



POSTAL NEWS

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Tennis Legends Serve Up Tributes to Honor Icon Althea Gibson Tomorrow



To obtain a high-resolution image of the stamp for media use only, please email mark.r.saunders@usps.gov.

FLUSHING, NY — Tomorrow, on the grounds of the U.S. Open, tennis legends Billie Jean King and Katrina Adams will pay tribute at a 10 a.m. First-Day-of-Issuance Forever stamp dedication ceremony honoring tennis legend Althea Gibson as the 36th inductee into the Postal Service's [Black Heritage stamp series](#).

The event, free and open to the public, will take place near the plaque honoring Gibson that is located at the south entrance of the U.S. Tennis Association Billie Jean King National Tennis Center Court of Champions.

Beginning Fri., Aug. 23, customers may purchase the Althea Gibson Forever stamp at usps.com/stamps, at 800-STAMP-24 (800-782-6724) and at Post Offices nationwide.

The Postal Service will also honor Gibson at a special 10 a.m. stamp dedication ceremony Sat., Aug. 24 at the Althea Gibson Tennis Complex, located at the Essex County Branch Brook Park in Newark, NJ.

"I'm excited that the Postal Service is releasing a Forever stamp that honors the legacy of my friend, Althea Gibson," said King. "Her achievements served as a catalyst for equality in sports

and in life and I am honored to participate in this historic event.”

As the first African-American tennis player to win one of the four major singles tournaments, Althea Gibson (1927–2003) helped integrate her sport at the height of the civil rights movement. She twice won Wimbledon and the U.S. Championships (now known as the U.S. Open) and became the top-ranked player in the world.

King and Adams will join U.S. Postal Service Judicial Officer William Campbell and U.S. Tennis Association Director at Large Chanda Rubin and a host of other professional athletes and coaches in the dedication ceremony.

“Althea Gibson was impossible to ignore,” said Campbell. “Her achievements demanded Americans everywhere pay attention — and pay attention they did. She opened doors that other African-American tennis players would one day walk through — including Arthur Ashe, Katrina Adams, Chanda Rubin and the Williams sisters, Venus and Serena.”

The stamp, which features an action shot of Gibson, emphasizes two of her notable characteristics: grace and athleticism. Designed by Derry Noyes of Washington, DC, the stamp features an oil-on-wood painting of Gibson by artist Kadir Nelson of Los Angeles, CA. The art is based on a photograph taken at Wimbledon.

The Making of the Icon

Gibson was born Aug., 25, 1927 in Silver, SC. As a young child, she was sent to New York City to live with her aunt Sally. Gibson’s parents, Annie and Daniel, eventually migrated north as well, settling in an apartment on West 143rd Street in Harlem.

As a child, Gibson fared well in New York’s Police Athletic League (PAL) paddle tennis competitions. Musician Buddy Walker, who worked during summers as a play leader for the PAL, saw potential in Gibson. He purchased a few used tennis rackets and gave them to her. Later, she was formally introduced to the game at Harlem’s Cosmopolitan Club, a hub for black tennis players.

In 1942, Gibson entered — and won — her first tournament, the New York State Open Championship. The event was sponsored by the American Tennis Association (ATA), the country’s black tennis circuit. Gibson went on to win the ATA junior championship in both 1944 and 1945. By 1946, Gibson was competing at the women’s level. She dominated the ATA in the late-1940s and earned her high school diploma in June 1949.

Soon after graduation, she entered Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee on an athletic scholarship. In college, she played basketball and also kept her tennis skills sharp. The latter came in handy in 1950, when Gibson got her first real shot at the big time. Perhaps she was spurred on by an *American Lawn Tennis* editorial written by former tennis champ Alice Marble — an ardent Gibson backer and supporter of equal rights. The United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA) accepted her application to play in that summer’s United States Championships (now known as the U.S. Open) in Forest Hills, NY. Gibson, the first African-American ever to enter that tournament, advanced to the second round. In 1951, she once again made history, becoming the first black player to enter Wimbledon.

In 1953, Gibson graduated from Florida A&M and took a job teaching physical education at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, MO. For the next few years, her USLTA ranking fluctuated. She mulled joining the Women’s Army Corps in order to support herself and her family. Still, she hadn’t forgotten about tennis.

Around that time, coach Sydney Llewellyn began helping Gibson reshape her game. Gibson also received support from friend Rosemary Darben, a player on the ATA circuit. Throughout the 1950s, Gibson lived with the Darben family in Montclair, NJ.

In 1955, Gibson received an invitation from the State Department to join a delegation of American tennis stars for a public relations tour of Asia. The trip proved to be invaluable. She bonded with her fellow players and, in the process, gained confidence and on-court savvy.

She built on the experience, stringing together an impressive run of victories in Asia and Europe. In 1956, she captured the French Championships (now known as the French Open) in Paris and became the first African-American of either gender to win one of the four major singles tournaments. Gibson also teamed up with Angela Buxton to win the doubles crown. The victories were vital for Gibson, who was well aware of the burden she carried.

“No matter how hard I tried to think of myself as just another person, I was constantly being confronted with proof that I wasn’t, that I was a special sort of person — a Negro with a certain amount of international importance. It was pleasant to think about but very hard to live with,” Gibson wrote in *I Always Wanted to Be Somebody*, her autobiography. “It was a strain, always trying to say and do the right thing, so that I wouldn’t give people the wrong idea of what Negroes are like.”

Still, Gibson pressed on, earning a measure of stardom in the midst of the civil rights movement. She achieved perhaps the most famous victory of her career on July 6, 1957, prevailing in the Wimbledon final in straight sets. Afterward, Gibson shouted, “At last! At last!” During the trophy ceremony, she was greeted by Queen Elizabeth II. When Gibson returned to New York, the city threw her a ticker-tape parade. The good times continued that summer. In August, she appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine. On Sept. 8, Gibson cruised to victory in the final of the U.S. Championships to win the tournament for the first time.

Gibson, the Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year in 1957 and 1958, had become the top-ranked player in the world. In 1958, she successfully defended her titles both at Wimbledon and at the U.S. Championships. She turned professional soon after, ending her amateur career with five major singles titles and six major doubles titles.

Gibson's days as a competitive athlete, however, were not over. In 1959 and 1960, she toured with the Harlem Globetrotters, playing before their games against fellow tennis star Karol Fageros. In 1958 she released an album called *Althea Gibson Sings* and performed on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. She also became the first African American to qualify for the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour. She played many LPGA tournaments in the 1960s.

In 1971, Gibson was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame. She later worked in athletics for the state of New Jersey, where she made her home. She died Sept. 28, 2003, at the age of 76.

Many of this year’s other stamps may be viewed on Facebook at facebook.com/USPSStamps, via Twitter at [@USPSstamps](https://twitter.com/USPSstamps) or at beyondtheperf.com/2013-preview.

First-Day-of-Issue Postmark

Customers have 60 days to obtain the first-day-of-issue postmark by mail. Customers may purchase new stamps at their local Post Office, the Postal Store website at usps.com/shop, or by calling 800-STAMP-24. They should affix the stamps to envelopes of their choice, address the envelopes (to themselves or others), and place them in larger envelopes addressed to:

ALTHEA GIBSON STAMP
POSTMASTER
421 EIGHTH AVENUE, RM. 2029B
NEW YORK, NY 10199-9998

After applying the first-day-of-issue postmark, the Postal Service will return the envelopes through the mail. There is no charge for the postmark up to a quantity of 50. For more than 50, the price is 5 cents each. All orders must be postmarked by Oct. 23, 2013.

First-Day Covers

The Postal Service also offers first-day covers for new stamp issues and Postal Service stationery items postmarked with the official first-day-of-issue cancellation. Each item has an individual catalog number and is offered in the quarterly *USA Philatelic* catalog, online at usps.com/shop or by calling 800-782-6724. Customers may request a free catalog by calling 800-782-6724 or writing to:

U.S. Postal Service
Catalog Request
PO Box 219014
Kansas City, MO 64121-9014

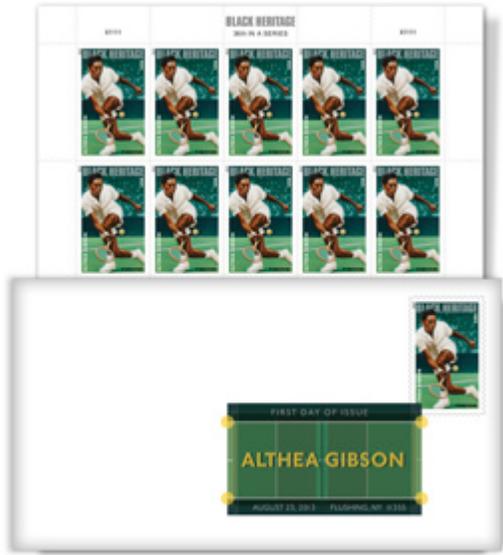
Philatelic Products

There are eight philatelic products available for this stamp issue:

- 470806, [Press Sheet with Die Cuts](#), \$92.00 (print quantity of 2,500)



- 470808, [Press Sheet without Die Cuts](#), \$92.00 (print quantity of 2,500).
- 470810, [Keepsake \(Pane and Digital Color Postmark Set\)](#), \$10.95.



- 470816, [First-Day Cover](#), \$0.90.



- 470821, [Digital Color Postmark](#), \$1.61.



- 470830, [Ceremony Program](#), \$6.95.



- 470831, Stamp Deck Card, \$0.95.
- 470832, Stamp Deck Card with Digital Color Postmark, \$1.96.

For the best selection of stamps and related collectible products, please visit the official Postal Service Store on eBay at ebay.com/stamps.

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For reporters interested in speaking with a regional Postal Service public relations professional, please go to about.usps.com/news/media-contacts/usps-local-media-contacts.pdf.

A self-supporting government enterprise, the U.S. Postal Service is the only delivery service that reaches every address in the nation: 152 million residences, businesses and Post Office Boxes. The Postal Service receives no tax dollars for operating expenses and relies on the sale of postage, products and services to fund its operations. With more than 31,000 retail locations and the most frequently visited website in the federal government, usps.com, the Postal Service has annual revenue of more than \$65 billion and delivers

nearly 40 percent of the world's mail. If it were a private-sector company, the U.S. Postal Service would rank 42nd in the 2012 Fortune 500. The Postal Service has been named the Most Trusted Government Agency for seven years and the fourth Most Trusted Business in the nation by the Ponemon Institute.

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