

# Integrity, fairness and the refreshing honesty of Serena Williams

SPORT

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The word ‘integrity’ evolved from the Latin adjective *integer*, meaning whole or complete. The word integrity means to be whole and undivided but also the quality of being honest with strong moral principles. In sport, this means the manifestation of the ethics and values which promote confidence in sports, including positive conduct by its members and community.

Discussions around sport integrity includes words like fairness, inclusivity, honesty, trust, values, ethics, morals, beliefs, respect and fairness. Traditionally, sport integrity also includes subjects such as doping, match-fixing, corruption, or cheating.

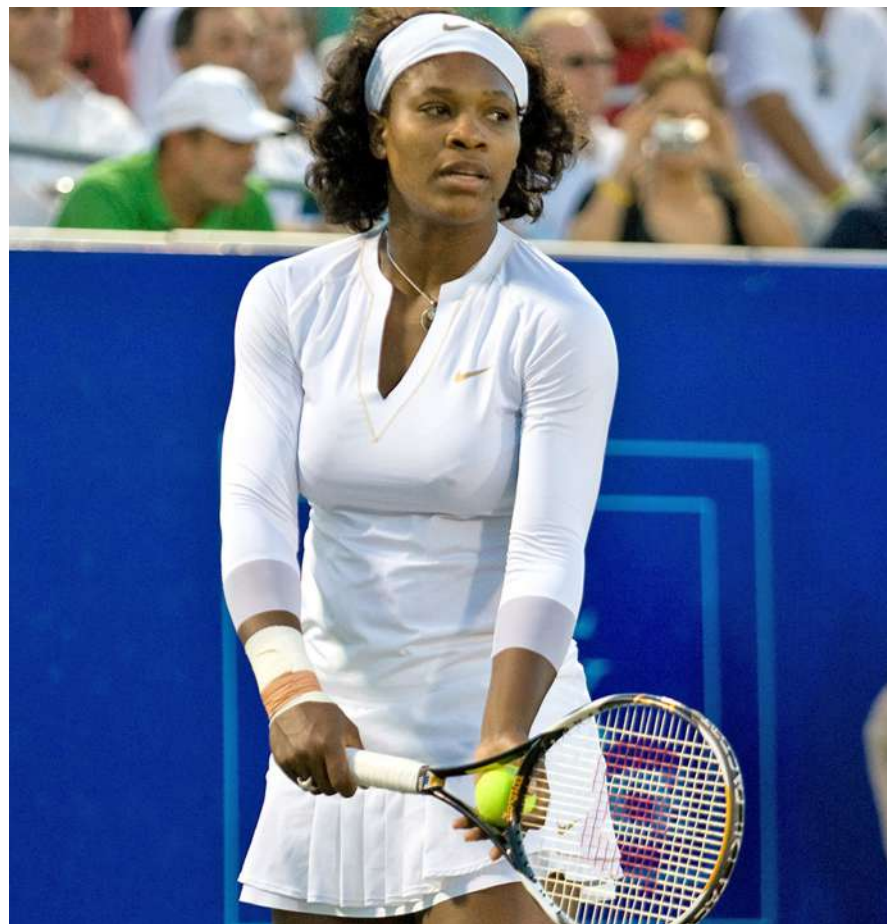
“I look for three things in hiring people. The first is personal integrity, the second is intelligence, the third is a high energy level. But if you don’t have the first, the other two will kill you,” stated Warren Buffett, American investor and philanthropist, who is the chairman and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway. As of 2024 his net worth was US \$128.1 billion. Honesty is the best policy; easier on the memory.

Integrity has siblings called honesty, truthfulness and straightforwardness that are trustworthy, loyal, fair and sincere while keeping their distance from lying, cheating and theft.

Remember how Pilate asked Jesus: “What is truth” (Jn. 18 38) and left the room before he heard an answer. Had he waited, he would probably have found out that truth is “the accurate perception - and communication - of reality”. What we say is true if it corresponds to the way we think things actually are – to the facts.

However, reality is not perception. Perception is not reality; it is our take on, our understanding of reality. Very hard to tell “the whole truth” as only God sees things 360 degrees and in context. Trying to be honest leads to a fulfilling, free life. Honesty is not just about telling the truth. It’s about being real with yourself and others about who you are, what you want and what you need to live your most authentic life. Honesty - including admitting our innate bias - sharpens our perception and allows us to observe everything around us with sharper clarity.

The contents of your heart may



**Serena Williams: If you ask Serena a question, she’ll give you an honest answer. Widely regarded as one of the greatest tennis players of all time, she hated spending time “on anything that has to do with working physically.”**

other, his first was an equally perfect example of his ability to cheat. We are talking, of course, about the ‘Hand of God’, as Maradona dubbed the opening goal himself after punching an aerial ball past England goalkeeper Peter Shilton.

Then there is the most notorious individual Olympic cheat, Boris Onishchenko a former Soviet modern pentathlete who competed at the 1968, 1972 and 1976 Olympics. From 1967 to 1974, he also took part in six World Modern Pentathlon Championships, winning gold five times. Sadly, he is best known for his disqualification from the 1976 Olympics – and subsequent lifetime ban – for cheating by means of an illegally modified épée that signalled it had scored when it had not.

Russia has an appalling record in sport dishonesty. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) banned Russia from major international sporting events for four years, on charges of tampering with doping-related reports; a carrying on of the cheating the USSR – and East Germany – had been doing for decades.

On the other hand, cricket has its magnificent honesty moment in Australia’s semi-final against Sri Lanka in 2003. It was then that Adam Gilchrist – great name – walked back to the pavilion despite being given not out by the on-field umpire. He knew what he had done: an inside-edge onto pad off the bowling of Aravinda de Silva.

Having scored over 15,000 runs across all forms of international cricket, completed in excess of 800 dismissals behind the stumps, won the World Cup and the Ashes on three occasions each and become the first man to hit 100 Test sixes, there is some delightful irony that his ethical stance is far better remembered.

I said, ‘great name’ as not only was ‘Adam’ the first man, but ‘Gilchrist’, a Gaelic surname stemming from “Gille Chrìost” or “Gille Chrìosd”, meaning “servant of Christ”.

How would you, dear reader, like to be remembered? As that Boris, a Maradona or a Gilchrist?

**PS...**

This is my last piece for the *Universe Catholic Weekly* which, alas, is closing. However, in my attempt to ward off dementia, I plan to carry on writing fortnightly pieces. These can be accessed on my website [fathervlad.com](http://fathervlad.com)

Perhaps you follow my thoughts on those pages, if not these? You would be very welcome.

be declared. As, “your love makes me strong, your hate makes me unstoppable!” stated Cristiano Ronaldo, Portuguese professional footballer who now plays as a forward for and captains both Saudi Pro League club Al Nassr and the Portugal national team.

“The foundation stones for a balanced success are honesty, character, integrity, faith, love and loyalty.” This from Zig Ziglar (1926-2012), an American whose sport was writing and motivational speaking.

“A lot of times in sport if you try to tell the truth it seems like an excuse,” admitted Sanya Richards-Ross (born 1985), a retired Jamaican-born American track and field athlete, who competed internationally for the United States in the 400 metres. Her notable accolades in this event include being the 2012 Olympic champion, 2009 world champion, 2008 Olympic bronze medalist, and 2005 world silver medalist

“Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Your character is what you really are, while your reputation is what others think of you. Make each day your masterpiece. Never lie, never cheat, never steal. Nothing will work unless you do. Success comes from knowing that you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming.” taught John Wooden, American basketball

player. Nicknamed the ‘Wizard of Westwood’, as head coach for the UCLA Bruins he won ten National Collegiate Athletic Association championships in a 12-year period.

His famous quote, “Success is never final, failure is never fatal, and it’s courage that counts,” still resonates around the world of sport. John never stopped. He consistently left the past to focus on the present, regardless of prior success, or failure.

Kathleen Marie Ireland, an American whose sport was super-modelling in the 1980s and 1990s, best known for appearing in 13 consecutive ‘Sports Illustrated’ covers, encouraged us to “keep integrity and your work ethic intact. So, what, if that means working a little harder? An honorable character is your best calling card, and that’s something anyone can have.”

If you ask Serena Williams a question, she’ll give you an honest answer. Serena, as you may remember, is an American former professional tennis player. Widely regarded as one of the greatest tennis players of all time, she was ranked world No.1 in singles by the Women’s Tennis Association for 319 weeks, including a joint-record 186 consecutive weeks, and finished as the year-end No.1 five times.

According to Adena Andrews – an American journalist – the tennis star once said she hates spending

time on “anything that has to do with working physically.” Then, a few months later, Williams displayed some of the most refreshing honesty you’ll ever see in sports.

After defeating her sister at the US Open, Williams had to answer a question about why she wasn’t smiling. Her response was truth-perfection.

Reporter: “You just won a match. Normally you smile when you win, you come here, you laugh. What happens tonight? Is just because you beat Venus or because you’re thinking about what is going next? What’s wrong?”

Williams: “It’s 11:30. To be perfectly honest with you, I don’t want to be here. (Laughter.) I just want to be in bed right now. I have to wake up early to practice.”

First, the negatives: what not to emulate. In thrall of victory at any cost, temptations are never far away. Argentina’s World Cup quarter-final against England in Mexico in 1986 became one of the most famous games in football history thanks to one man. Played at the famous Estadio Azteca, the match was taken over by the greatest player on the planet at the time – and, for some, of all time – Argentina’s captain and No.10, Diego Maradona.

But while Maradona’s second goal of the game encapsulated his brilliance perhaps better than any