



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, November 10, 2008

CONTACT:
Jennifer Kearns
Associate Director of Public and
Media Relations
317/917-6117

NCAA HONORS BILLIE JEAN KING WITH GERALD R. FORD AWARD

INDIANAPOLIS--- Billie Jean King, tennis great and champion for social change and equality, is the recipient of this year's NCAA President's Gerald R. Ford Award.

The award, named in recognition of the late President Gerald Ford, honors individuals who have provided significant leadership as an advocate for higher education and intercollegiate athletics on a continuous basis over the course of his or her career.

NCAA President Myles Brand will present the award to King at the opening business session of the 2009 NCAA Convention on Thursday, January 15, in Washington, D.C. In honor of King, the NCAA will donate an honorarium to the institution of her choice for the benefit of student-athletes.

"Billie Jean King has created new inroads for women in sports and beyond during her legendary career," Brand said. "From her record 20 titles at Wimbledon, to the 'Battle of the Sexes' in 1973, to her founding of the Women's Tennis Foundation and Women's Sports Foundation, her career has been – and continues to be – one of great accomplishments and contributions to society."

King was born Nov. 22, 1943, and grew up in Long Beach, Calif., where her father, Bill, worked for the Long Beach Fire Department and her mother, Betty, was a homemaker. At age 5, while washing dishes, Billie Jean told her mom, "I am going to do something great with my life."

At age 11, Billie Jean bought her first tennis racket – which came complete with maroon strings – using the money she saved from odd jobs. At age 11, following a free tennis lesson, Billie Jean told

her mother, "I am going to be No. 1 in the world." Her mother told her that was nice but she needed to go home and finish her homework and practice piano.

King attended California State University in Los Angeles, where she played tennis.

She won 39 Grand Slam singles, doubles and mixed doubles tennis titles, including a record 20 titles at Wimbledon.

To commemorate the 35th anniversary of her historic match against Bobby Riggs, she authored "Pressure is a Privilege: Lessons I've Learned from Life and the Battle of the Sexes." The book, published by Lifetime Media, was released in August 2008. The book is a collection of life lessons King used to prepare for her historic Battle of the Sexes match. The 1973 match is widely considered to be one of the greatest moments in sports history. It is remembered for its effect on society and its contribution to the women's movement.

King was one of nine players who, in 1970, broke away from the tennis establishment and accepted \$1 contracts from tennis promoter Gladys Heldman in Houston. The revolt led to the birth of women's professional tennis and the formation of the Virginia Slims Tour and Women's Tennis Association.

In 1973 King lobbied for, and obtained, equal prize money for men and women at the U.S. Open. Also in 1973, she founded the Women's Tennis Association. In 1974 she founded the Women's Sports Foundation and Women's Sports Magazine.

Since founding the Women's Sports Foundation, King has led the organization in its mission to advance the lives of girls and women through sports and physical activity. In the past 34 years, the Foundation has awarded more than \$50 million in educational and cash grants to advance participation, research and leadership in sports and physical activity for girls and women.

King co-founded World TeamTennis in 1974, the groundbreaking co-ed professional tennis league and founded the World TeamTennis Recreational League, one of the most popular recreational tennis formats in the U.S.

In 1990, Life Magazine named King one of the 100 most important Americans of the 20th Century and in 1994, King was ranked No. 5 on Sports Illustrated's "Top 40 Athletes" list for significantly altering or elevating sports the last four decades.

King was honored on Aug. 28, 2006, when the National Tennis Center, home of the U.S. Open, was renamed the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in honor of King's contributions to tennis, sports and society both on and off the court. She remains involved with the USTA and is currently chair of the Tennis in the Parks Committee. She also continues to be a leader in the effort for equality and recognition in the gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgendered (GLBT) community and has been honored by many of the leading GLBT organizations, including the Human Rights Campaign, GLAAD and Lambda Legal Foundation.

She was further honored in October 2006, when the Sports Museum of America and the Women's Sports Foundation announced that the Billie Jean King International Women's Sports Center, the nation's first permanent, comprehensive museum collection dedicated to women's sports, would be housed at the Sports Museum of America when it opened in New York in 2008.

She currently serves on boards of the Women's Sports Foundation and the Elton John AIDS Foundation. As a member of the board of the Elton John AIDS Foundation, King has helped the organization raise more than \$125 million to support 4,000 programs in 55 countries around the world.

To commemorate the first anniversary of the renaming of the National Tennis Center in her

honor, King launched an environmental initiative called GreenSlam, which is a challenge to the sports industry to get proactive about being ecologically minded.

This is the sixth year the NCAA has presented the Gerald R. Ford Award. University of Notre Dame President Emeritus Theodore Hesburgh received the inaugural award in 2004 and former Knight Commission chair William Friday was the 2005 recipient. In 2006, Birch Bayh, former United States Senator from Indiana and “Father of Title IX”, and John Wooden, legendary UCLA men’s basketball coach who won 10 national championships, were dual recipients of the award. Christine Grant, former director of women’s athletics at the University of Iowa, received the award in 2007. James Frank, former membership president of the NCAA, was last year’s recipient.

Ford was the 38th president of the United States taking office in 1974 after President Richard Nixon resigned. Ford was president until 1977. His political career began in 1948 when he was elected to Congress from Grand Rapids, Michigan. He became House Minority Leader in 1965, a position he held until Nixon appointed him vice president in 1973.

Ford played football at the University of Michigan where he participated on national championship teams in 1932 and 1933. He started every game at center his senior year and was voted Most Valuable Player by his teammates. Ford received contract offers from the Green Bay Packers and the Detroit Lions, which he turned down in favor of studying law at Yale University. Before beginning his law classes, Ford coached freshman football and boxing.

At the age of 93, President Ford died at his California home on December 26, 2006.

“As a public servant and as a student-athlete, President Ford embodied the qualities of integrity, achievement and dedication that we aspire to in intercollegiate athletics, and so does Billie Jean King,” Brand said. “Because of Billie Jean King’s work and dedication to the integrity of every human being, she has been – and still is – able to bring about change in athletics and society.”