

# Williams' wins glorify pioneer

NEW YORK (AP) - Venus and Serena Williams carry Althea Gibson's legacy forward every time they step on a court, every time they hoist a Grand Slam trophy.

So, on a night set aside to honor the 50th anniversary of the first U.S National Championship title won by a Black tennis player, the Williams sisters figured the best way to celebrate Gibson was to win.

Simple as that, they did. Venus Williams beat Kira Nagy of Hungary 6-2, 6-1 in the first round of the U.S. Open on Monday—and hit a Grand Slam-record 129 mph serve in the process. Serena Williams topped out at 126 mph and had only slightly more trouble getting past Angelique Kerber of Germany 6-3, 7-5 before a tournament-record crowd of 23,737.

"I have all the opportunities today because of people like Althea," Venus Williams said. "Just trying to follow in her footsteps."

The siblings narrated a video that opened the tribute to Gibson, who was the first Black man or woman to enter (in 1950) and to win (in 1957) Wimbledon and the tournament that's now called the U.S. Open.

In 1999, Serena Williams became the first Black woman since Gibson to win the U.S. Open. The next year, Venus Williams became the first Black woman since Gibson to win Wimbledon.

"I know every time I step out on the court, I play for me

and I play for all the other little African-American kids out there who have a dream and who might not have the means, like myself and my sisters didn't growing up," Serena Williams said.

"It's important to have nights like this," she added, "so you can teach young people."

Aretha Franklin sang, actress Phylicia Rashad emceed, and Rachel Robinson — baseball barrier-breaker Jackie Robinson's widow — was in the audience Monday as the late Gibson was inducted into the U.S. Open Court of Champions.

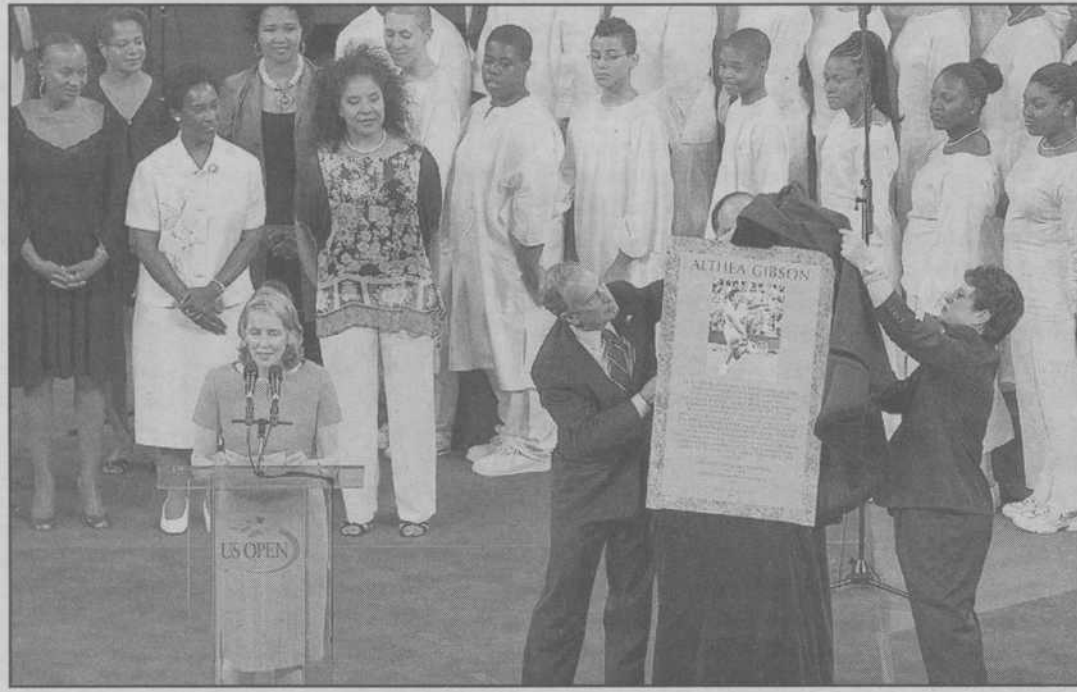
"It was definitely a tough act to follow. ...It was really moving," said Venus Williams, limited by wrist and knee problems to only one tournament since winning Wimbledon in early July.

"It's like, 'OK. Williams can't lose tonight. That's not part of the plan. It's supposed to be an all-American win tonight.' I was definitely thinking that."

It actually was a pretty good day for Americans, including the third African-American player,

Ahsha Rolle, a 22-year-old playing in her third Grand Slam match. She surprised No. 17-seeded Tatiana Golovin of France 6-4, 1-6, 6-2, also under the lights.

"I was watching a little bit of the (Gibson) tribute. I thought that of all the nights, I've got to do it tonight," Rolle said. "I wasn't scared, I wasn't nervous. I was ready to bring it."



New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Billie Jean King unveiled a plaque honoring Althea Gibson. The ceremony marked the 50th anniversary of Gibson's becoming the first African-American woman to win the United States National Championships, the tournament that would become the Open.



Althea Gibson, who died in 2003, was inducted into the Open's Court of Champions. She was a fluid, potent player.

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