

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the people across the world who made contributions to Althea Gibson, and who helped her live out the rest of her days in dignity and comfort.



DON'T QUIT

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG, AS THEY SOMETIMES WILL,
WHEN THE ROAD YOU'RE TRUDGING
SEEMS ALL UPHILL,
WHEN THE FUNDS ARE LOW AND THE DEBTS ARE HIGH,
AND YOU WANT TO SMILE, BUT YOU HAVE TO SIGH,
WHEN CARES ARE PRESSING YOU DOWN A BIT,
REST IF YOU MUST, BUT DON'T YOU QUIT.

LIFE IS QUEER WITH ITS TWISTS AND TURNS,
AS EVERYONE OF US SOMETIMES LEARNS,
AND MANY A FAILURE TURNS ABOUT
WHEN HE MIGHT HAVE WON HAD HE STUCK IT OUT;
DON'T GIVE UP THOUGH THE PACE SEEMS SLOW -
YOU MIGHT SUCCEED WITH ANOTHER BLOW.

OFTEN THE GOAL IS NEARER THAN
IT SEEMS TO THE FAINT AND FALTERING MAN,
OFTEN THE STRUGGLER HAS GIVEN UP
WHEN HE MIGHT HAVE CAPTURED THE VICTOR'S CUP.
AND HE LEARNED TOO LATE,
WHEN THE NIGHT SLIPPED DOWN,
HOW CLOSE HE WAS TO THE GOLDEN CROWN.

SUCCESS IS FAILURE TURNED INSIDE OUT,
THE SILVER TINT OF THE CLOUDS OF DOUBT,
AND YOU NEVER CAN TELL HOW CLOSE YOU ARE,
IT MAY BE NEAR WHEN IT SEEMS AFAR;
SO STICK TO THE FIGHT WHEN YOU'RE HARDEST HIT -
IT'S WHEN THINGS SEEM WORST
THAT YOU MUST NOT QUIT.

- by Edgar A. Guest -

Pall Bearers

- Kevin Dowdell
- George Henry
- Dr. Duane Dyson
- Sean Cotter
- Louis Wiggs
- Orin McKay

Honorary Pall Bearers

- William Hayling
- Gus Jenkins
- Arthur Carrington
- Billy Davis
- Gene Scott
- Robert Rylan
- Alan Schwartz

Professional Services Entrusted To
James E. Churchman, Jr.
Funeral Home
345 13th Avenue • Newark, NJ
973.242.8454
www.churchmanfuneralhome.com



*In Loving Memory
of*

Althea Gibson



Sunrise

August 25, 1927



Sunset

September 28, 2003

Service

*Thursday, October 2, 2003
11:00 a.m.*

Trinity & St. Philips Cathedral

610 Broad Street
Newark, New Jersey

The Very Rev. C. David Williams, Officiating

Service for the Burial of the Dead

Book of Common Prayer, page 491

The Very Rev. C. David Williams, Dean - Officiating
The Rt. Rev. John Palmer Croneberger, Bishop of Newark - Celebrant
The Rt. Rev. Rufus Brome, Assisting Bishop of Newark
The Rev. Mildred J. Solomon, Assisting Priest (Gospeler)

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Reception of the Body	Page 466
Opening Anthem	Page 491
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First Lesson	Lamentations 3: 22-26, 31-33
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Psalms 23 (Traditional)	Page 476
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Obituary Reading	
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Announcements	
Remarks	David Adams , President of the American Tennis Association Dr. Fred Gainous , President Florida A&M University Zina Garrison , Wimbledon Finalist Alan Schwartz , President - United States Tennis Association Denise Jordan , Executive Director, Eastern Section U.S. Tennis Association The Honorable Mayor Sharpe James , Mayor of City of Newark The Honorable David Dinkins , former Mayor of New York City

RITE 1

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Final Disposition
Rosedale Crematory
Orange, New Jersey

Upon graduating high school, **Althea** was immediately accepted into Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University on a tennis scholarship. **Althea** was a key to FAMU winning all of the Conference Championships during her four years before graduating 10th in her class.

As the two-time winner of the national black women’s tennis championship, **Gibson** thought she had a good case for being admitted to the 1950 U.S. Nationals. But it appeared as if she were going to be shut out again until Alice Marble, a four-time winner of the event, advanced her cause in the July 1950 issue of “American Lawn Tennis” magazine. “If **Althea Gibson** represents a challenge to the present crop of players, then it’s only fair that they meet this challenge on the courts,” Marble wrote.

Finally, the U.S. Lawn Tennis Association relinquished and invited her. In her historic debut at the 1950 U.S. Nationals, **Gibson** defeated Barbara Knapp in straight sets. Her second-round match on the grass of Forest Hills was against Louise Brough, who had won the previous three Wimbledons. After being routed 6-1 in the first set, **Gibson** recovered to win the second set 6-3 and led 7-6 in the third when a thunderstorm struck, halting the match. When it resumed the next day, **Gibson** dropped three straight games to lose the match.

It took **Gibson** a while to adjust to the stronger competition. She also remained unwelcome at some clubs where tournaments were held. She was ranked No. 9 among American women in 1952, but it wasn’t until four years later that Gibson displayed the game of a player ready to move into the first echelon.

She won her first major in 1956, the French championships, defeating defending champion Angela Mortimer 6-0, 12-10 on the clay courts in Paris. This was her only appearance at the French. She teamed with Englishwoman Angela Buxton to win the women’s doubles title at the French, as well as at Wimbledon. That year she also won singles tournaments at the Italian, the Pacific Southwest, New South Wales, Pan American, South Australian and the Asian title in Ceylon.

In 1957 **Gibson** gained control of the women’s game. First, she beat Darlene Hard 6-3, 6-2 to win Wimbledon. Then on Sept. 8, she made history in her own country, defeating Brough by the same score for the U.S. Championship. She also was part of the winning women’s doubles team with Hard at Wimbledon and took the mixed doubles title with Kurt Nielsen at Forest Hills.

Even while winning tournaments she was denied rooms at hotels. One refused to book reservations for a luncheon in her honor. She said she didn’t care. “I tried to feel responsibilities to Negroes, but that was a burden on my shoulders,” she said in 1957. “Now I’m playing tennis to please me, not them.”

She pleased herself -- and blacks -- in 1958 by defeating Mortimer 8-6, 6-2 in the Wimbledon final and rallying to beat Hard 3-6, 6-1, 6-2 for the U.S. title. Her third consecutive Wimbledon women’s doubles title also was won, this time with Maria Bueno.

Her singles record at the Grand Slams events was an impressive 53-9 -- 16-1 at Wimbledon, 27-7 at the U.S., 6-0 at the French and 4-1 at the Australian. As a member of the 1957 and 1958 U.S. Wightman Cup teams, she went 5-1 -- 3-1 in singles and 2-0 in doubles -- against Britain.

In 1957, she was the first black to be voted by the Associated Press as its Female Athlete of the Year. She won the honor again in 1958.

There was no professional tennis tour in those days. **Gibson** turned to the pro golf tour for a few years, but she didn’t distinguish herself. She tried playing a few events after open tennis started in 1968, but by then she was in her 40s and too old to beat her younger opponents. She worked as a tennis teaching pro after she stopped competing.

The title of her autobiography, written in 1958, is “I Always Wanted to Be Somebody.” To tennis fans, she always will be. Though she didn’t go looking for the role of pioneer, she was one.

“If it hadn’t been for her,” says Billie Jean King, winner of 12 Grand Slam singles titles, “it wouldn’t have been so easy for Arthur (Ashe) or the ones who followed.”

**“It has been a bewildering, challenging, exhaustive experience,
often more painful than pleasurable, more sad than happy,
But I wouldn’t have missed it for the world.”**

- Althea Gibson -



Obituary

On the morning of September 28, 2003, with her “daughter,” Frances Clayton Gray at her bedside, **Ms. Althea Gibson** peacefully departed this life.

Althea is survived by a brother, Daniel Gibson; a sister, Lillian Chisolm; an aunt, Minnie McFadden; four sisters-in-law, Thelma Gibson, Rosemary Darben, Ella Brown and Elizabeth Terry; a brother-in-law, Melvin Gibbs; nine nieces, eleven grandnieces, one nephew and eleven great grandnieces and grandnephews; The Althea Gibson Foundation, Althea Gibson Community Education & Tennis Center and the Florida A&M University Alumni Association.

Althea was the daughter of Annie and Daniel Gibson. She was born on August 25, 1927 in the small town of Silver, South Carolina. In 1930, the family (**Althea** along with her three sisters: Mildred (deceased), Anne (deceased) and Lillian, and her brother, Daniel) moved to Harlem, New York. It was in Harlem that talent, determination, opportunity and kindness converged to shape an individual that would cause the world to examine its notion of fairness and competition.

Althea was married twice, first to William Darben and then to Sydney Lewellyn (both deceased).

In 1998, **Althea Gibson**, along with Fran Clayton Gray, founded The Althea Gibson Foundation for the purpose of educating children and exposing them to tennis and golf.

Before **Althea Gibson** could play in - much less win - major tennis tournaments, another opponent first had to be defeated. But Gibson had less control against this foe which went by the name “segregation.”

Jackie Robinson played in the Major Leagues (1947) before a black was permitted to play tennis at the U.S. National Championships. But cracks soon developed in the “lily white” sport. And finally, in 1950, when **Gibson** was 23 years old, she was permitted to play at the U.S. Nationals, becoming the first black to compete in the tournament. She also later cracked the color barrier at Wimbledon.

In 1956, **Gibson** made history by becoming the first black person to win the French championships. The next year, she made more history by winning Wimbledon and the U.S. Nationals, the first black to win either. She must have liked winning the world’s two most prestigious tournaments, too, because she repeated the accomplishments in 1958.



The 5-foot-11 right-hander had a strong serve and preferred to play an attacking game. An athletic woman, she had good foot speed which allowed her to cover the court. As the years went on, she became more consistent from the baseline. Including six doubles titles, she won a total of 11 Grand Slam events on her way to the International Tennis Hall of Fame and the International Women’s Sports Hall of Fame.

The family moved to Harlem in New York City when she was 3. Growing up there, **Gibson** disliked going to school so much that she often played hooky. “Daddy would whip me,” she said, “and I’m not talking about spankings.” But she didn’t blame her father for the whippings, saying she deserved them. Aside from an occasional fight, she was never in any real trouble.

What **Gibson** liked to do was play sports, at first, basketball was her favorite. Next she became quite proficient in paddle tennis. Then a friendly musician, Buddy Walker, gave her a tennis racket and introduced her to the Harlem River Tennis Courts and The Cosmopolitan Tennis Club. The Cosmopolitan Tennis Club was the elite tennis club for persons of African descent at that time. Under the guidance of Fred Johnson, the tennis pro at the club, she developed her game.

She quit high school -- not because of tennis but because she couldn't stand classes -- and began competing in girls tournaments under the auspices of the American Tennis Association, which was all black. In 1946, she attracted the attention of two tennis playing doctors, Hubert Eaton of North Carolina and Robert W. Johnson of Virginia, who were active in the black tennis community.

Soon-to-be welterweight champion Sugar Ray Robinson and his wife, who had befriended **Gibson**, advised her to continue her education even if it meant going South. She did. Each doctor took her into his family -- Eaton during the school year, Johnson in the summer. Not only did they provide tennis instruction, they also straightened her out academically. She went back to high school for her last three years and graduated at the top of her class in 1949 in Wilmington, N.C.



Precious



Memories

