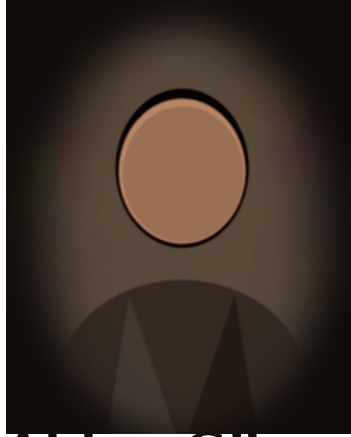




Althea Gibson

August 25, 1927 - September 28, 2003

East Orange, New Jersey

Althea Neale Gibson - American tennis champion and professional golfer who broke the sport's color line at the highest level - died in East Orange, New Jersey, on September 28, 2003. She was seventy-six. Born August 25, 1927, in Clarendon County, South Carolina, and raised in Harlem, she learned paddle tennis on playgrounds before patrons and the American Tennis Association pushed her toward grass-court futures that Jim Crow tried to wall off.

In 1950 she became the first Black player in the U.S. Nationals; in 1956 she won the French Championships; in 1957 and 1958 she took Wimbledon and the U.S. Nationals in singles, standing in white dress on courts that had long pretended excellence had a complexion. Tall, attacking, and unimpressed by ritual, she later toured with the Harlem Globetrotters' entertainment circuit, tried the LPGA, sang, acted, and held public jobs in New Jersey when the endorsement economy still underpaid pioneers. Illness and financial strain marked late years; friends organized aid that should not have been necessary.

East Orange was home when respiratory and other ailments closed the match. She died in a hospital near the city that had claimed her as a neighbor.

Harlem asphalt and Southern birth both lived in her footwork. She proved that Grand Slam gates could open - and that opening them did not automatically pay the rent.

She died in East Orange on September 28, 2003. Centre Court still echoes with the serve that arrived before the marketing plans were ready.

Gibson's gift was barrier-breaking athleticism - elegance with a purpose that outran polite timelines. Notice Nearby keeps the death date so September 28 remembers the South Carolina-born Harlem champion who made tennis admit its future.

Services

Died in East Orange, New Jersey, September 28, 2003. Tennis champion and golfer; Wimbledon and U.S. Nationals titles; first Black Grand Slam singles champion.

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