Gibson, Althea

(b. Aug. 25, 1927, Silver, S.C., U.S.), American tennis player who dominated women's competition in the late 1950s. She was the first black to win the Wimbledon and U.S. singles championships.

Gibson grew up in Harlem in New York City and in 1950 became the first black athlete to play Forest Hills, narrowly losing to third-seeded Louise Brought in the second round. She graduated from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Tallahassee, in 1953, and rose to sudden prominence in 1956, becoming the first black to win a major title--the Wimbledon doubles--as well as the French singles and doubles and the Italian singles. She went on to win the Wimbledon singles and doubles and the U.S. singles in 1957-58, as well as the U.S. mixed doubles and the Australian women's doubles (in 1957).

Gibson turned professional in 1958, but women's professional tennis at that time offered few tournaments and prizes. After winning the U.S. professional women's title in 1960, she became a professional golfer in 1963, with moderate success. She married William Darben in 1965 and attempted professional tennis again, after open tennis started in 1968, but without much success. In 1971 she was elected to the National Lawn Tennis Hall of Fame. In 1975 she was named athletic director for the state of New Jersey.