

STAMP SCOOP



ALTHEA GIBSON

In the world of sports, few players have broken through as many barriers as Althea Gibson. Born in South Carolina in 1927, Althea grew up in Harlem. As a student, she was enthusiastic about sports, especially tennis. A year after she began playing at the Harlem River Tennis Courts, she won her first tournament, sponsored by the American Tennis Association, a group devoted to growing the sport among black athletes.

Althea obtained an athletic scholarship to Florida A&M University, but was frequently discouraged from playing tennis professionally due to the sport's strict segregation. In 1951, she became the first black player invited to Wimbledon. A year later, she was one of America's Top Ten Players. In 1955, the United States Lawn Tennis Association sponsored a State Department tour that had Althea playing tennis around the world. With global fame under her belt, she was invited to some of tennis' most important tournaments. In 1956, she won the French Open, and in 1957, her US Championship (now known as the US Open) and Wimbledon titles followed. Althea was praised as Wimbledon's first black champion and was named Female Athlete of the Year by the Associated Press in 1957.

Althea retired in the late 60s and stayed connected to tennis through teaching and service roles. She died of respiratory failure in New Jersey in 2003 leaving behind an enormous legacy, helping to integrate an all-white sport in the heat of the Civil Rights Movement. This month, Althea Gibson will be honored on the Postal Service's 2013 Black Heritage Stamp

© 2013 Powers Communications © 2013 USPS