Venus Williams

Venus Williams was born on June 17, 1980, in Lynwood, California. Her father was a former sharecropper who introduced Williams to tennis on the public courts near Compton, LA. She turned pro in 1994, and has since won seven Grand Slam titles, including five Wimbledon championships, as well as four Olympic gold medals (three with her sister, Serena). Williams lives in Palm Beach, Florida.

Early Life

American tennis player. Born Venus Ebony Starr Williams on June 17, 1980, in Lynwood, California. One of Richard and Oracene Williams' five daughters, Venus, along with her younger sister, Serena, has redefined women's tennis with her strength and superb athleticism. Since turning pro in 1994, Venus has captured seven Grand Slam titles, including five Wimbledon championships, joining Martina Navratilova and Steffi Graf as the only women to have accomplished this.

Venus was introduced to tennis by her father on the public courts in Los Angeles, not far from the family's home in Compton. Richard Williams, a former sharecropper from Louisiana, used what he'd gleaned from tennis books and videos to instruct his girls on the different aspects of the game.

The fact that the family had relocated to Compton was no accident. With its high rate of gang activity, Richard Williams had wanted to expose his daughters to the ugly possibilities of life "if they did not work hard and get an education." In this setting, on courts that were riddled with potholes and sometimes missing nets, Venus and Serena cut their teeth on the game of tennis and the requirements for persevering in a tough climate.

Turning Pro

By the age of 10, Williams's serve topped 100 miles per hour, a weapon she used to go 63-0 on the United States Tennis Association junior tour. On October 31, 1994, she turned pro, something she proved she was more than ready for when, in her first match, she beat 50-seeded Shaun Stafford at the Bank of the West Classic in California.

It was a momentous occasion for the Williams family, Richard in particular, who wasn't afraid to let the tennis world know that his girls were going to change the game. "That's one for the ghetto!" he shouted out at the press conference following Williams's victory.

Resounding Success

In 1997, Williams became the first unseeded U.S. Open women's finalist in the Open era. She lost to Martina Hingis. In 2000, she won both Wimbledon and the U.S. Open, paving the way for her to ink a $40 million contract with Reebok. She then went out and defended her titles in 2001.

At the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia, Williams captured the gold medal in the singles competition, and then took a second one with Serena in the doubles event. The sisters have credited the other with pushing them in tennis, both as teammates and as competitors. Together, the pair have won 10 Grand Slam doubles titles and have squared off more than 20 times, including the finals of eight Grand Slam tournaments. In addition to their time spent together on the court, the sisters also share a home together in Florida.

Their parents continue to coach them.

In recent years, Williams has struggled with injuries—she competed in only a handful of tournaments in 2006—but returned to form in 2007, winning the singles title at Wimbledon. She repeated the victory a year later, when she defeated Serena for a fifth career Wimbledon championship, placing her fifth all-time in women's Wimbledon singles championships. A few months later, the Williams sisters teamed up to capture the doubles title at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

At the 2012 Summer Olympic Games, held in London, Williams and sister Serena won gold in women's doubles against Czech Republic tennis stars Andrea Hlavackova and Lucie Hradecka. The victory brough both her and Serena's Olympic gold medal count to four.

Off the Court Pursuits

Off the court, Venus Williams has cultivated a varied number of pursuits. She's pursued art classes, and earned a certificate in interior design. She has started her clothing line called "EleVen" as well as a collection of women's apparel for Wilson's Leather. In addition, she has launched her own interior design company, V Starr Interiors, which works on residential projects throughout the country.

Williams has also been active in a number of social causes, including working closely with UNESCO on promoting gender equality throughout the world.

Williams lives in Palm Beach, Florida, with her sister Serena and their two dogs, a Jack Russell terrier and a Maltese.