THIRTEEN’s American Masters Series Profiles a Sports Figure for the First Time in Its 27-Year History

Billie Jean King Premieres Nationally Tuesday, September 10 on PBS to commemorate 40th anniversaries of King v. Riggs “The Battle of the Sexes” match, founding of the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) and equal prize money

Documentary features new interviews with King, Serena & Venus Williams, Hillary Clinton, Sir Elton John, Maria Sharapova, Rosie Casals, Chris Evert, Gloria Steinem, Margaret Court, and others

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For the first time, THIRTEEN’s American Masters series profiles a sports figure: Billie Jean King (born Nov. 22, 1943), a determined woman who has been a major force in changing and democratizing the cultural landscape. American Masters Billie Jean King premieres nationally Tuesday, September 10, 2013, 8-9:30 p.m. ET on PBS (check local listings) to commemorate three 40th anniversaries: the Billie Jean King v. Bobby Riggs “The Battle of the Sexes” match on Sept. 20, 1973, the founding of the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) by King on June 20, and the U.S. Open becoming the first Grand Slam tournament to award equal prize money to men and women. This new documentary traces the incredible life of one of the most important female athletes of the 20th century as her 70th birthday nears.
American Masters looks back to the 12-year-old Long Beach, California, girl who played tennis on public courts, observed disparity and, as she soared athletically, never stopped trying to remedy inequality. During her professional tennis career, King won 39 Grand Slam titles, helped form the Virginia Slims Series (pre-cursor to WTA Tour), founded the Women’s Sports Foundation and Women’s Sports magazine, and co-founded World TeamTennis (WTT). Her competitiveness on the circuit was matched by her efforts on behalf of women and the LGBT community, and her commitment to prove there is strength in diversity.

In American Masters Billie Jean King, King presents her own story with perspective from fellow tennis stars who played alongside her or were influenced by her, among them Margaret Court, Chris Evert, Ilana Kloss (King’s partner), Maria Sharapova, Serena and Venus Williams, Caroline Wozniacki, and members of the Virginia Slims Circuit “Original 9,” including Peaches Bartkowicz, Rosie Casals, Julie Heldman, Nancy Richey, and Valerie Ziegenfuss. The film also features new interviews with a diverse cast of characters from King’s unparalleled life: former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, friend and fellow activist Sir Elton John, feminist icon Gloria Steinem, Bobby Riggs’ son Larry and “Battle of the Sexes” trainer Lornie Kuhle, King’s brother Randy Moffitt and ex-husband Larry King, and Valerie Jarrett, Senior Adviser to President Obama, who chose King as the first female athlete to be awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. King is also a member of the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition. Through these interviews and archival footage, the film illustrates the life of a woman whose journey became not just a battle for personal glory but a sociopolitical battle for equality for all.

“Billie Jean King embodies the art of sports, of humanism and of activism. For more than 50 years, her excellence and example have sparked the way for changes that enrich us all,” said Susan Lacy, creator and executive producer of American Masters. “Billie Jean’s star on our cultural landscape shines brighter and brighter, with no end in sight.”

“I am thrilled American Masters is choosing to showcase my journey as we celebrate so many historic anniversaries in my ongoing commitment to social justice and equality,” said King. “It is an honor to be the first athlete profiled in the 27-year history of American Masters and I look forward to bringing our message of equality to audiences of all ages and all backgrounds.”

“Almost from the first time she picked up a racquet, Billie Jean King has understood the power of sport as a major cultural force to shape society; and it was her insight to use the emotional energy borne on the playing field to fight for equality and social justice. Through her life she has faced triumph and adversity with equal measure, battling both on and off the court for a better world. To be entrusted with telling her story is both an honor and responsibility,” said Emmy-nominated filmmaker James Erskine, co-founder of New Black Films (The Battle of the Sexes, One Night in Turin).

Since its 1986 premiere, American Masters has earned 24 Emmy Awards — including eight for Outstanding Non-Fiction Series since 1999 and five for Outstanding Non-Fiction Special — 12 Peabodys, an Oscar, three Grammys, and two Producers Guild Awards. Now in its 27th season on PBS, the series is a production of THIRTEEN. WNET is the parent company of
THIRTEEN and WLIW21, New York’s public television stations, and operator of NJTV. For 50 years, THIRTEEN has been making the most of the rich resources and passionate people of New York and the world, reaching millions of people with on-air and online programming that celebrates arts and culture, offers insightful commentary on the news of the day, explores the worlds of science and nature, and invites students of all ages to have fun while learning.

To take *American Masters* beyond the television broadcast and further explore the themes, stories and personalities of masters past and present, the companion website ([http://pbs.org/americanmasters](http://pbs.org/americanmasters)) offers streaming video of select films, interviews, essays, photographs, outtakes, and other resources. *American Masters* is also seen on the WORLD channel, a 24/7, full-service multicast channel featuring public television’s signature nonfiction documentary, science and news programming, broadcast in nearly two-thirds of the United States.

*American Masters Billie Jean King* is a production of New Black Films, Media Squared Films PLC, and THIRTEEN’s *American Masters* in association with Goldcrest Films International and WNET. James Erskine is director, producer, and writer. Victoria Gregory is producer. Susan Lacy is *American Masters* series creator and executive producer.

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**About New Black Films**

New Black Films is an independent London-based film and TV production company set up in 2009 by filmmakers James Erskine and Victoria Gregory. New Black Films specializes in feature film and documentary productions. Focusing on projects that are distinctively authored, yet with broad appeal, New Black Films produces films that are challenging, provocative and relevant, putting a twist on existing genres to explore contemporary issues and reach the widest possible audience. In 2010 New Black Films produced *One Night in Turin*, a documentary feature film about the 1990 World Cup and its transformative effect on the England team that changed perceptions at home and abroad of English football for the better. In 2011, came *From The Ashes* the story of another momentous moment for English sport when in 1981, against betting odds of 500-1, cricketer Ian Botham turned the fortunes of England’s cricket team to bring home the Ashes. 2013-14 will see the international releases of major new productions including *The Battle of the Sexes* and *Pantani - An Accidental Death of a Cyclist*, the tragic story about the iconic Italian cyclist Marco Pantani.

**About WNET**

In 2013, WNET is celebrating the 50th Anniversary of THIRTEEN, New York’s flagship public media provider. As the parent company of THIRTEEN and WLIW21 and operator of NJTV, WNET brings quality arts, education and public affairs programming to over 5 million viewers each week. WNET produces and presents such acclaimed PBS series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *Need to Know*, *Charlie Rose* and a range of documentaries, children’s programs, and local news and cultural offerings available on air and online. Pioneers in educational programming, WNET has created such groundbreaking series as *Get the Math*, *Oh Noah!* and *Cyberchase* and provides tools for educators that bring compelling content to life in the classroom and at home. WNET highlights the tri-state’s unique culture and diverse communities through *NYC-ARTS*, *Reel 13*, *NJ Today* and *MetroFocus*, the multi-platform news magazine focusing on the New York region. WNET is also a leader in connecting with viewers on emerging platforms, including the [THIRTEEN Explore iPad App](http://pbs.org/americanmasters) where users can stream PBS content for free.