

Billie Jean King

“Be bold. If you're going to make an error, make a doozy, and don't be afraid to hit the ball.”

Billie Jean King is known as one of the best tennis players of all time. She has won 39 Grand Slam titles. Throughout her career she not only made great strides for gender equality in sports, but women's equality in the workplace in general.

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Discover

1. When Billie Jean King was 11-years-old she wasn't allowed in a tennis tournament group photo, simply because she wasn't wearing a tennis skirt which was traditionally worn by female tennis players. She knew from that day on that she wanted to change the sport and make it more inclusive for women. Has there ever been a time that you weren't able to do something because you were different. Has there ever been a time where you where you thought “I want to change that!” or “Why is that done that way?”
2. Billie Jean King is probably most famous for her “Battle of the Sexes” match against Bobby Riggs. Riggs challenged her to a match saying even though he was 26 years older than her that he could still beat her

because women's tennis was inferior to men's tennis. Billie Jean King beat Bobby Riggs and made great strides for women athletes! Billie Jean's victory is often credited with both igniting a boom in women's sports participation, and for empowering women to advocate for equal pay in all sectors of the workforce. Talk about what it would be like if Billie had not won. Do you think there would be fewer women playing sports? What sports do you like to play? How would that make you feel if it was only a "boy" sport? What women athletes do you look up to in your favorite sport? If you don't know of any do some research about women in sports!

3. Billie Jean came from a very athletic family. Her father Bill tried out for an NBA team before he became a firefighter. Her mother Betty was an accomplished swimmer and her brother was a pitcher for several Major League baseball teams. Are your parents athletic? Find out what sports your parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and grandparents did as a child, or even as an adult! Did they participate in any sports you are interested in? Maybe they could teach out a move or two!
4. Billie Jean started playing tennis when she was in 5th grade. She saved up her money from odd jobs to buy her first racquet. Have you ever wanted something so bad that you saved up your allowance for it? Or have you ever wanted to be good at something so you spent hours working hard at it and practicing? What was it? Talk with troop about something new you would want to try in the future and the steps you would need to take to be good at it. It doesn't have to be a sport!

Connect

5. Have you ever played tennis? Grab a racket, head to your local park and give it a try! Do some research before about tennis rules; and find out what the proper form is when serving the ball. Have fun while trying out this sport! You may find your new favorite hobby.

6. Billie Jean won her first major singles championship at Wimbledon in 1966. Wimbledon, is the oldest tennis tournament in the world, and is regarded by many as the most prestigious. Learn more about Wimbledon. Where is it held? How many matches go on there? There are a lot of traditions associated with Wimbledon; all the way from what the players dress to how the fans in the stands dress to what they eat! Discuss what you learn about Wimbledon with your troop!
7. In 1966, Billie Jean King achieved the goal she set for herself as a young girl when she was ranked #1 in the world in women's tennis. She held the #1 ranking for five additional years. This is a goal that Billie Jean set when she was only 11 years old. I want you to think about your goals for life! Make a vision board by cutting out pictures from magazine or draw your own pictures. Find things that motivate you to stick to your goals! Put your vision board somewhere in your room so you can be reminded of what you are working towards every day!
8. In 2006 the National Tennis Center, home of the US Open tennis tournament, was renamed the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center. This was in honor of her contributions to tennis, sports, and society both on and off the court. She was the first woman to have a major sports venue named in her honor. Dream big; wouldn't it be so cool if something was named after you! What would it be? Design your building, monument, statue etc.. that is named after you. Why was it named after you? What is your legacy? Can you think of any other women that have had major venues named after them or have had a statue built in their honor?

Take Action

9. Billie Jean King started a non-profit, the Billie Jean King Leadership Initiative, which advocates for more diversity and inclusivity in the workplace. Take a look at businesses in your town. Are there many businesses run by women? Interview a local business woman! Ask her how she got her start in that field. Ask her if she has ever experience

gender bias in the workplace. Come up with some additional questions to ask her as a group!

10. Billie Jean has spent much of her later years devoted to helping younger tennis players access the sport. Is there something you are great at that you could teach someone younger than you to do? This doesn't have to be a sport; this could be helping someone with a certain school subject, teaching your cousin how to draw or practicing some basketball techniques with your neighbor. Whatever you are good at share it with the world by passing along your talents to people younger than you.
11. Billie Jean has always stood up for what she believes is right. Throughout her career this was primarily gender equality and equal pay for women. She has also helped with other causes such as racial discrimination and gay rights. Find a cause you believe in and advocate for it! What is an organization that matters to you and how could you help? This could be anything from collect food for a local food bank to making toys for an animal shelter. This world can benefit from you advocating for what you believe in! Start today by doing something nice for a local charity that you care about.