

ENGL1101

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"Arthur Ashe: A Legend in His Own Time"

A young African-American boy walks onto some rundown tennis courts at a local park with his father in Richmond, VA. Armed with an old wooden racquet and a can of white tennis balls, his father begins to feed him some different shots and tells his son everything he knows about tennis. Being an African-American, this young boy did not have many friends that were as interested in tennis as he was. Since tennis is a predominantly white sport, Arthur Ashe's desire to play was not encouraged by either race, but instead of giving up on the sport he loved, he continued playing to the dismay of many. Little did Ashe know, however, that his persistence would change the game forever. His efforts opened doors for many of the popular African-American tennis players, such as Serena and Venus Williams, MaliVai Washington, and Bryan Shelton. The class that he brought to the game of tennis and the bravery he showed by changing a sport dominated by whites made Arthur Ashe a legend in his own time.

What is a legend anyway? The word "legend" is a very strong word to use when describing a person. Legends are people who are known for changing the ways that things are traditionally done. Legends never fall into the norm; they are seen as pioneers in their own field or, in this case, sport. When something seems impossible to everyone, they don't just do it; they do it with flying colors, to the awe of all those around them. The more obstacles put in front of them, the more they strive to overcome them. Passion and desire constantly drive them to strive for perfection in anything that they do. Everybody involved with these types of people find their lives drastically changed over time. Legends give all those around them a new appreciation for whatever they do; they are an inspiration.

Arthur Ashe displayed an extremely high level of tolerance and persistence while he was learning the game of tennis. Being an African-American, he was faced with many obstacles when he played tennis, a sport mostly played by white people. Many establishments refused to give him an opportunity to play at their facilities. Many tournament directors prohibited him from entering any tournaments, despite (or maybe because of) the fact that he was better than many of the other players. He even had trouble finding a place to practice. However, despite these prejudiced restrictions, he was persistent in his quest to become the best tennis player he could be. When others would have quit and taken up another sport, he persevered through all the hardships and barriers placed before him.

Arthur Ashe also brought to the game of tennis a level of class and dignity that was not seen before, which he got from his family. "Drummed into me . . . by my dad, by the whole family, was that without your good name, you would be nothing," he said (CMG "Quotes"). With the media feeding off the more flamboyant players, such as John McEnroe and Jimmy Connors, Ashe could have very easily taken on a more crowd-pleasing personality; however, he stayed with his dignified and classical demeanor. On the court, he never lashed out at any of the players or umpires. He never displayed any negative emotions or received any point penalties. (A point penalty is issued when a player exhibits any unsportsmanlike conduct, such as any type of racquet or ball abuse, audible obscenity, or obscene gestures.) Off the court, he always treated people with respect, regardless of how they treated him. He never turned down an interview. (In professional athletics, turning down interviews is very prominent, especially after a poor

performance or when dealing with sensitive issues.) He won "The Sports Illustrated Sportsman of the Year" award in 1992 (CMG "Career Summary") because of his dignified behavior. He also put together numerous inner-city programs in an attempt to get underprivileged kids involved in tennis. Although his time was very valuable, he always found time to give back to his community in an impoverished section of Richmond, VA.

Ashe's figure was important, not only to tennis but also to many other endeavors dominated by whites. All of a sudden, African-Americans ventured into golf and hockey, making a splash in those sports as well. Because of Ashe, minorities felt that they deserved higher positions in business and management firms. The way he presented himself gave everyone a new respect for African-Americans. In a time where segregation was celebrated, Ashe made the world look at him in a whole new light; he was honest, classy, and very dignified. Better yet, he was an extremely talented tennis player who proved that whites were not the only ones who could play world-class tennis. He possessed qualities that were not usually seen in many athletes. His presence was also important to other African-Americans who dreamed of playing tennis; he diversified the game of tennis in a way that allowed other non-whites to participate. Without him, many well-known players today may not have had the chance to play tennis. Imagine the women's professional tour without greats such as Zina Garrison or Althea Gibson. What would women's tennis be like now without the Williams sisters, although some believe them to be arrogant and self-centered? MaliVai Washington is another beneficiary of Arthur Ashe's contributions. Without the efforts of Arthur Ashe, I probably would not have the opportunity to play tennis for one of the top Division I schools in the country.

Arthur Ashe's name must be included in any conversation dealing with legends. In the game of tennis, he was a pioneer, venturing into a sport dominated by whites. "He took the burden of race and wore it as a cloak of dignity," said Andrew Young, a former U.S. delegate to the United Nations (CMG "Quotes"). I could not have said it better myself. The obstacles placed before him did not intimidate him; instead, those barriers gave him more desire to accomplish great things. The class and dignity that Ashe exemplified was virtually nonexistent at that time! In the heat of competition, he was always calm and collected; he never lost his temper, despite the situation. During his daily life, he was a very respectful man who never had anything bad to say about anyone. He exercised the golden rule in everything he did: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Arthur Ashe would make the perfect role model for anyone trying to make a name for himself or herself. The word "legend" is the only word that can describe Ashe and all the things he did for the game of tennis!

Works Cited

CMG. *Official Web Site of Arthur Ashe*. 14 Oct. 1999
<http://www.cmgww.com/sports/ashe/index.html>.