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DAVIDSON, SUE. *Changing the Game: The Stories of Tennis Champions Alice Marble and Althea Gibson*. Seattle: Seal Press, 1997. Pp. v, 169. The Game of Tennis. Glossary, photographs. \$10.95 pb.

*Changing the Game* is the third in the Women Who Dared series which cover multicultural double biographies of outstanding American women who are connected by their achievements in the same field. The first book, *Getting the Red Story*, delineates the lives of the journalists, Nellie Bly and Ida B. Wells, for example. It is important to understand that this series is written for the young reader which the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* endorsed, saying that it “represents a valuable addition to juvenile literature.”

This third volume about Alice Marble and Althea Gibson was released only in paperback on June 23, 1997, the opening day of Wimbledon, a clever tactical move by the publisher. Since it is designed for young readers, the contents are easy to read and fast paced. To the serious scholar, however, the aspects that are usually present in biographies that are missing from this treatise are rather upsetting as one digests the details of each champion’s life. There are only a few cited sources, no footnotes, no index, and many exact quotes which the reader is left to speculate whether they are real or conjured up by the author. As Davidson candidly admits in the beginning of the book, “dialogue and details. . . have . . . been added by the author.” It appears that Davidson, as she mentions in the acknowledgments, obtained her information mostly from the two autobiographies by Alice Marble and Althea Gibson’s autobiography and the second book on Gibson by Tom Biracree in 1990. These two stories lack insight into some of the more significant events. Most serious scholars want all the facts and not just a superficial treatment of an historic episode. Perhaps the author felt the young reader would be turned off by including some of the standard treatment of historical biography, but it is quite amazing that Davidson, a former editor for

the Feminist Press, would allow some of the shortcomings.

It appears that the best approach to reviewing this book is to analyze each person's life separately and then to summarize by indicating some of the connections between them as well as similar traits and behaviors they had in common.

The story of Alice Marble is not the usual one of a young player who dreams of stardom and eventually achieves it. Along Marble's way there are many ups and downs—illness, romance, marriage, intrigue coupled with relationships to coach, actors, and actresses. The first love of Marble's life was baseball, which she played until she turned to tennis at age 15. Interestingly, Davidson covers this early aspect of her life more thoroughly than events in the later years. Marble's path to becoming champion was orchestrated by the well-known tennis teacher Eleanor "Teach" Tennant, who not only was her coach but, as the years went on, so dominated her life that an eventual break was inevitable. The same situation occurred years later when Miss Tennant attempted to control every aspect of her famous pupil Maureen Connolly until she too split from the splendid but possessive coach.

Alice Marble was the first woman in tournament tennis to serve and volley—in other words, to be aggressive and "play like a man." She also was the first to wear shorts instead of the customary long skirt, thus revolutionizing dress for women on the tennis court. It might have added to this story if some of the negative reactions to this costume had been included but they are not mentioned.

Davidson gives due credit to the championships won by Marble, but the wins are interspersed with other facets of her life. It would have been helpful to have capsulated these important facts: United States Singles Championship 1936-1940, United States Doubles Championship, with Sarah Palfrey 1937-1940, and United States Mixed Doubles Championship, with four different partner—Gene Mako, Don Budge, Harry Hopman, and Bobby Riggs—1936-1940. She won Wimbledon only once in 1939, and one can only speculate could she have won the title again if from 1940 to 1945 the tournament was not canceled due to World War II. In 1941 she became a professional and, thus, was no longer eligible for amateur tournaments.

One of the most exciting parts of Marble's life is similar to parts of the life of Moe Berg, the ballplayer who spied on the OSS. In 1937 Marble fell in love with a wealthy man from Switzerland whose father owned a bank. Tennant broke up the relationship but years later Army Intelligence had her renew this association to gain information on the Germans who were hiding their funds in the bank. Again, Davidson treats the plot superficially, and one wishes she provided more details.

It is amazing that Alice Marble was one of our best tennis champions and lived to be 77 years of age, dying in 1990, because she battled illness most of her adult life.

Althea Gibson, as most everybody knows, was the first African American to win both the United States Singles Championship (in 1957 and 1958) and Wimbledon (in 1957 and 1958). As a talented athlete growing up in Harlem,

she was a paddle tennis champion before taking up tennis. The author covers more details of Gibson's life than she devotes to Marble.

Gibson's first exposure to Alice Marble occurred as a junior player when she was inspired by watching her in an exhibition tennis match. Soon thereafter, two doctors, noticing Gibson's talent and potential, brought her to their house in Wilmington, North Carolina, for schooling and coaching. Gibson's first book *I Always Wanted To Be Somebody* is dedicated to the two doctors.

After graduating from high school in Wilmington, Althea Gibson went to Florida A & M University on a full scholarship. With her degree in physical education she taught for a few years at Lincoln University in Missouri. In 1950, after repeated denials of Gibson's entry into USLTA tournaments, Alice Marble wrote a revolutionary letter that was printed in the official USLTA magazine. Here, Davidson must be commended for citing the major portions of this document. Two points in particular must have been the turning point for change: "If Althea Gibson represents a challenge to the present crop of women players, it's only fair that they should meet that challenge. . . she is not being judged by the yardstick of ability but by. . . her pigmentation" (pp. 113-114). Soon thereafter, she became the first African American to be accepted into USLTA championships.

The author describes Gibson's play on the LPGA tour, her contract with the Harlem Globetrotters, her marriage and divorce, and her appointment as director of recreation in East Orange, New Jersey, without many details. Even though the book was published in 1997, Davidson ends the narrative in 1991. No mention is made of Gibson's present illness and her limited financial condition.

Even though Marble was 14 years older than Gibson, their careers did intermingle and there were similarities. As talented athletes and renowned tennis champions, both women had alternate careers off and oncourt, including singing and serving the United States government. Both were inducted into the Tennis Hall of Fame—Marble in 1964 and Gibson in 1971—and both received numerous awards.

Perhaps this book with its cursory treatment of some facts will pique the curiosity of a sport historian who will to delve into the complex events of their respective lives. Let us hope so as the rest of the story may prove to be very exciting and interesting.

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