



# Astounding Athletes

## HIDDEN HEROES OF HISTORY

**Listen to the story:** <https://jonincharacter.com/astounding-athletes/>

### Althea Gibson - Tennis and Golf Champion

Althea Gibson was a professional tennis player and later, golfer. She was the first Black athlete to win two major tennis tournaments: the French Wimbledon, and the U.S. Open singles championships.

Her road to becoming a tennis champion wasn't easy. She was born in 1927 in Silver, South Carolina, and grew up in the neighborhood of Harlem in New York City. The unfair laws at the time made it hard for her to access tennis courts and compete, but she never gave up. She learned to play at night and won ten straight tennis championships with the ATA, or the American Tennis Association.

The ATA was created to support Black athletes because, back then, they were left out of what were considered the main tennis competitions. Eventually, in 1950, Althea was able to compete in a U.S. national competition, becoming the first African-American athlete to do so.

In 1956, she became the first African-American to win a Grand Slam title, winning all four major championships in one calendar year. Despite her achievements, Althea wasn't allowed to use the front door at competitions. She had to enter through the back, and she couldn't use the same locker room as the white players or dine in the dining room. There were still laws that allowed discrimination based on the color of a person's skin.

After her tennis career, Althea became a pro golfer. She wrote a book and was honored multiple times for her achievements.

### Lusia Harris - Queen of Basketball

Lusia Mae Harris, nicknamed "Lucy," was born in Mississippi in 1955. She grew up shooting hoops outside her house and dreamed of becoming a basketball star like the ones she saw on TV. Standing 6 feet 3 inches tall, she had the perfect height for basketball.

She was a star player on her high school team, then went on to play basketball at Delta State University in Mississippi. She led her college team to three national championships.

In 1976, the Summer Olympics in Montreal became the first to include women's basketball. Lusia was chosen for the U.S.

Women's National Team and made history by scoring the first basket ever in Olympic women's basketball. Her team brought home the silver medal.



Afterward, there were few opportunities for her to keep playing professionally. At the time, pro basketball was only for men. The New Orleans Jazz, an NBA team, even invited her to try out, but she declined.

Lusia opened the door for many girls who came after her. She returned home to coach at her old high school and raise her children. She had no regrets about not joining the NBA, but she knew that if she had been born in another time, her basketball career would have been much longer.

## **Marge Villa - Baseball and Golf Star**

Marge Villa was from Montebello, California, and was one of only eleven Latinas to play in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League.

The league started in America during World War II when many of the male baseball players were away at war. It was the first professional baseball league for women.

Marge started playing baseball at 13 years old with a local team. She eventually became the catcher for the Kenosha Comets in Wisconsin, but was versatile enough to play any position.

She made history when she drove in 9 runs and scored 11 bases, setting two single-game league records that no one else could outdo. Over her career, she played 500 games.

After retiring from baseball, Marge turned to golf and became a national champion.



**Althea Gibson**



**Marge Villa**

## Glossary

**Professional** – Doing a job for money instead of just for fun or practice. A professional athlete gets paid to play their sport.

**Tournament** – A sports competition where many players or teams compete to see who is the best.

**Singles Championships** – A type of tennis competition where one player plays against another (not doubles, where two players are on each side).

**Harlem** – A neighborhood in New York City known for its strong African-American history, culture, music, and art.

**Racism** – The unfair belief that individuals should be treated differently because of their race or the color of their skin.

**American Tennis Association (ATA)** – An organization that was created to give Black tennis players a fair place to compete when other competitions would not let them join.

**Grand Slam Title** – In tennis, this means winning all four of the biggest tournaments in the same year — the Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon, and U.S. Open.

**Discriminate** – To treat someone unfairly or differently because of something like their race, gender, or religion.

**Olympic Games** – A huge sporting event held every four years where athletes from around the world compete in many different sports.

**All-American Girls Professional Baseball League** – A women's baseball league in the United States that started during World War II when many male baseball players were away fighting in the war.

**Lusia Harris**



## Give it Some Thought

- Althea Gibson practiced tennis at night because it was hard for her to find courts to play on. Can you think of a time you had to find a creative way to do something you love?
- Althea showed determination, courage, and confidence on and off the court, even when she faced challenges. Which of these qualities do you think helped her the most, and why?
- Althea was great at both tennis and golf. If you could try a second sport or activity, what would it be and why?
- Lusia Harris scored the very first basket in Olympic women's basketball. If you were making sports history, what moment would you want to be remembered for?
- Lusia turned down a chance to try out for an NBA team. Can you think of a time you had to make a tough but important choice?
- Lusia coached at her old school and inspired others. Who is someone who has inspired you, and what have they taught you?
- Marge Villa played many positions in baseball and set amazing records. What is something you've worked hard at and gotten better at over time?
- After baseball, Marge became a golf champion. If you could start something completely new, what would you want to learn and why?

## Use Your Imagination

**After listening to Dorktales episode 116 on Astounding Athletes, try creating your own Sports Trading Card.**

### STEP 1

You can choose to:

- Create a card for Althea Gibson, Lusia Harris, or Marge Villa
- Make one of your own favorite sports hero, or
- Design a trading card about yourself

### STEP 2

Use the template on the next page to draw and color a picture of your hero inside the Astounding Athlete frame. On the right side, fill in:

- The hero's name
- Sport or sports they play or played
- A fun fact about them
- Their big achievements
- Tell us how this hero inspires you

### STEP 3

Fold on the dotted line to create your super-sized trading card.



# ASTOUNDING ATHLETE



## DORKTALES



Name:

Sport(s):



Fun Fact:

Big Achievements:



Why This Hero Inspires Me: