



Meet an exceptional tennis player who revolutionised women's sports

In this exclusive interview, Billie Jean King shares her vision of how she influenced reaching gender equality in tennis. How did it all begin? What motivated her? What message would she like to convey? Finally, how does she view Group BNP Paribas' commitment to gender equality?

You are considered a pioneer in the fight for Gender Equality in Tennis. The 'Original 9', a group you initiated to bring parity, will soon celebrate its 50th birthday. What made you decide to start this journey?

Billie Jean King: "The reason it started is when tennis became a professional sport in 1968. Everyone was very excited but they didn't care much about the women. When they did have a tournament, the ratio of prize money was like 8:1 to 10:1 or 12:1. So things were not going well for the women, and going very well for the men. We were getting very upset and very concerned that we weren't going to have opportunities to really play, we were always going to be getting less and less. So the 9 of us signed a One Dollar Contract with Gladys Heldman. She said: *I'm going to hold our own tournament in Houston at the Racket Club.* So we had the tournament there, but during the tournament we decided we were going to have to do something really drastic. We signed that One Dollar Contract because we talked about the future generations... The three things are: that any girl in the world, if she's good enough would have a place to play; that we would be appreciated for our accomplishments, not only our looks; and finally the most important one, to be able to make a living. So we put our careers on the line. We didn't care, we thought it was worth giving up our careers for the future generations. Because it was going to have to change then, or we were never going to be even with the men. With the Original 9, and Gladys and Joe Coleman, we were able to start the infrastructure of having a tour the next year in 1971. And the WTA tour is now that one - it's one and the same. I founded the WTA in 1973, and we got all the top players together. When you see the WTA tour, that's the history. And every time you see a woman tennis player, for instance Naomi Osaka, getting 3 million dollars at the US Open this year, the reason for that goes back to that original One Dollar Contract."

If you had a few words of encouragement, what would you say?

BJK: “I would suggest that everyone of you is an influencer. Because women in particular tend to be told not to speak up. I think there are 3 things to think about: Relationships are everything and that means with yourself, your family and your friends and your associates at work. Number two, is to keep learning and to keep learning how to learn. And number three: be a problem solver and an innovator. Be entrepreneurial, keep inspiring yourself to think outside of the box: What does the world need next?

Think positively and absolutely want to make a difference. Because each and every one of you does make a difference, and you do matter. And remember, each and every one of you is an influencer.”

Conclusion

BJK: “The ITF and BNP Paribas have a lot of the same philosophies, in that they care about tennis from the grass roots to the grand slam. I think they care about people with their [HeForShe](#) programme, and they have [OneInThreeWomen](#). They really do support helping women and having equality, and I really appreciate that. BNP Paribas has been loyal to our sport for so many years. They've been such a great promoter or sponsor - it's really a partnership - what they've been for tennis. It's amazing, and we appreciate it and I hope it always continues, because tennis is very fortunate to have BNP Paribas as a partner and sponsor.”

Source: group.bnpparibas