

Female Sports Stars

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Female Sports Stars



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Title page: Australia's Samantha Stosur returns the ball during a tennis match at the 2010 Madrid Open.

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Introduction

For many years, men **dominated** sports. But today, women compete in most of the same sports that men do. Women’s professional tennis, basketball, and soccer draw thousands of **spectators**. Additionally, high schools and colleges now have women’s sports teams that compete against one another in the same way that men’s teams do.

There are thousands of outstanding female athletes. This book features four modern-day female athletes who have made huge impacts in their respective sports, and who serve as an inspiration to others—both female and male.



Female athletes compete against each other in a professional basketball game.



Mia Hamm kicks the ball during the 1999 Women's World Cup.

Mia Hamm

Mariel Margret Hamm, known as Mia, is considered the world's best all-around women's soccer player. During her college and professional careers, she set almost every soccer record, including that of all-time leading scorer, male or female, with 158 goals scored in international competition. With her help, the U.S. women's team won two gold and two bronze medals in the Women's World Cup, and an Olympic gold and silver. Mia retired from international competition in 2004.



Mia jumps above two defenders to make a header.

Mia grew up with five brothers and sisters. She says they taught her the importance of teamwork. As a child, she would often quit games before they were over because she hated to lose. But when her brothers and sisters refused to play with her, she learned to accept losing along with winning. When her older brother Garrett beat her at backyard games, she decided to **dedicate** herself to becoming a winner. To her, winning is everything. Winning, however, isn't just about who has the highest score at the end of the game, but rather about who plays the best and most fairly.

Mia stresses the importance of working hard on individual drills, but to her, teamwork is what's really important. She says, "I believe that to fit into a team, no individual can put her needs above those of the team as a whole. I am a member of a team, and I rely on the team, I defer to it and sacrifice for it, because the team, not the individual, is the ultimate champion."

In 1997, Mia's brother Garrett developed aplastic anemia, a rare blood disease that affected his **bone marrow**. He received a bone marrow **transplant** from a healthy donor, which might have cured him, but unfortunately he died of complications from the transplant. Mia learned a lot about courage and strength from Garrett's brave struggle with his illness.

To **commemorate** Garrett's life, and to help others with similar struggles, the Mia Hamm Foundation raises money for bone marrow research, and to support families of people who receive transplants. The Foundation also works to raise awareness about transplants, since it is often hard for people who need a transplant to find a good medical match.



The second part of the mission of the Mia Hamm Foundation is to develop more opportunities for young women to participate in sports. Opportunities for girls to compete in sports were rare when Mia started playing soccer. As a result, Mia's Foundation works to develop new programs that support young women in sports.

Mia says, "My goal is to leave a positive and lasting **legacy** in the research of bone marrow diseases and for every female athlete to have the opportunity to play the sports they love."



Julie Foudy and Mia Hamm are inducted into the National Soccer Hall of Fame in 2007.



The Williams sisters pose before a match at Wimbledon in 2000.

Venus and Serena Williams

In 1978, Richard Williams watched on television as Virginia Ruzici won \$22,000 in the French Open women's singles tennis tournament. He realized that tennis could be a way to earn a lot of money. Richard claims to have known before the birth of his daughters Venus and Serena that they would become tennis champions. While he waited for them to grow big enough to hold a tennis racquet, he taught himself and his wife, Oracene, how to play tennis by studying videos and books on the subject.

The family lived in Compton, California. It was a tough place to grow up with its drug dealers and gangs. When the girls were young, they would pack the family car with racquets, tennis balls, and a broom, and go to the local park to practice.



Venus Williams

The courts were littered with trash, and the girls had to sweep them clean before they could play.

As a young girl, Venus watched tennis matches on TV, and learned by studying the professionals. She figured out that the winners could find the weakness in an opponent's game and then repeatedly hit the ball to that weak area. She also studied the footwork of the pros, applying what she learned to her own play and teaching her younger sister.



Serena Williams

Venus and Serena shared their father's dream that they would become the best tennis players in the world. As their coach, Richard worked them hard, but he also insisted that they concentrate on their schoolwork. Serena says, "Being well educated helps us succeed both on and off the court." Venus and Serena were encouraged to excel in everything they did, not to earn praise from others, but to satisfy themselves.



Richard Williams coaches his daughter Venus before a match.



The Williams sisters compete as a doubles team during the Australian Open in 2009.

Venus and Serena, a year apart in age, each entered their first professional tournament at age 14. They quickly began winning against older, more well-known players. Since then, the Williams sisters have won every big-name tournament, including the French Open, the U.S. Open, and Wimbledon. They compete in **singles**, sometimes playing against each other, and in **doubles**, playing together as a team. At various times, each of them has been ranked number one in the world.

As children who grew up in the city, Venus and Serena recognized that inner-city high school students often had trouble earning tennis **scholarships** because they didn't have the necessary training and support. As a result, the sisters founded the Venus and Serena Williams Tutorial/Tennis Academy, which provides inner-city students with tennis lessons, tutoring, financial aid, and career counseling.

The Williams sisters play as much tennis as possible, making the most of what is available to them while they are still competitive in their sport. They also attended college to prepare for their lives after tennis, and work at other pursuits. They stress the importance of education, and of constantly challenging oneself to work hard and set new goals.

Both women have studied fashion design; Serena developed her own clothing line, called *Aneres* (*Serena* spelled backward). Venus has an interior design company called V Starr Interiors and her own line of clothes, called *EleVen*. Both sisters have acted on television and hope to work in movies.



Serena Williams visits a school she founded in Kenya, Africa, in 2008.

Their natural curiosity keeps them busy learning new things. Serena, the outgoing sister, likes to learn new languages so she can talk to people when she travels. She can speak French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese. Venus, who is shyer than her sister, is a bookworm. She likes to read about many different subjects. The sisters credit their success to hard work and a positive attitude. Serena says, "When you're really going for something, you can't think about your doubts. You have to push them out of your head and replace them with positive thoughts like 'I can do this.'"

Memorable Moments

- **June 17, 1980** — Venus Williams is born.
- **September 26, 1981** — Serena Williams is born.
- **October 31, 1994** — Venus enters her first professional tournament.
- **1998** — Venus wins her first Women's Tennis Association (WTA) singles championship.
- **2000** — Venus wins Wimbledon, her first Grand Slam singles title.
- **2001** — The Williams sisters meet in a Grand Slam finals match for the first time in the U.S. Open; Venus wins the championship.
- **2002** — The Williams sisters face off in the Wimbledon finals; Serena wins.
- **2003** — For the second year in a row, the Williams sisters face off in the Wimbledon singles finals; Serena wins.
- **2005** — Venus wins Wimbledon. Serena wins the Australian Open.
- **2007** — Serena wins the Australian Open for the third time.
- **2009** — Venus wins her fourth Wimbledon title.
- **2010** — Serena wins her fourth Wimbledon title.



Even after the shark attack, Bethany still competes in surfing competitions.

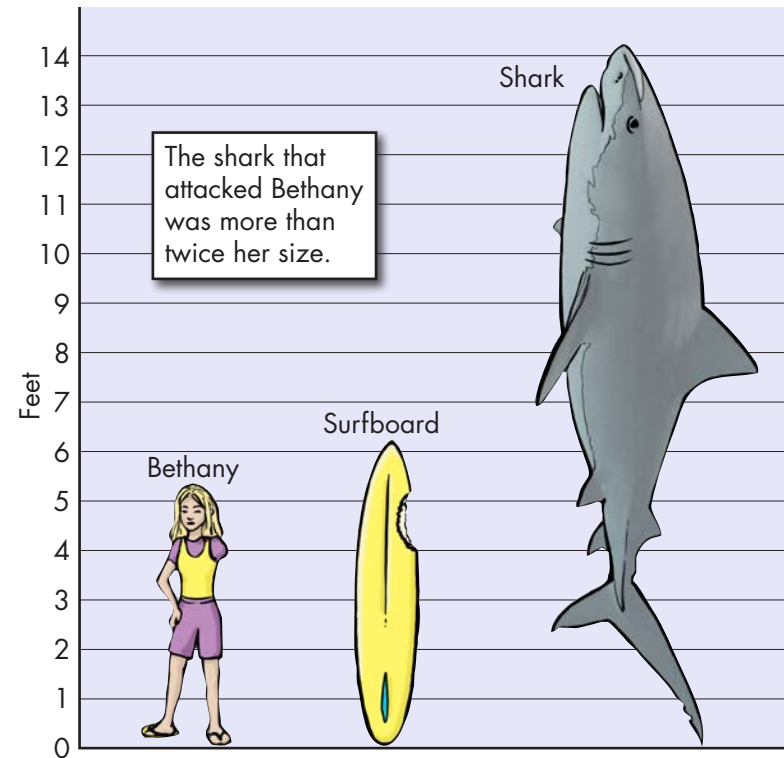
Bethany Hamilton

Tom and Cheri Hamilton grew up loving to surf, Tom in New Jersey and Cheri in California. After high school, they both moved to Kauai, Hawaii, to take advantage of the great surfing. There they met, married, and had three children—two sons and Bethany. All three children were born surfers. Bethany's older brothers dared her to try everything they did. She says their pushing made her adventurous and competitive. She played other sports, such as soccer, but preferred to concentrate on surfing.

Bethany began entering surfing competitions at age 8, and dreamed of becoming a professional surfer. She was 13 years old on October 31, 2003. On that day, while surfing with friends near Tunnels Beach, a 14-foot tiger shark attacked her. Bethany said, "My arm was hanging in the water, and it just came and bit me. It kind of pulled me back and forth. But I just held onto my board and then the shark let go." The shark tore off Bethany's left arm just below her shoulder.

A nearby surfer made a **tourniquet** from a rubber surf leash, which kept the bleeding under control while they paddled one-quarter mile back to shore. Bethany's doctors say that her athletic training helped her to survive the shock and blood loss, but Bethany thinks that's not the whole story. She says, "I might not be here if I hadn't asked for God's help. I look at everything that's happened as part of God's plan for my life."

Bethany's book, *Soul Surfer*, tells her story of faith and courage.



While she was healing, Bethany thought for a while that she might not surf again. She was concerned that it would be much harder to stand up on the board using only one hand and that her balance would be completely off. But with hard work and determination she returned to surfing. She says, "It's hard for me to describe the joy I felt after I stood up and rode a wave in for the first time after the attack. I was incredibly thankful and happy inside. The tiny bit of doubt that would sometimes tell me 'You'll never surf again' was gone in one wave!"

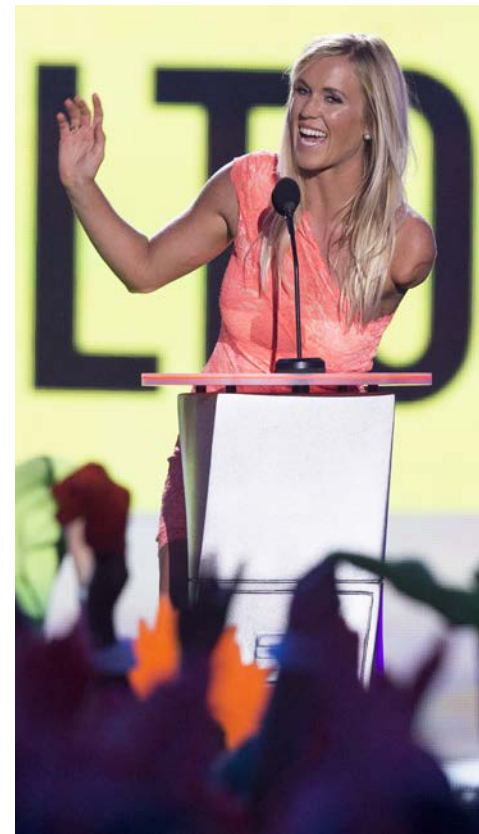
As for fear of another shark attack, Bethany says that sometimes her heart pounds when she sees a shadow under the water and she still has occasional bad dreams about being attacked by a shark. But she believes that “God is watching out for me, and while I don’t want to do something stupid like paddling out where someone has just seen a shark, in the end, I trust Him to take care of me.”



Bethany had to regain her sense of balance to surf again.

Bethany has returned to her pre-attack routine of **strenuous** workouts, school, and surfing competitions. She says that she has a lot to be thankful for. When people tell her that she’s an inspiration, she responds, “I just want to be a sign along the way that points toward heaven.” She believes that faith provides hope and a future for those who feel down or defeated in their lives.

Bethany’s popularity and hope for the future led her to partner with World Vision to create



“Surfing for Children in Crisis.” Bethany hopes that her involvement in the campaign will help provide disabled children from around the world with essential care, support, and hope.

Bethany accepts the Favorite Comeback award during the Nickelodeon Kids’ Choice Sports awards.



Conclusion

Not every girl has the soccer talent of Mia Hamm, the tennis skills of the Williams sisters, or the surfing ability of Bethany Hamilton. Not everyone is destined to be a star athlete like these four. Whether your dream is to excel in sports, medicine, art, music, or another field, these star athletes can provide inspiration. Their message is to believe in yourself, work hard, and pursue your dreams.

Women's Sports Firsts

- In 1900, women began competing in the Olympics in Paris, France. Initially, women could only compete in golf and tennis.
- The first women's professional football league was started in 1974 with a seven-team, ten-game schedule. Each player earned \$25 a game.
- In 1997, more high school girls than ever before participated in sports—2,472,043 girls!
- The Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, located in Knoxville, Tennessee, opened in 1999.
- In 2001, the first Women's Amateur World Boxing Championships were held in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The event drew more than 150 competitors from 35 nations.
- In 2004, more women participated in the Olympic games than ever before—44 percent of the athletes were women!
- The Women's Professional Soccer League held its first game in 2009.

Glossary

- bone marrow** (*n.*) the body tissue that fills the center of bones and produces red blood cells (p. 7)
- commemorate** (*v.*) to honor the memory of (p. 7)
- dedicate** (*v.*) to commit to a goal (p. 6)
- dominated** (*v.*) had a continuing power over something (p. 4)
- doubles** (*n.*) a game with two players on each side (p. 12)
- legacy** (*n.*) something left to somebody (p. 8)
- scholarships** (*n.*) money given to students to help pay for their college education (p. 13)
- singles** (*n.*) a game with one player on each side (p. 12)
- spectators** (*n.*) people who watch an event (p. 4)
- strenuous** (*adj.*) requiring great effort, energy, and strength (p. 20)
- tourniquet** (*n.*) a bandage that stops the flow of blood from an artery by applying pressure (p. 17)
- transplant** (*n.*) an organ or tissue moved from one body to another (p. 7)

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