

KUUMBA KORNER

by Dorothy Word

Great tennis player disliked school, but...

As a youth, Althea Gibson disliked school so much that she played "hooky" whenever she could. Her parents and other caring adults made Althea realize how important and necessary an education is even for a talented athlete. They encouraged her and insisted that she get a high school diploma, which she finally did at age 21! She then attended Florida A& M College and received a B.S. degree.

As a youth in the 1940s, playing tennis became Althea's favorite



activity. She was very skilled, winning all kinds of championships in all-Black tennis competitions.

In the 1950s, with the help of many people behind the scene, Althea Gibson broke through the barriers of racism and segregation that kept African American "tennis hopefuls" out of amateur and professional tennis in America.

In 1950, Althea was the first African American to play tennis at Forest Hills (USA) and in 1951, the first African American to play at Wimbledon (England). In 1957, Ms. Gibson not only played at Wimbledon—She won the Singles Championship there and received personal congratulations from Queen Elizabeth!

"I Always Wanted To Be Somebody" is the title of Althea Gibson's autobiography; and she is somebody indeed! Ms. Gibson will be remembered as the first African American to play tennis in this formerly all-white amateur and professional game.

Althea Gibson opened the tennis courts to African Americans who would follow in her footsteps: Zina Garrison, Venus Williams, Chanda Rubin and others.