

real SPORTS e-Zine

The Authority in Women's Sports™

Most Important Moments In Sports Decade Edition



9th Annual REAL SPORTS Most Important Moments in Sports

Special Decade Edition

2000 - 2009

Keeping Women's Sports in Focus

#10 WTA – aka Williams Tennis Association

Venus and Serena Williams solidified their dominance during the decade, especially on the hallowed grass courts of Wimbledon, where they raised the Venus Rosewater Dish a combined eight times. Venus won her namesake trophy five times, along with two US Opens and an Olympic gold medal, while Serena claimed three Wimbledons and seven additional Grand Slam titles. The pair also made news on the fashion and entertainment fronts and bought a share of the Miami Dolphins in 2009.



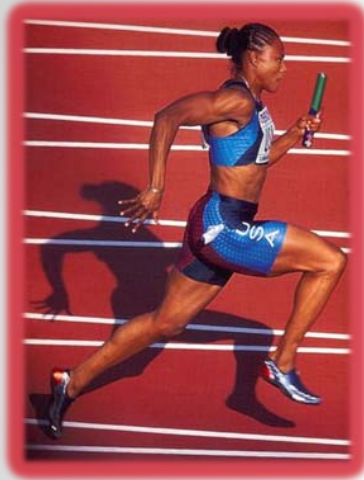
#9 Going Solo

English sailor Ellen MacArthur broke the record for the fastest solo circumnavigation of the globe in February 2005, completing her journey of greater than 27,300 nautical miles in a little more than 71 days, 14 hours. Technology allowed fans around the world to follow along on the adventure as she broke Frenchman Francis Joyon's mark by more than a day. He reclaimed the record in January 2008, beating MacArthur's time by almost two weeks, and she announced her retirement from competitive sailing shortly thereafter to concentrate on environmental issues.



#8 Danica Takes The Checkered Flag

Danica Patrick inspired a surge in Indy Car's popularity with her 2005 rookie of the year season, but her failure to win a race as the laps and years went by raised questions. She garnered plenty of attention for her turns in GoDaddy's suggestive commercials and the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue, but finally put concern over her ability to bed when she became the first woman to win an Indy Car race at the 2008 Indy Japan 300. In 2009, she announced her intention to race in NASCAR's Nationwide Series.



#7 Coming Clean



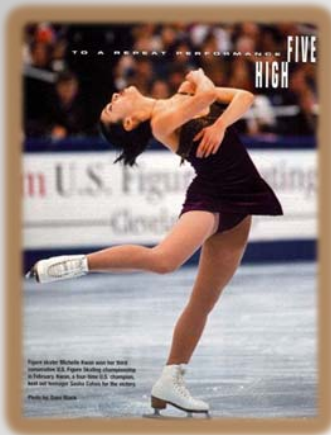
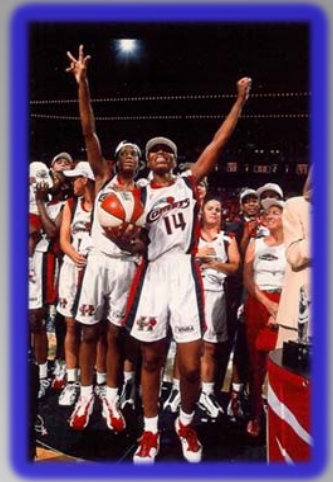
Once proclaimed as the world's greatest female athlete, Marion Jones was respected and revered by fans of both genders who admired her strength, her work ethic and the five medals (three gold) she won at the 2000 Olympics. But her story was too good to be true. In 2007 she admitted to lying to US federal agents regarding steroid use and her involvement with the BALCO ring. Her honors and records were swept away and she spent six months in prison.

#6 Golf Equality

Annika Sorenstam, whose dominance of women's golf was established in 2000 when she qualified for the World Golf Hall of Fame in just her seventh year on the LPGA tour, struck a blow for equality when she entered the Colonial in 2003. She had shot a 59 in 2001, when she became the first woman to win \$2 million in a season, but surely the pressure on that opening tee shot in Fort Worth two years later was immense. The first woman to play a PGA event since Babe Zaharias in 1945, Sorenstam finished five over par through two rounds and missed the cut. A month before, Martha Burk drew national attention to her protest of August National's male-only membership policy. And in July, Suzy Whaley played in the Greater Hartford Open, a spot she earned by winning the Connecticut section PGA championship.

#5 Premonitions

In December 2009, NBA Commissioner David Stern said there was a "good possibility" that a woman would be playing in his league before the next decade concludes. Stern's faith in women's basketball, exemplified by his continuing support of the WNBA, has been critical and will remain necessary to ensure that the men's league is not the only option down the road. Six franchises folded in the 2000s, including the flagship Houston Comets and former titlist Sacramento Monarchs, while the three-time champion Detroit Shock announced they were moving to Tulsa for the 2010 season.



#4 Olympic Moments

For many, the Olympics are about so much more than athletic excellence. They represent what's possible. They bring us together to celebrate the human ideal. We've chosen three of the most poignant examples from the past decade. Australia's Cathy Freeman, who is of Aboriginal descent, lit the flame in 2000 then won 400 meter gold to the roar of more than 110,000 countrymen filling Sydney's Olympic Stadium, and in the process brought unity and healing to a nation still coming to terms with its past.

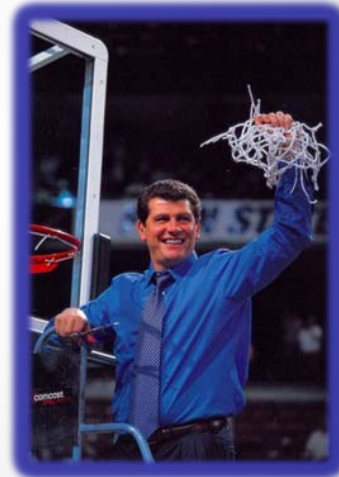
Canadian figure skaters Jamie Sale and David Pelletier accepted their 2002 silver medals with dignity despite a scandalous judging decision that outraged observers and elevated a Russian pair to gold. Collusion between the Russian and French judges soon was discovered, and Sale and Pelletier, who maintained their class throughout, were justly awarded gold medals.

That same year, Michelle Kwan reminded us that there is more than one-way to define excellence. The two-time defending world champion was the favorite in women's singles but wound up with bronze after teammate Sarah Hughes' perfect free skate vaulted her from fourth to first. Kwan finished her career with five world and nine U.S. championships but no Olympic gold, yet is considered by many to be the most accomplished skater in history.

We also acknowledge the very short-sided decision of the IOC to drop softball from the Olympic games. May what's possible, bring this sport back.

#3 Sometimes There's an I in Team

It took a benching to vault goalkeeper Hope Solo to stardom. U.S. national team coach Greg Ryan's insane decision to replace the in-form Solo with veteran Briana Scurry prior to the 2007 Women's World Cup semifinal against Brazil resulted in a firestorm that changed the way women's team sports were regarded by the general public. Solo's very public complaint following the 4-0 defeat, and her subsequent ostracism from the team, forced players and fans to take a hard look at the stereotype that many women preferred unity over results. Solo was lauded for her competitive drive and courage to speak out. Ryan was let go, and Solo was in goal as the U.S. won gold at the 2008 Olympics.



#2 Hardwood Dynasty

Pat Summit returned to glory in the latter part of the decade, winning NCAA titles in 2007 and 2008 and netting her 1,000th career victory along the way.

But the true team of the 2000s was Connecticut, led by Summit's rival, Geno Auriemma. The Huskies captured championships in 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2009, putting together two 39-0 seasons, and reached two additional final fours. Auriemma also won seven Big East titles and developed stars like Diana Taurasi, Sue Bird and Maya Moore

#1 The Screeches of Little (and Big) Girls Are Silenced, Temporarily

As the decade opened, the U.S. was in love with a group of talented and telegenic world champion soccer players whose popularity suggested that the time for a viable, big-time women's pro sports league had come. In 2001, with the backing of cable moguls John Hendricks and Amos Hostetter, the Women's United Soccer Association kicked off with Mia, Brandi, Julie, Joy, eight clubs, big stadiums and plenty of potential. But three years later the league was gone, a victim of incredible overspending and misguided faith in the suburban "soccer mom" market.



The shutdown had broad implications as the industry lost faith in women's team sports. Companies closed dedicated marketing groups and media outlets reduced coverage. But the new decade begins with signs of life--Women's Professional Soccer, a seven-team circuit playing in stadiums that match the current market demand, played its first season in 2009. The quality was good, and Commissioner Tonya Antonucci remained committed to running a pro sports league rather than a crusade. Two new teams will join in 2010. **[RS]**