

**HISTORY
MAKERS**

BILLIE JEAN KING



She changed the game for women in sports.

Growing up in Long Beach, California, Billie Jean King played basketball, volleyball, and softball. In 1954, when King was in fifth grade, she started playing tennis. The second time she picked up a racket, she set a goal.

“I wanted to be the best player in the world,” King says.

Before long, King realized that female players faced **discrimination**. Boys were treated differently than girls. When she was 12, King was left out of a team photo because she was wearing shorts instead of a tennis skirt.

WORDS TO KNOW

discrimination *noun*. unjust treatment based on differences such as gender, race, religion, or nationality
legislation *noun*. a law or set of laws made by a government

“I’ll show them someday,” King recalls thinking. “That was when I decided to fight for equality for the rest of my life.”

Leading the Way

Over the next decade, King’s determination paid off. By 1966, she was the No. 1 female tennis player in the world.

Despite her success, King wasn’t satisfied. Female tennis players earned less money than male players and played in fewer tournaments.

In 1970, a fed-up King convinced eight other top players to start their own all-female tournament. Each agreed to be paid just one dollar.

“We decided that any girl born in this world would have a place to compete,” King says. “We were willing to give up our

careers for future generations.”

The plan was a success and led to more tournaments for women. In 1971, King became the first female athlete to earn more than \$100,000 in a single season. She founded the Women’s Tennis Association two years later.

Game-Changing Law

But there was still work to do. In the early 1970s, most schools had few girls’ sports teams. Those that did gave more funding to boys’ teams.

In 1972, Congress passed a new law called Title IX. It said that public schools had to give equal opportunities to male and female athletes. Eventually, schools added more girls’ teams and offered more athletic scholarships to female players.

Watch a VIDEO
Billie Jean King talks about her fight for equality.

“Title IX is one of the most important pieces of **legislation** of the 20th century,” King says.

Still, some lawmakers tried to get rid of the law or weaken it.

In 1973, King spoke in front of

Congress in support of Title IX. The next year, she created the Women’s Sports Foundation, which continues to fight to uphold the law.

Not Finished Yet

King played her last pro match in 1990. But she has continued to fight tirelessly for women in sports.

“I’m not finished yet,” she says. “It’s really important to keep lifting up others and creating opportunities.”

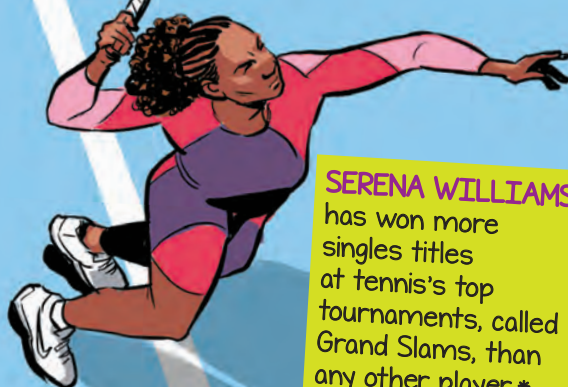
King reminds people that her lifelong fight for equality began when she was 12 years old.

“You’re not too young,” King says. “If you have a dream, go for it.”

—by Alicia Green

WINNING WOMEN

Without Billie Jean King leading the way, these athletes may never have had the chance to shine.



SERENA WILLIAMS has won more singles titles at tennis’s top tournaments, called Grand Slams, than any other player.*

*The record is for most titles in the Open Era, which started in 1968 when pro players were first allowed to compete in Grand Slam tournaments.



With four World Cup titles, the **U.S. WOMEN’S NATIONAL SOCCER TEAM** is the most successful women’s soccer team in the world.

DIANA TAURASI led the University of Connecticut Huskies to three national championships. She is now the Women’s National Basketball Association’s all-time leading scorer.

