

# GOATS say goodbye

## COMMENTARY

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On the public tennis courts of Compton, California in the 1980s, a tennis legend was made.

After an outstanding career spanning 27 years, Serena Williams announced she was stepping away from tennis for the time being. She uses the word “evolving” to signify she may not be done with tennis for sure, but will be focusing on it less.

Williams is undoubtedly the greatest of all time in tennis as she was not only extraordinarily successful – winning 23 Grand Slams and smashing countless records – but she also changed the game of women’s tennis.

Born in 1981, Williams began playing tennis at age three under coaching from her father, Richard Williams, according to *The Guardian*.

Playing alongside her sister, Venus, Williams scaled the ranks fast. She turned pro at 14 years old in 1995 and won her first Grand Slam four years later in 1999.

Grand Slam wins piled up fast for Williams after 1999; she has since won 23 singles Grand Slams. The public even attached her name to winning all four Grand Slams consecutively: The Serena Slam. She accom-

plished this feat two times: the 2002-2003 and 2015-2016 seasons. In addition to success with singles, Williams won 14 Grand Slam doubles with her sister,

Venus, and four gold medals at the Olympics – three in doubles with Venus, and one in singles.

Another tribute to Williams’ success is her 319 weeks as the Women’s Tennis Association #1, – 186 of which were consecutive – a record tied with Steffi Graf, according to the U.S. Open website. All this success on the court accumulated to a total of \$94 million in prize money, which is twice as much as any other female athlete, according to *Forbes*.

Williams’ results demonstrate top-caliber performance from women’s tennis. However, her merit extends beyond her wins, rankings and achievements.

For one, Williams’ dedication was unmatched. In an essay for *Vogue*, she describes how she strives for her own version of perfection motivated her. Williams played tennis through a myriad of challenges. For example, Williams continued playing after having a near fatal C-section, through

breastfeeding and even postpartum depression. She continued playing after her half-sister, Yetunde, was murdered in 2003, when she went through an extreme period of grief. Williams continued playing despite the overt racism and sexism she endured.

Williams ultimately changed the way women’s tennis is played. With her unrelenting power on the court, she introduced a level of unprecedented intimidation and dominance. Williams was unafraid to be forceful. Her serve is an example of her strength: she averaged 170 km

per hour, 12 km faster than the average female tennis player – according to *Business Insider*.

Williams inspired a new generation of women of color onto the tennis court, which is a remarkable change considering the history of tennis as a white-dominant sport. For example, Naomi Osaka – a Japanese-American that has been ranked #1 for the WTA – proclaimed herself a “product” of Williams’ legacy, mentioning in a press conference during the U.S. Open that Williams inspired her to pick up a tennis racket.

Representation matters, and Williams’ success was the representation needed to open the floodgates and welcome a new side of women’s tennis.

Williams also never hesitated to make a statement. Known for unconventional and eye-catching outfits, she pushed the boundaries of traditional all-white tennis fashion. For example, when playing in the French Open just over a year after giving birth, Williams wore a tight black catsuit.

According to *Vox*, the catsuit was designed to help with circulation, but French Open officials disapproved, calling it disrespectful to the tradition of tennis. One can also look to the outfit Serena wore to her last tennis match: a black dress with a star spangled chest, ballerina-style skirt and sheer sleeves.

Williams’ barrier-breaching fashion was important because it mirrored her barrier-breaching mentality and legacy; it sent the message that Serena was not afraid to test the limits and inspired others to do so too.

Williams’ impact on the game resulted in enormous popularity. Even in the twilight of her career, she decimated the ESPN ratings record for a tennis game during her last match of the U.S. Open Sept. 3, which averaged 4.8 million viewers. A fitting way to end the career of a tennis legend.

Moving forward, Williams says she is setting aside tennis to focus on other passions and her own family, as she writes in her *Vogue* essay. For one, she owns a venture capital fund called Serena Ventures that is diversity focused, aiming to prioritize funding to companies run by women or people of color.

In addition, Serena published a children’s book in late September, “The Adventures of Qai Qai,” which has the theme of gaining personal confidence.

These moves off the court contribute to Williams’ legacy as they show she is using her influence from tennis to change the world in other ways, too.

Ultimately, it is clear that Williams’ legacy lives both on and off the tennis court. She revolutionized women’s tennis by changing the players and the game. She used her influence for causes outside of tennis. She continues to inspire girls every day to reach their potential.

Serena Williams is the GOAT in tennis, if not one of the greatest athletes of all time.

