

Venus Williams

On October 31, 1994, a 14-year-old girl, with her hair styled in beads and full of confidence, strode onto the court at Bank of the West Classic in California and transformed tennis.

Today, Venus Williams is one of the most accomplished women in the history of the sport. Having been called "the best athlete in the history of women's tennis" by [*Sports Illustrated*](#), Venus has been ranked number one in the world in singles three times in her career, and has captured seven Grand Slam titles, five Wimbledon championships and five Olympic medals -- and counting.

Along the way, Venus has also distinguished herself as a student who has pursued higher education, an entrepreneur who has launched and helms two businesses, a designer who creates fashion and interior designs, an investor whose ventures include becoming with her sister the first African-American women to buy shares of an NFL team, an author who has written a best-selling book, and an advocate for gender and pay equality.

The most amazing part is that Venus Williams is just getting started.

Venus' Early Years: Family Values

Venus Ebony Starr Williams was born in the Watts area of Los Angeles, California, into a tight-knit family helmed by her parents, Richard Williams and Oracene Price. Born on June 17, 1980, Venus was the fourth of Richard and Oracene's five daughters. Her birth was followed fifteen months later by the arrival of her youngest sister, Serena.

From a young age, Venus' father, Richard, who himself was self-taught in the sport, began training his daughters on the public tennis courts in Compton, California. The young Williams girls practiced up to five hours a day, breaking only when it rained, with their father providing them with notebooks filled with thoughts on how they could improve their game, as well as motivational sayings such as, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."

When Venus was 10 years old, Richard relocated the family to West Palm Beach, Florida, so Venus and Serena, who were demonstrating preternatural talent for the sport, could train with tennis coach Rick Macci. Then, despite the fact that Venus, who already had a serve topping 100 miles per hour, was attracting national attention for her precocious prowess on the court, Richard did something that no one could have predicted. When Venus was 11, he made the unexpected decision to stop sending Venus and Serena to national junior tennis tournaments, wanting instead for them to take it slow and focus on their education.

While Venus trained in tennis, her parents also trained her in the values and work ethic that would serve her not only on the court, but in all aspects of the diverse career that was ahead of her. Richard instilled in Venus an entrepreneurial spirit, a fierce independence, a relentless work ethic, a love of learning, and a sense of self-confidence. At the foundation of all the lessons Richard taught Venus was the fundamental belief that, with confidence and training, she could accomplish anything she set her mind to.

"Belief and Training": A Remarkable Career on the Court

"Belief and training," Venus told the [*New York Times*](#) shortly after returning with history-making Gold from the 2012 Olympics. "That was unconquerable."

Venus' storied professional career began in October, 1994, when she beat No. 59-seeded Shaun Stafford in [what's been called](#) the biggest debut in tennis history, demonstrating a breakthrough style and athletic approach.

By 2000, during what the [New York Times](#) called the "Summer of Venus," which saw her playing "everywhere, equally dominant on different continents and under any circumstance," Venus won the US Open, as well as her first Grand Slam singles title at Wimbledon, plus two Olympic gold medals that same year, both in singles and in the doubles tournament with Serena.

In her over 20 years as a professional athlete, Venus has won Wimbledon five times and has 22 overall Grand Slam titles, including 7 in women's singles, 13 in women's doubles and 2 in mixed doubles. Venus earned a Gold medal again at the Olympics in 2008. At the 2012 Olympics, she earned her fourth Olympic Gold medal for the doubles tournament with Serena. In 2015 Venus achieved her 700th career singles victory.

With more than two decades of experience in professional tennis, Venus continues to accrue accomplishments and break records.

Off the Court: A Multi-Hyphenate Career

While making tennis history, Venus also pursues a diversified career as a businesswoman, entrepreneur, designer and author. In 2002, Venus launched her interior design firm, [V*Starr Interiors](#). Then, after earning her associate degree in fashion design from the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale in 2007, Venus also launched [EleVen](#), her line of fitness apparel designed to help wearers' look and feel "better than the best," better than a 10. A serial entrepreneur, Venus also owns several Washington, DC-area locations of Jamba Juice, the smoothie and health-food chain, and, in 2015, she earned her degree in business from University of Indiana East.

In 2009, Venus and Serena become the first African-American women to obtain ownership of an NFL franchise when they became limited partners in the NFL's Miami Dolphins. In 2010, Venus added best-selling author to her resume. Her book with co-author Kelly E. Carter "[Come To Win: Business Leaders, Artists, Doctors, and Other Visionaries on How Sports Can Help You Top Your Profession](#)" in which she interviews former athletes who are now at the top of a variety of professions about how sports helped them in their careers, was published, hitting the New York Times bestseller list.

Taking a Stand

When in 2005, after having won Wimbledon, Venus was awarded prize money that was comparatively less than her male counterpart, Venus raised her concerns to tournament officials and, while the women's championship prize was increased, it was not raised to an equal level with the men's prize money.

In response, Venus made her voice heard by authoring an essay that was published in the [Times of London](#), with the provocative headline, "Wimbledon has sent me a message: I'm only a second-class champion." In 2007, Wimbledon announced it would no longer pay its female champions less than its male champions. In retrospect, [The New York Times](#) writes, Venus helped "achieve an enduring victory for women players at the iconic tournament and, by extension, for all women in the fight for equal pay." Venus continues to be an outspoken advocate for pay equality and women's empowerment.

In addition to advocating for gender equality, Venus has also been an outspoken advocate for healthy eating. In the summer of 2011, Venus battled a frustrating mix of symptoms which defied diagnosis until it was finally determined that she suffers from Sjögren's Syndrome, an autoimmune disorder. In response

to this challenge, Venus adopted and became a proponent of a strict healthy diet, speaking out publicly about how changing her diet helped alleviate symptoms by reducing inflammation brought on by the condition.

“Believe it. Achieve It.”

As a role model to millions around the world, Venus inspires fans with her relentless pursuit of excellence on the court and in all areas of her life.

When she was a young girl, practicing tennis for hours each day on the Compton courts, the motivational notes Venus’ father gave her served as her inspiration.

“Believe it. Achieve it,” read one note.

By living her life true to the philosophy that, with self-belief and training, she can achieve any goal, and that while she may face setbacks, she can never be defeated, Venus continues to set tennis records, help break the sports world’s pay glass ceilings, and pursue business goals with the same fervor she brings to the court. In the process, she inspires others to raise the bar on living their own lives without limits.