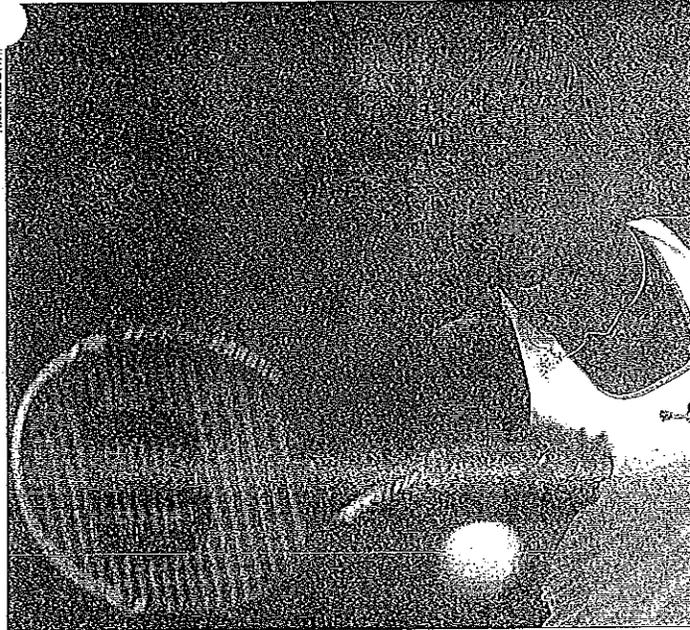
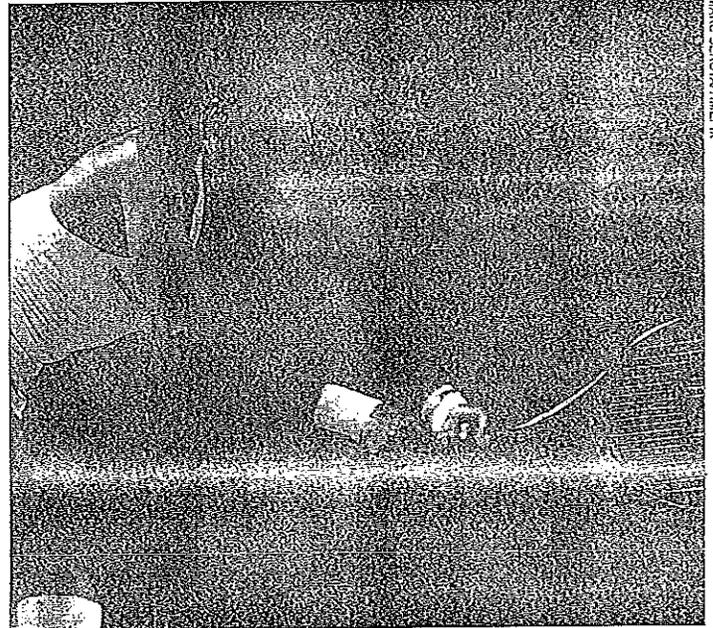


The Williams Sisters: Tennis Greats



Serena Williams



Venus Williams

Serena and Venus Williams are the queens of tennis. In becoming two of the most famous female athletes in the world, the sisters have changed the face of the sport.

Venus Williams was born in 1980. Her sister Serena was born a year later. Before they were born, their father, Richard, promised himself that he would turn his daughters into world-class tennis players. With Richard coaching them, the sisters trained hard on run-down public tennis courts in Compton, California. Venus and Serena proved to be naturals at the sport. Richard told a magazine, "Venus and Serena took to tennis as soon as rackets were put in their hands."

Young Winners

Both girls played in contests when they were very young, and they rapidly became the best junior players in California. But in 1991, Richard took his daughters out of the junior tennis tour. Although they continued to practice, they weren't allowed to play in contests. Richard thought the games had become too competitive. He worried that some people might hurt the sisters with racist remarks.

Soon Venus and Serena began to attract attention. They were among the few top young African American players, and they were big and skilled for their age. Because they only competed against each other, they were a mystery to the tennis world.

When Venus turned 14, she became a pro. Serena followed the next year. At first, the sisters were known less for their tennis skills than for their beaded hair styles. But their games slowly improved. By 1998, Venus was in the top ten of women's tennis, and Serena was ranked 21.

Two Champs

Slowly, they began to be leaders in women's tennis with their speed and strength. In 1999, Serena won the U.S. Open. She became the first African American woman to win a Grand Slam singles title since tennis great Althea Gibson in 1958. In 2000, Venus won both the Wimbledon and U.S. Open titles. She repeated that accomplishment in 2001. In 2002, Serena beat Venus in the finals of the French Open, Wimbledon, and the U.S. Open. She was the top-ranked woman player in the world, and her sister was number two.

Their electrifying performances have—for the first time ever—made women's tennis more popular than men's tennis. As long as the Williams sisters are on the courts, that is likely to remain true.

IMPORTANT FACTS

June 17, 1980: Venus is born in Lynwood, California.

September 26, 1981: Serena is born in Saginaw, Michigan.

1994: Venus turns pro.

1995: Serena turns pro.

1999: Serena wins the U.S. Open singles title.

2000: Venus wins the Wimbledon and U.S. Open titles.

2001: Venus wins the Wimbledon and U.S. Open titles and is ranked number one.

2002: Serena wins the French Open, Wimbledon, and the U.S. Open. She is ranked number one in world; Venus is ranked second.