

# The wonderful women in sport

FAITH IN SPORT

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The recent Women's World Cup in football has brought women's sport closer to the centre of our sporting attention. However, over the past hundred years, many women have achieved great results in many sports. Here are a few role models. It is worth appreciating – and celebrating – their lives.

**Sprinter Wilma Rudolph** was the first American woman to win three gold medals in a single Olympics. She overcame the loss of strength in her left leg and foot, caused by polio when she was five, to become the fastest woman in the world at the 1960 Olympics. She held the records for the 100 metres at 11.2 seconds and 200 meters at 22.9 seconds. Because of worldwide television coverage throughout the 1960 Olympics, Rudolph gained international recognition and became an iconic figure for black and female athletes.

During the peak of the civil rights movement, Rudolph was a trailblazer for the rights of Black women. She broke the gender barrier of all-male events in track and field, and her legacy lives on today.

Former World No. 1 professional tennis player **Billie Jean King** is regarded as one of the greatest women's tennis players of all time. She won 39 Grand Slam titles: 12 in singles, 16 in women's doubles, and 11 in mixed doubles. King is an advocate for gender equality and social justice. She campaigned for equal pay when the Open Era began in 1968 and became the first female athlete to earn over \$100,000 in prize money in 1971.

Two years later, she beat tennis superstar Bobby Riggs in 'The Battle of the Sexes' and helped found the Women's Tennis Association, both of which contributed to her legacy of making tennis among the most equitable professional sports on the planet.

Her fight for equity in sports has continued ever since. Today, King remains a primary advocate for women as the founder of the Women's Sports Foundation.

**Lindsey Vonn** is one of only two female skiers to win four World Cup overall championships. She won three consecutive titles from 2008-10 and another in 2012. She was also the first American woman to win a gold medal in the downhill, which she did at the 2010 Winter Olympics. Vonn won her 20th World Cup crystal globe title in 2016 to surpass Ingemar Stenmark for the overall record for men or women. She is also one of six women to win a World Cup race in all five disciplines of alpine skiing. With three Olympic medals,



four World Cup titles, 82 World Cup victories, and two World Championship gold medals to her name, Vonn is widely considered one of the greatest skiers of all time. After missing parts of several seasons as a result of injuries, Lindsey Vonn retired from the sport in 2019.

**Aly Raisman** is a two-time Olympic gymnast. In 2012, she won the team gold medal, floor gold medal, and bronze medal on balance beam with Team USA. She took home the individual all-around silver medal and floor silver medal in 2016, as well as another team gold medal. As accomplished as she is in the gym, Raisman may be even better known for her work in the fight to end sexual abuse. She was among hundreds of gymnasts who came forward to speak out against former USA Gymnastics team doctor Larry Nassar.

Since Nassar's trial, during which she delivered a blistering speech, she has used her platform to focus on fixing USA Gymnastics and fighting for justice for all victims of sexual abuse.

**Alexandra Morgan** is a United States Women's Soccer Team legend who won her second

consecutive FIFA World Cup championship in 2019. After debuting in the World Cup in 2011, in 2012 Morgan recorded 28 goals and 21 assists to become the second American woman to score 20 goals and 20 assists in the same calendar year, alongside Mia Hamm.

Morgan has accumulated more than 200 caps and 119 goals. She was also one of the first women's soccer players to appear on the cover of a FIFA video game.

Off the field, Morgan was crucial to the US women's national team's successful fight for equal pay, which involved a cantankerous lawsuit against the US Soccer Federation. She was instrumental in the National Women's Soccer League's reckoning over pervasive emotional, mental, and sexual abuse.

**Nastia Liukin** was a pivotal member of the US gymnastics team during three World Championships and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. She won the 2008 Olympic all-around, as well as five Olympic medals, which tied the record for most medals won by an American gymnast in a single non-boycotted Olympic Games. Simone Biles later also tied the record. A four-time



all-around US national champion, Liukin's strongest events were the uneven bars and balance beam. She attempted a comeback in 2011 with hopes of making the 2012 Olympic team, but fell several times during the Olympic Trials and retired in 2012.

She is now a gymnastics analyst for NBC Sports and hosts an annual Nastia Liukin Cup to support the growth of gymnastics.

**Serena Williams** is highly regarded as the best female tennis player of the Open Era. Her victories have shaped her into an inspirational figure in the sport. She holds the most Grand Slam titles in singles, doubles, and mixed doubles combined among active players and tied for third on the all-time list. She is second in the Open Era. Her 23 Grand Slam singles titles is a record for the most tournament wins in the Open Era, just one shy of Margaret Court's all-time record.

Along with sister, fellow tennis legend Venus, she is considered a pioneer of a new era for women in tennis that focuses on power.

Throughout her career, she was often among the only women on the list of the world's highest-paid athletes, according to Forbes. She announced her decision to pivot away from tennis in 2022, and her improbable run through the US Open later that year was widely believed to be her final professional competition.

**Danica Patrick** is the most successful woman in the history of American open-wheel racing. She

accomplished multiple firsts for women in the sport, including being the first woman to win an IndyCar Series race at the 2008 Indy Japan 300. Patrick also had the highest finish by a woman in the Indianapolis 500 (third) and Daytona 500 (eighth). She did not endure as much success as many expected, but she had an undeniable impact on the sport.

In a predominantly male industry, Patrick is often credited for inspiring more women to take part in auto racing and motorsports.

**Maria Sharapova** is a professional tennis player and the only Russian to have a career Grand Slam. When she was 18 years old, Sharapova was ranked world No. 1 and was the first female from Russia to do so. Sharapova accumulated 36 singles titles and five Grand Slam titles. She is considered one of the best tennis players to play the game. She has also been involved in various humanitarian endeavours, including being a United Nations Development Programme Goodwill Ambassador focused on the Chernobyl Recovery and Development Programme. She also a programme in 2018 to mentor women entrepreneurs.

The 20th century saw women sports personalities achieve ever increasing popularity. Our current century seems to be doing even better – as the Lionesses have demonstrated – and inspiring an ever increasing number of girls to become involved in sport.



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