pepsi Cola World Pro Tennis Championships.

Gibson became the first African-American woman to join the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) in 1964. She still faced discrimination, but performed well, breaking course records and tying for second at the 1970 Len Immke Buick Open. She left that sport in 1978. Gibson worked with the national mobile tennis project, bringing tennis equipment to under privileged areas. She also ran tennis outreach programs and coached several rising tennis stars.



Gibson has been called "one of the greatest players who ever lived."



Gibson won 11 Grand Slam tournaments during her career.

Gibson briefly served as New Jersey's athletic commissioner and later served on the State Athletic Control Board and supervised the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. She suffered from health issues in her later years and her former doubles partner raised awareness and money to help cover her medical expenses. Gibson died on September 28, 2003.

Gibson was one of the first inductees into the International Women's Sports Hall of Fame. A tournament has been named after her as well as a few sports complexes.

Mystic Stamp Company • Camden, NY 13316