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THIRTY-SEVEN YEARS LATER, ALTHEA GIBSON IS REMEMBERED

W.G. Ramirez

Her contributions to the world of tennis will long stand as a monument to talent and determination. Her rise to the top in a sport dominated by white, affluent, "private club" players is an inspiring story alone.

Althea Gibson was born in Silver, South Carolina on August 25, 1927. She was raised in Harlem in New York City, and it was there that she would hone her athletic skills by hanging out with the boys, playing basketball, baseball or paddle tennis. It was on the playground that Gibson felt good about herself, as she gained self-confidence by winning medals in city-sponsored competition.

In the summer of 1941, Althea moved on from junior high school and tried to stay active in whatever athletic activities she could find. What she would find would end up to be her future.

One day Gibson stopped in on West 143rd Street, where the city had set-up a paddle-tennis court. Fortunately for her, Buddy Walker, a musician known as Harlem's Society Orchestra Leader, was there to observe the natural talent that she had.

After encouraging her to play regular tennis, Walker took Gibson to the Harlem River Tennis Courts so she could actually experience the feel of a real tennis court. She played along with Walker and a few of his friends and caught the attention of many other players that were there. One of the spectators happened to be Juan Serrell, a teacher who belonged to the Cosmopolitan Club, New York's most prestigious black tennis club. Serrell insisted that Gibson come to the Cosmopolitan Club and play with the house professional in front of a small crowd of the members.

The members immediately were drawn to Gibson, and they took up a collection and bought her a membership to the club. Members of the Cosmopolitan Club were always looking for ways to promote the participation of blacks in tennis.

One year after taking lessons at the club, her instructor Fred Johnson entered her in her first tournament, the American Tennis Association (ATA) New York State Open Championship, held at the Cosmopolitan Club. Proving herself worthy of the

club's support, Althea won the tournament, and earned more support from her sponsors, as she went to the ATA's national girls' championship at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania.

Gibson made it all the way to the finals, only to be ousted by Nana Davis. It was apparent then that Gibson still needed to pick up some tennis etiquette as she stormed off the court after losing.

Gibson continued to work on



her skills at the Cosmopolitan Club over the next four years, and got an abundance of help from a member named Rhoda Smith. She went on

nights out until three or four in the morning.

Strangely enough, it would be a bowling alley that Gibson would find a new influence on her future, an influence by the name of Sugar Ray Robinson.

Robinson and his wife, Edna Mae, took a liking to Althea and quickly became concerned with her welfare. The Robinsons took Gibson with them on road trips, and the young budding tennis star loved all of the attention. The couple kept encouraging Gibson to make the best of her talents, and she listened as she moved on to the ATA women's division tournaments. In 1946, she made it to the finals, but fell short to Roumania Peters. She described her loss as a "good lesson," but drew rave reviews from two doctors - Hubert A. Eaton and Robert W. Johnson.

The two offered Althea a plan to get her admitted into college and also pursue her tennis ca-

reer. The situation was discussed with ATA officials and then presented to Althea in fine fashion.

Gibson would live with Dr. Eaton in Wilmington, North Carolina during the school year, and attend high school (Althea was a high school dropout at the time), while sharpening her skills on the court.

Hersummers were spent with Dr. Johnson in Lynchburg, Virginia so she could travel with him for ATA tournaments. It was the Robinsons that convinced her to take the opportunity at hand, in order for her to gain an education.

Gibson made her way down South, but didn't exactly adapt to the ways of the white folks. Far from the more tolerant New York City, Gibson was now in a place where she was considered a nigger, and must remain at the back of the bus. She was looked down upon, and she didn't

(See Gibson, Page 19)

AS GRADUATION RATES RISE, BLACKS AT THE TOP OF LIST

Associated Press

Kansas City, MO — Graduation rates for NCAA athletes in the second year of Proposition 48 generally kept pace with gains noted in the first year, and females did better than men.

The most significant increases continued to be shown

by black athletes.

Overall, 57 percent of all athletes graduated who enrolled in NCAA Division I schools in the 1987-88 academic year, NCAA statistics indicate, compared with 56 percent of the general student body.

Released Thursday, the data

includes nearly 300 Division I schools and counts only students who received athletic scholarship aid. A 1987-88 freshman was allowed a six-year degree program.

Athletes also graduated at 57 percent in the first-class under the controversial freshman eligi-

bility rule, a jump of five percentage points over the previous year.

"I am more confident the significant increase in freshman graduation rates was due to the imposition of Proposition 48," said Jerry Kingston, chairman of the NCAA's Academic Requirements Committee.


In virtually every major group, athletes held gains they had made in the first year of the new standards.


Individually, Marist and Providence moved to the head of the class as the only schools who had been NCAA members since 1987 and graduated 100 percent of their 1987-88 freshman.

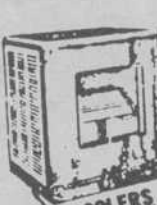
UNLV came in at 38 percent, and UNR was listed at 44 percent.


The data indicated student-athletes graduated at the same or higher rates than students of the same gender and racial group. Black male athletes graduated at a rate of 43 percent, compared with 33 percent for black male students.

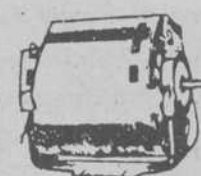
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THIS WEEK'S STARTING LINEUP

<p>Thursday July 7</p> <p>Houston at Chicago Cubs - 5:05 p.m.</p> <p>Montreal at San Diego - (joined in progress)</p> <p>Friday July 8</p> <p>Houston at Chicago Cubs - 12:20 p.m.</p> <p>Montreal at San Diego - 7:05 p.m.</p> <p>Saturday July 9</p> <p>Kansas City at Toronto - 10:35 a.m.</p> <p>Montreal at San Diego - 7:05 p.m.</p>	<p>Sunday July 10</p> <p>Montreal at San Diego - 1:05 p.m.</p> <p>Houston at Chicago Cubs - 5:05 p.m.</p> <p>Monday July 11</p> <p>Meet the All-Stars - 6:00 p.m.</p> <p>Tuesday July 12</p> <p>65th Annual All-Star Game - 5:05 p.m.</p> <p>Thursday July 14</p> <p>San Diego at New York Mets - 4:40 p.m.</p>
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