



Breaking the Barriers: African Americans and the World of Tennis

OVERVIEW

As students learn about African Americans who have broken barriers on and off the tennis court, they will also review the use of text features and search tools to research, build and present knowledge as they conduct a short research project.

OBJECTIVES

- Understand the barriers that were broken on and off the court by past, present, and up-and-coming African American tennis players.
- Learn about significant African Americans who have contributed to advancing diversity in the world of tennis.
- Activate background knowledge regarding text features and their importance in accurately reading and using informational text for research purposes.
- Complete short biography activities about these African American tennis players, and how they impacted tennis and society.

Lesson Time Suggested: Three to Five Class Periods



Springfield Racquet Club, 1922. Courtesy of Art Carrington

Common Core Learning Standards

Literacy in History/Social Studies,
Science, and Technical Subjects

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY

5th Grade:

RH.5.5, RI.5.6, RI.5.7, W.5.6,
W.5.7, W.5.8, W.5.9

6th-8th Grade:

RH.6-8.5, RH.6-8.6, RH.6-8.7
WHST.6-8.6, WHST.6-8.7,
WHST.6-8.8, WHST.6-8.9



PREP AND MATERIALS

- Knowledge Rating Chart
- Common Text Feature Glossary
- Informational Text Feature Chart
- *A Hard Road to Glory* Chapter 4
- Sequencing timeline
- Biography Map
- Wheaties Box Biography Sheet



POSSIBLE SOURCES

- *Faithful to the Task at Hand: The life of Lucy Diggs Slowe* by Carroll L.L. Miller and Anne S. Pruitt-Logan
- *Whirlwind: The Godfather of Black Tennis* by Doug Smith
- *Changing the Game: The Stories of Tennis Champions Alice Marble and Althea Gibson* by Sue Davidson
- *I Always Wanted to be Somebody* by Althea Gibson
- *A Hard Road to Glory* Vols. 1-3 by Arthur Ashe
- *Days of Grace* by Arthur Ashe
- *On the Line* by Serena Williams
- *Venus & Serena: Serving from the Hip* by Venus & Serena Williams
- *Come to Win* by Venus Williams
- USTA Article, "[The Founding of the ATA, 1916](#)"
- [American Tennis Association](#) Website
- [Association of Tennis Professionals](#) / [Women's Tennis Association](#) Websites

MUSEUM SOURCES

- ITHF Hall of Famer Biographies on [Website](#)
- Artifacts, photographs, archives from the ITHF Museum collection (pgs. 4-15)
- Digital Exhibition: [Breaking the Barriers](#)
- Digital Exhibition: [Breaking Boundaries](#)



ACTIVITY ONE

1. Present students with a **Knowledge Rating Chart** to assess their knowledge of seven past, current, and up-and-coming African American tennis players.
2. Using the **Common Text Feature Glossary** and an article or book, activate students' prior knowledge regarding text features and their importance in gathering information.
3. Give students the **Informational Text Features Chart** and ask them to read the Biography and In the Museum pages (pgs. 4-15), explore the digital exhibitions, and any other books or articles related to the seven profiled African American tennis players. The students can use these materials to complete the **Informational Text Features Chart** (independently or in small groups). If time allows students can share out their text feature findings with the entire group. *(End of Day 1)*
4. Using the **Sequencing Timeline** and Chapter 4 from *The Hard Road to Glory*, students (in small groups) will create a timeline of important historic dates related to the advancement of African Americans in the world of tennis. Timelines should be displayed so that students have a chance to look at other students' timelines and solidify their background knowledge regarding the advancement of African Americans in the world of tennis. *(End of Day 2)*

ACTIVITY TWO

1. Students will complete a **Biography Map**. They will choose one of the seven tennis players from the **Knowledge Rating Chart**. Using the listed resources, students will begin to answer the questions "Who is (chosen tennis player)?" and "What is his/her historical significance to the game of tennis?" Students will organize their research and answers in the **Biography Map**.
2. Students will present their information using the **Wheaties Box Activity Sheet**. They will be required to use many text features to effectively answer the research questions noted above. *(Day 3-5)*



• THE LIFE OF LUCY DIGGS SLOWE •

*Faithful
to the Task
at Hand*

Lucy Diggs Slowe

(1885-1937)

Born in 1885, Lucy Slowe went on to become the first female graduate and the first scholarship recipient of her high school to enter Howard University in Washington, D.C. Slowe graduated as class valedictorian in 1908 and accepted a teaching position at Douglass High School in Baltimore. While attending Howard University and continuing through the years, she excelled at tennis. In 1917, Slowe became the first African American to win a national title in any sport by winning the first women's title at the American Tennis Association's (ATA) national tournament in Baltimore.



Dr. Robert “Whirlwind” Johnson

(1899-1971)

Hall of Fame Class: 2009

Tennis historians have long lauded the noble efforts of Althea Gibson and Arthur Ashe in breaking down racial barriers, but without the guidance and encouragement of Dr. Robert Johnson, known as the “godfather” of Black tennis, Gibson, Ashe, and countless other African Americans would have been denied the opportunity to play tennis, therefore dashing not only tennis hopes and dreams, but the myriad of personal growth benefits that come with athletics. For more than two decades, Dr. Johnson trained, coached, and mentored African Americans from his personal courts in Lynchburg, Virginia. He established a Junior Development program for the American Tennis Association (ATA), worked tirelessly behind the scenes to provide opportunities for all competitors, and emerged as a towering figure in the game’s evolution.

For more information visit [Dr. Robert Johnson](https://www.tennisfame.com/biographies/dr-robert-johnson) on [TennisFame.com](https://www.tennisfame.com)



Althea Gibson

(1927-2003)

Hall of Fame Class: 1971

Determined and athletic, confident and aggressive, Althea Gibson turned the 1950s into a showcase for her talent and temerity. Breaking the color barrier in 1950 at Forest Hills by gaining entry into the U.S. National Championships, Gibson played with peak efficiency from 1956-1958. In that span, she collected five major singles titles, sweeping Wimbledon and the U.S. back-to-back in the latter two seasons.

For more information visit [Althea Gibson](https://www.tennisfame.com/althea-gibson) on TennisFame.com



Arthur Ashe (1943-1993)

Hall of Fame Class: 1985

Younger generations of tennis fans may only recognize Arthur Ashe's name as the one that adorns the stadium at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center at Flushing Meadows, New York, site of the US Open. Ashe rose from segregation and racial roadblocks to become the first African American male to win the US Open (1968), Australian Open (1970), and Wimbledon (1975). In 1963 he was the first African American chosen to play in the Davis Cup for the United States, and in ten years representing his country, helped the US to win five championships (1963, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1978). He was an activist, author, educator, and a tireless campaigner for civil rights and racial equality, not only in the United States but worldwide, particularly against the apartheid systems of South Africa.



For more information visit [Arthur Ashe](https://www.tennisfame.com/ArthurAshe) on TennisFame.com



Venus and Serena Williams revolutionized the sport of tennis. Serena Williams has won 23 Grand Slam singles titles, more than any tennis player, man or woman, in the Open Era. Combined, the Williams sisters have won 9 Olympic medals and 122 singles titles. Born to Richard and Oracene Williams in 1980 in Lynwood, California, and in 1981 in Saginaw, Michigan, the sisters moved with their family to Compton, California, in the early 1980s. Coached by their dad Richard, they both began playing tennis at a young age and entered the pro ranks of the Women's Tennis Association at the ages of 14 and 15. They both embarked on endeavors outside their tennis careers, and now lead successful ventures in film television, fashion, and philanthropy. Their incredible success on and off the court has made them two of the most recognizable and iconic names in the world.

Venus Williams

(b. 1980)

Serena Williams

(b. 1981)



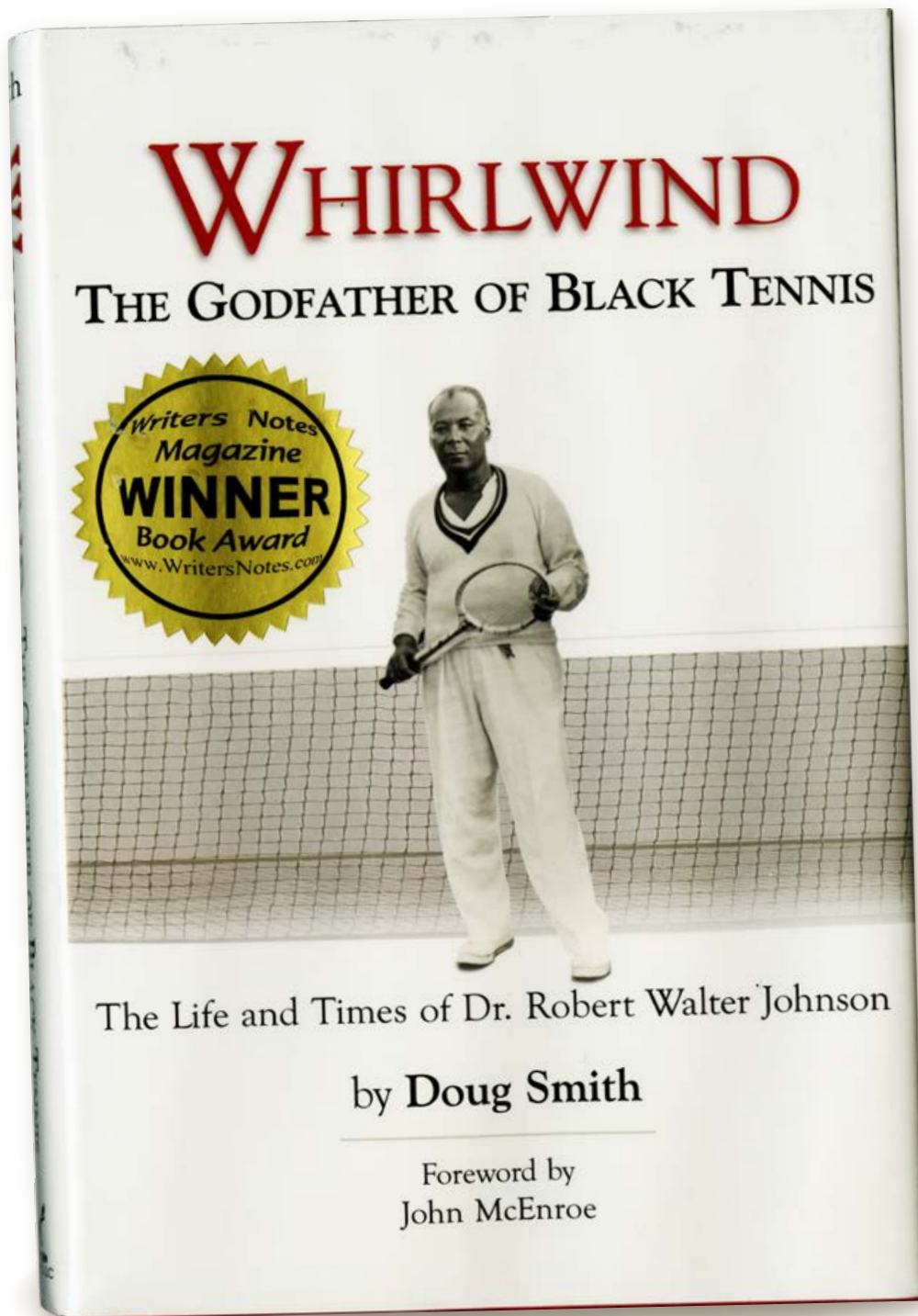


***Whirlwind, The Godfather
of Black Tennis, 2004***

Doug Smith (b. 1942), Author,
foreword by John McEnroe (b. 1959)
Blue Eagle Publishing Company,
Gift of Doug Smith, PUB 2004.17

Dr. Johnson served as a force
behind the integration of tennis.
He built a tennis dynasty that
produced two grand Slam
champions, Althea Gibson
and Arthur Ashe.

**The Popular Game: Tennis & Tours,
American Tennis Association Case**





**Time Magazine
featuring Althea Gibson,
August 26, 1958**

Boris Chaliapin,
Artist (1904-1979),
Time Inc., Publisher
Gift of Michael Dodson,
98.8.4

**The Popular Game:
Tennis & Tours,
1940s and 1950s Case**

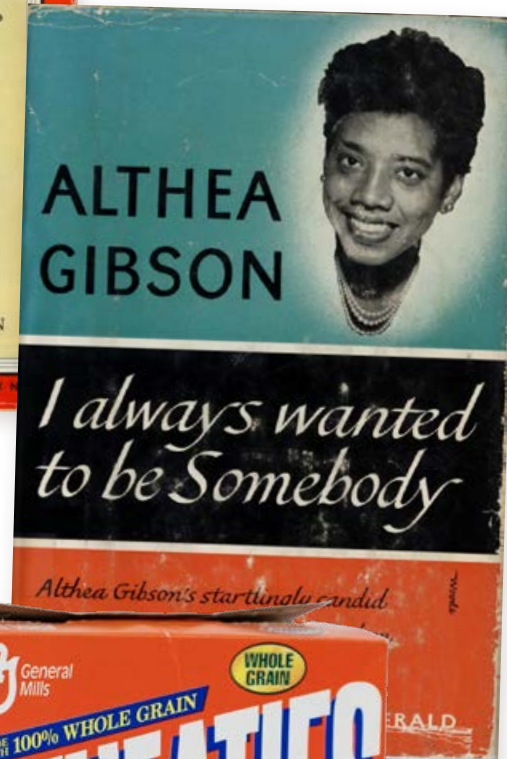


I Always Wanted to Be Somebody, 1958

Althea Gibson, Author, Harper & Brothers Publishers
Gift of Mr. John D. Law, PUB.1958.5

In her autobiography, Althea Gibson chronicles her life on and off the court, including the trials and tribulations she had to overcome in her rise to greatness.

**The Popular Game: Tennis & Tours,
American Tennis Association Case**



**Sports Illustrated featuring Althea Gibson,
September 2, 1957**

Time Inc., Publisher
ITHF Acquisition, 98.81.2

The Popular Game: Tennis & Tours, 1940s and 1950s Case



**Wheaties Cereal Box
featuring
Althea Gibson, 2001**

General Mills
ITHF Collection,
2001.2.1

**The Popular Game:
Tennis & Culture,
Pop Culture Case**



In His Shadow (Arthur Ashe), 2010

Richard Wilson (b. 1972)
Pastel on Wallis sanded pastel paper
Gift of John G. Davis, 2011.10.1

North Carolina-based artist Richard Wilson strives to tell stories about optimism or introspection in his artwork. *In His Shadow* portrays a young tennis player walking off the court inspired by his idol, Arthur Ashe.

The Popular Game: Tennis & Tours, next to Pro Tours Case



Arthur Ashe, 1966

Joe Brown (1909-1985)
Bronze
ITHF Acquisition, 98.6

Joe Brown created this realistic bronze of Arthur Ashe, which was presented during National Arthur Ashe Day on Tuesday, August 30, 1966.

**The Popular Game:
Tennis & Tours, American
Tennis Association Case**



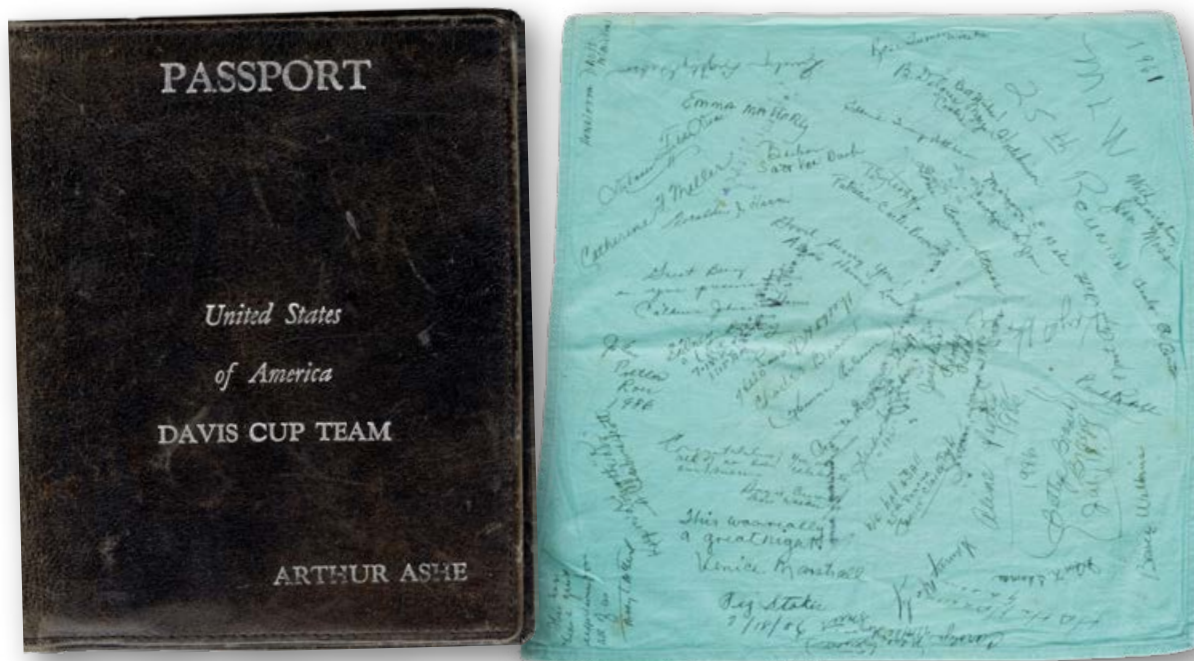
ATP Arthur Ashe Humanitarian of the Year Award, 2003

Waterford Crystal
Gift of Gustavo (Guga) Kuerten,
2014.18.3

In 2003, Gustavo Kuerten was presented with this award, in recognition of the work he has done through his Institute Guga Kuerten (inspired by his late brother Guilherme and opened in 2000). The Institute Guga Kuerten provides developmental opportunities, sports, education, and social inclusion for the disabled in Brazil.

**The Open Era:
ATP WCT/Handsome 8, Wimbledon Boycott,
Year-End Championships Case**





Arthur Ashe's Davis Cup Team Passport Case, ca. 1980

THF Acquisition, 2005.8.6

Ashe represented the United States 18 times as a player, and later served as Captain from 1981 to 1985.

The Open Era,
Global Tennis Gallery, Davis Cup Case

Napkin autographed by peers of Arthur Ashe, 1986

ITHF Acquisition, 2013.2.1

In 1986, Arthur Ashe attended his 25th high school reunion in Virginia. His classmates and teachers, proud of what he had accomplished, sought out his autograph. Ashe believed that he was no more significant than his peers, and spent the evening obtaining the autographs of his former classmates and teachers.

The Popular Game: Tennis & Culture, Games Case, Drawer 4



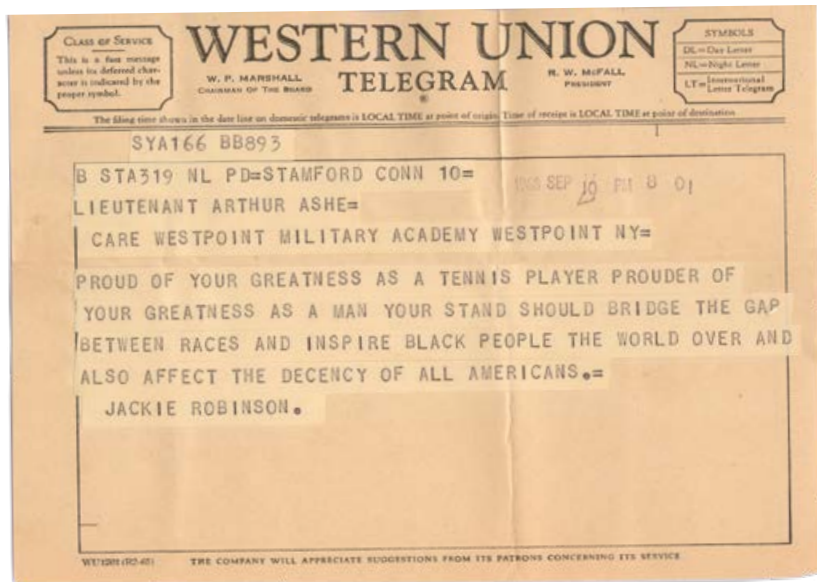
"Arthur Ashe Competition II" Tennis Racquet used by Arthur Ashe, 1975

Head (American)

Gift of Arthur Ashe, 80.13

Arthur Ashe used this racquet in the 1975 Wimbledon Gentlemen's Singles Championship final to defeat rival Jimmy Connors 6-1, 6-1, 5-7, 6-4.

The Open Era, Grand Slam Gallery, Wimbledon Case



Telegram from Jackie Robinson to Arthur Ashe, September 10, 1968

Western Union
ITHF Acquisition, 2005.8.1

In 1968, Arthur Ashe, an amateur tennis player, defeated professional Tom Okker 1412, 5-7, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, in the first US Open final. With this win, Ashe became the first African American man to win a major title, a historic feat which was recognized by Jackie Robinson.

The Popular Game: Tennis & Tours, American Tennis Association Case

ATA National Championships Program, 1962

Gift of Nora Graves, 2007.43.12

Founded in 1916, the American Tennis Association (ATA) is the oldest African American sports organization in the United States. The ATA organizes national tournaments, improves the standards of existing clubs, and provides resources to develop African American tennis. The 46th ATA National Championships were held at Wilberforce University in Ohio. Arthur Ashe won a third consecutive men's singles title while Carolyn Liquori won the women's singles title and partnered with Mimi Kanarek to capture the women's doubles title.

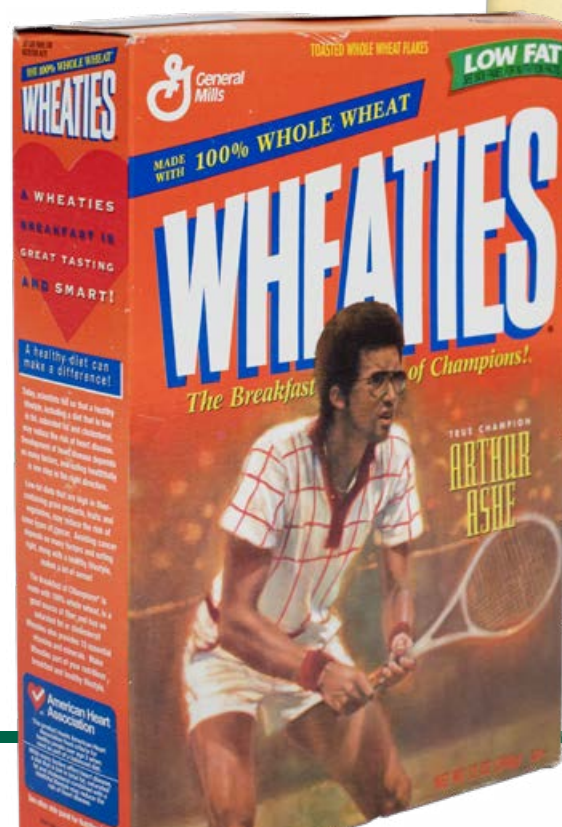
The Popular Game: Tennis & Tours, American Tennis Association Case



Wheaties Cereal Box featuring Arthur Ashe, 1997

General Mills (American)
Gift of Julia A. Levering,
1998 98.20

Area 2: Tennis & Culture, Pop Culture Case





Serena Williams' Catsuit, 2002

Puma
Gift of Serena Williams,
2003.22.1

The form-fitting Lycra "catsuit" made headlines and raised eyebrows when Serena Williams wore it as she dominated the 2002 US Open. Though Williams credited the outfit for the supreme confidence with which she was playing, it was not worn when she completed a "Serena Slam" in Melbourne at the 2003 Australian Open, becoming the fifth woman in history to hold all four major titles at the same time.

**The Open Era,
WTA Fashion, Players,
Year End Champs Case**

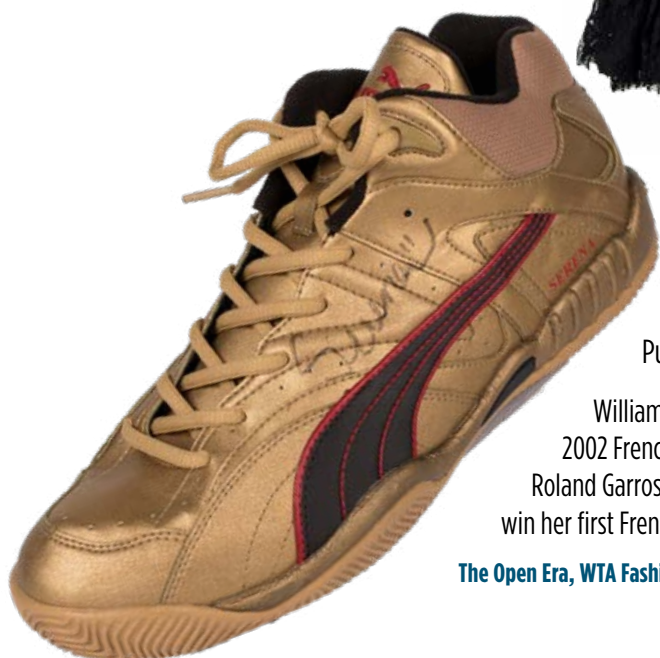


Dress worn by Venus Williams, 2010

Eleven by Venus Williams
Gift of Venus Williams, 2010.21.1

With its skin-toned lining, this "see-through" black lace dress shocked and awed audiences during the 2010 French Open at Stade Roland Garros in Paris and around the world. Venus' daring ensemble entertained viewers of the second Grand Slam event of the year.

**The Open Era,
WTA Fashion, Players,
Year End Champs Case**



Serena Williams's Gold Tennis Shoe, 2002

Puma, Gift of Serena Williams, 2002.48

Williams sported the gilt tennis shoe style during the 2002 French Open Women's Singles Championships at Stade Roland Garros. She defeated her older sister Venus 7-5, 6-3 to win her first French Open title.

The Open Era, WTA Fashion, Players, Year End Champs Case



Dress and tennis shoes worn by Serena Williams, 2010

Nike, Inc., Gift of Dianne Hayes on behalf of Nike, Inc. and Serena Williams, 2010.12.1 and 2010.12.2a&b

At the 2010 Australian Open, Serena Williams defended her 2009 title by defeating Justine Henin of Belgium 6-4, 3-6, 6-2. This was Serena's 12th major singles title and an Open Era record 5th at the Australian Open.

The Open Era, Grand Slam Gallery, Center Case



WTA Tour Equal Prize Money Recognition Award, 2007

Sterling Cut Glass Co.
Gift of the Sony Ericsson WTA Tour, 2009.14.1 a-c

The Sony Ericsson WTA Tour created this one-of-a-kind display—containing a ball from the 2007 Wimbledon Championships autographed by finalists Venus Williams and Marion Bartoli—to recognize the achievement of securing equal prize money for women in all four of the Grand Slam tournaments. In 2007 Roland Garros and Wimbledon agreed to do so, following the Australian Open and the US Open who have provided equal prize money since 2000 and 1973 respectively.

The Open Era, WTA Virginia Slims and Prize Money Case