

Handout #7

Tennis Champions

Name _____

Bill Tilden

How big was William “Big Bill” Tilden? In the 1920’s and 1930’s, Bill Tilden was to tennis what Babe Ruth was to baseball. From 1920 to 1926, he won six straight U.S. Championships (the equivalent of today’s US Open). He won it for a seventh time in 1929, which still stands as a record. Although he didn’t play in every Wimbledon during his prime years (for a variety of reasons including being banned as professional tennis journalist), he won three Wimbledon crowns. As an amateur from 1912-30, he won 138 of 192 tournaments, and had a match record of 907-62—an unbelievable .936 percent winning percentage.

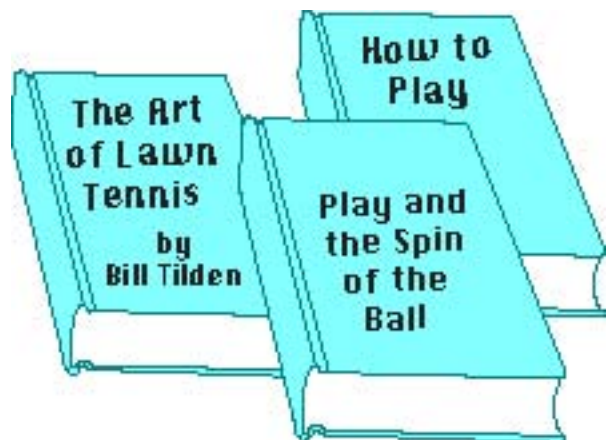


Unlike most champions who can perform great athletic feats but can’t articulate how they or others perform them, Tilden was an accomplished tennis journalist and author who could explain in words the physical, mental, and emotional attributes that made a great tennis champion. He wrote three books about tennis, including *How to Play Better Tennis*, *The Art of Lawn Tennis*, and *Match Play and the Spin of the Ball*.

Tilden’s life ended dismally. In 1953, he died alone and broke.

In today’s world, tennis is either a big money professional game played by a few superstars or it’s a casual way to have some fun and get a little exercise. Tilden had a different vision. To him, a tennis coach is the equivalent of the karate sensei (master). Focus, focus, focus.

What can we learn today from a man who won most his last tennis championships in the 1920s? We can learn that tennis is more than just about winning or having fun or that highest of modern goals, “getting some exercise.” We can learn that tennis is an art which requires, in Tilden’s words “the sum total of physical condition, courage, intelligence, experience, and stroke equipment of a player.”



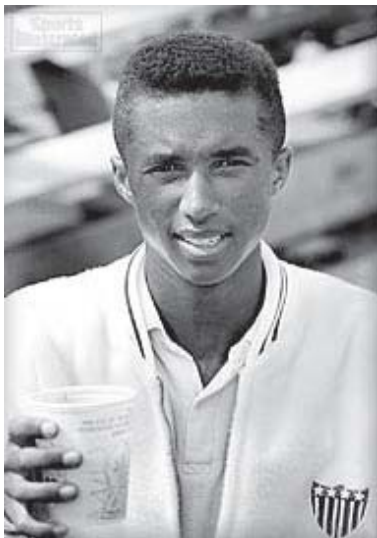
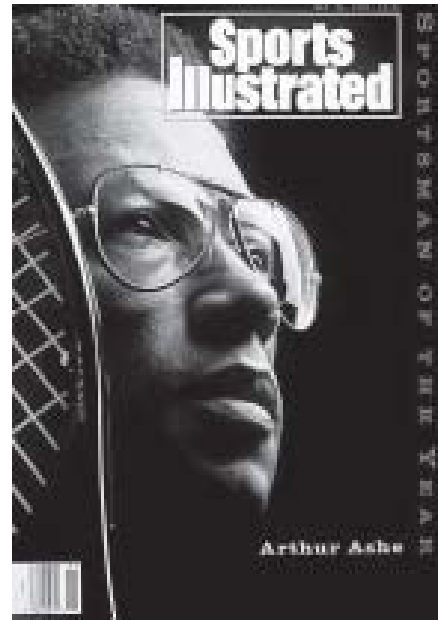
Arthur Ashe

As a tennis player, Arthur Ashe was one of the most prominent players of his time; an all-out competitor who rarely beat himself. His legacy, however, will be the positive changes he helped bring about and the causes he championed, both within tennis and in society as a whole. Though at his best he was for many the very definition of tennis, tennis never defined Arthur Ashe.

As a child growing up in segregated Richmond, Virginia, Arthur's physical stature did little to indicate his future career as a professional athlete. "Skinny as a straw," Arthur derived countless hours of pleasure reading and listening to music with his mother, Mattie. He also showed a surprising flair for tennis from the first time he picked up a racket. At the age of six, Mattie passed away suddenly. Though heartbroken, Arthur's memory of his beloved mother was a source of inspiration throughout his life.

When he graduated from high school, Arthur was good enough to earn a tennis scholarship to UCLA. It was at UCLA that Arthur became recognized for his tennis ability on a national level. He won an individual and team NCAA championship in 1965. In 1966 he graduated with a BA in Business Administration.

Ashe was selected in 1963 to represent the United States in Davis Cup play, an honor in which he took great pride. In doing so, he also became the first African-American to be selected to play for the American team. In actuality, Arthur Ashe was a trailblazer for African-American males in tennis every time he succeeded on the court.



Ashe became active in world politics in 1969 when, as the number one ranked American and one of the best players in the world, Arthur applied for a visa to play in the South African Open, a prestigious event. His visa was denied because of the color of his skin. Though Arthur was well aware that this would probably be the case, he decided to take a bold stand. He called for South Africa to be expelled from the tennis tour and Davis Cup play. What Arthur had done was to raise the world's awareness to the oppressive form of government (apartheid) of South Africa.



In 1975, at the age of 31, Arthur Ashe enjoyed one of his finest seasons ever and one of the most shining moments of his career by winning Wimbledon. He also attained the ultimate ranking of #1 in the world.

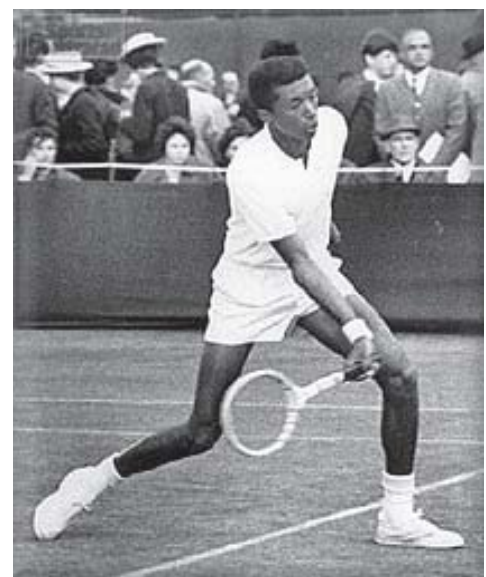
Following his retirement in 1980 and unexpected heart surgeries in 1979 and 1983, Arthur began reaping awards and branching off into other professional areas, including journalism, the media, and philanthropic endeavors. Included among those were jobs as a commentator for HBO Sports and ABC Sports, a columnist for *The Washington Post* and *Tennis* magazine, the publishing

of Arthur's 3-volume body of work, *A Hard Road To Glory*, a stint as captain of the US Davis Cup team, a well-deserved election to the Tennis Hall of Fame in 1985, and the founding of numerous charitable organizations, including the National Junior Tennis League, the ABC Cities Tennis Program, the Athlete-Career Connection, and the Safe Passage Foundation.

Arthur looked to be making a smooth transition into the second-half of his life, even becoming a father in 1986, when his daughter Camera Elizabeth arrived. During a doctor's exam in 1988, however, the Ashe's lives were irrevocably changed.

While in the hospital for brain surgery, Arthur received the overwhelming news that he was HIV-Positive. He had contracted the virus through a tainted transfusion during his two heart surgeries. Arthur Ashe passed away on February 6, 1993, having raised awareness of AIDS to a level where paranoia was no longer the overriding emotion.

For Arthur Ashe, tennis was a means to an end. What began on the public courts in Richmond, Virginia, ultimately became a lucrative, illustrious 10-year career. In between were many honors and awards, including three Grand Slam singles titles and over 800 career victories. But for Arthur, it was always more than personal glory. He knew that his status as an elite tennis player gave him a unique and worldwide platform to speak out about inequities, both in the tennis world and society as a whole. That in and of itself was unique, but not outstanding. Arthur stood out when he chose to use his status to bring about change. That is what makes his legacy so unique and important.



Billie Jean King

Billie Jean King was born on November 22, 1943, in Long Beach, California. In her early years she was an exceptional softball player; yet, Billie Jean knew that there was no significant future for woman in softball. Her parents introduced her to tennis, the game that would change her life and the lives of many other women. In 1962, at age 18 King upset Margaret Smith Court, the world's leading women's tennis player, at Wimbledon.



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In 1967 she was selected as “Outstanding Female Athlete of the World”. In 1972 she was named *Sports Illustrated*, “Sportsperson of the Year,” the first woman to be so honored; and in 1973, she was dubbed “Female Athlete of the Year.” She was the first female athlete to win over \$100,000 prize money in a single season. Billie Jean King spoke out for women and their right to earn comparable money in tennis and other sports. Her constant lobbying and commitments have broken many barriers. Billie Jean King established the first successful women's professional tennis tour. She founded many tennis clinics for underprivileged children. For her contributions to tennis as President of Tennis-America, Billie Jean King was awarded the National Service Bowl.



By 1968 she had won three Wimbledon championships as well as the United States title and was the world's top-ranked women's amateur. In 1967 King became the first woman player since 1939 to win the triple crown of singles, doubles, and mixed doubles in both the British and American championships. In 1968 she won Wimbledon for the third consecutive year and also won the Australian Open. In 1971 she also reclaimed the U.S. Open title. The next year she took her only French championship. She won her fourth U.S. Open in 1974. She won two more straight Wimbledon crowns in 1972-73 and her sixth in 1975, when she retired from singles competitions, although she continued playing in team tennis (1973-78) and in doubles, in which she was a superb player, winning the Wimbledon title ten times and the U.S. crown five times.

On September 20, 1973, a tennis match was played in the Houston Astrodome with over 30,000 people in attendance. The participants in this monumental match were the top ranked American woman at the time, the 29 year-old Billie Jean King, and an aging 55 year-old former Wimbledon and United States champion named Bobby Riggs. King beat Mr. Riggs convincingly 6-4, 6-3, 6-3. Her victory was historical in two ways - it enhanced the image of women's tennis around the world, and it accelerated the broader politically motivated women's movement in the United States as well as in other countries. Billie Jean's intense competitiveness was instrumental in increasing the popularity of women's tennis.