Martina Navrátilová (Born October 18, 1956, in Řevnice, near Prague, Czechoslovakia) is a former World No. 1 woman tennis player. Originally from Czechoslovakia, she defected to the United States in 1975 and became a US citizen in 1981.

During her career she won 18 Grand Slam singles titles and 40 Grand Slam doubles titles (31 women's doubles and 9 mixed doubles). She won the women's singles title at Wimbledon a record 9 times.

She was born Martina Šubertová in 1956. Her parents divorced when she was three, and in 1962 her mother Jana married Miroslav Navrátil, who became her first tennis coach. Martina then took the name of her stepfather (adding the feminine "ová").

In 1972 at the age of 15, Navrátilová won the Czechoslovakian national tennis championship. In 1973, aged 16, she turned professional. She won her first professional singles title in Orlando, Florida in 1974.

A left-handed serve-and-volleyer with superb volleying skills, Navrátilová raised the women's game to new levels with her power and aggression. She struggled with her weight in the early years of her career (and was at one point unflatteringly labelled the "Great Wide Hope" by the journalist Bud Collins), but her determination to reach the top of the game saw her embark on a punishing routine to get herself into shape that eventually made extreme levels of fitness and conditioning a hallmark of her game.

Navrátilová finished runner-up at two of the Grand Slams in 1975 - losing in the final of the Australian Open to Evonne Goolagong and the French Open to Chris Evert.
Navratilova enjoyed a fierce but friendly rivalry with Chris Evert.

After losing to Evert in the semi-finals of that year's US Open, the 18-year-old Navratilova went to the offices of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in New York City and informed them that she wished to defect. Within a month, she received a Green Card.

Navrátilová won her first Grand Slam singles title at Wimbledon in 1978, where she defeated Evert in three sets in the final and captured the World No. 1 ranking for the first time. She beat Evert in the final again to successfully defend her Wimbledon title in 1979. In 1981 Navrátilová won her third Grand Slam singles title by defeating Evert in the final of the Australian Open, and also reached the final of the US Open where she lost a third-set tie-breaker to Tracy Austin. She won both Wimbledon and the French Open in 1982.

The mid-1980s were the most dominant period of Navrátilová’s career. After losing in the fourth round of the first Grand Slam event of 1983 - the French Open - she captured the year's three remaining Grand Slam titles (the Australian Open was held in December at that time). She then won the 1984 French Open to hold all four Grand Slam singles titles simultaneously.

This was extended to a record-equalling six consecutive Grand Slams following wins at Wimbledon at the US Open, and she entered the 1984 Australian Open with a chance of winning all four titles in the same year. Navrátilová did succeed in winning all four of the Grand Slam women’s doubles titles in 1984, partnering Pam Shriver.

This was part of a record 109-match winning streak that the pair achieved between 1983 and 1985. (Navrátilová was ranked the World No. 1 doubles player for a period of over three years in the 1980s.)
SPORTING LEGENDS: MARTINA NAVRATILOVA

Wimbledon became very much a second home for Martina during the 1980s.

In the three years from 1985 to 1987, Navrátilová reached the women’s singles final at all 11 Grand Slam tournaments she entered, winning six of them (and extending her run of triumphs at Wimbledon to a record six consecutive).

A new threat to Navrátilová’s dominance, in the form of the young German player Steffi Graf, emerged on the scene in 1987 when she beat Navrátilová in the final of the French Open.

Navrátilová beat Graf in the 1987 Wimbledon and US Open finals (and at the US Open became only the third player in the Open Era to win the women’s singles, women’s doubles and mixed doubles at the same event). But Graf’s consistent play throughout 1987 nevertheless allowed her to depose Navrátilová as the World No. 1 before the end of the year. (Graf eventually went on to break Navrátilová’s records of 156 consecutive weeks and 331 total weeks as the World No. 1 singles player.)

In 1988, Graf truly eclipsed Navratilova by winning all four Grand Slam titles, beating Navrátilová 5-7, 6-2, 6-1 in the Wimbledon final along the way. In 1989, Graf and Navrátilová met in the finals of both Wimbledon and the US Open, with Graf winning both encounters in three sets.

But Navrátilová was to have one final Grand Slam singles triumph in 1990. Graf was knocked-out in the Wimbledon semi-finals that year by Zina Garrison. In the final, the 33-year old Navrátilová blew Garrison away 6-4, 6-1 to claim a record-breaking ninth Wimbledon singles crown. Though that was her last Grand Slam singles title, Navrátilová made two further major finals in the years that followed.
SPORTING LEGENDS: MARTINA NAVRATILOVA

Martina's clay-court game was powerful and consistent.

In 1991, she lost in the US Open final to the new World No. 1 Monica Seles. And then in 1994, at the age of 37, Navrátilová reached the Wimbledon final one last time where she lost valiantly in three sets to Conchita Martinez.

In 1994, Navrátilová retired from the singles tour. She was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 2000. Since 2000, Navrátilová has returned to the tour to play doubles events, while occasionally also playing singles.

In 2003, she won the mixed doubles titles at both the Australian Open and Wimbledon partnering Leander Paes. This makes her the oldest ever Grand Slam champion (aged 46 years, 8 months). The Australian Open victory made her only the third player in history to complete a "boxed set" of Grand Slam titles by winning the women's singles, women's doubles and mixed doubles at all four Slams.

The Wimbledon win allowed her to equal Billie Jean King's record of 20 Wimbledon titles (in singles and double combined) and extended her overall number of Grand Slam titles to 58 (second only to Margaret Court, who won 62). Navratilova won a singles match at the first round of Wimbledon in 2004, aged 47 years and 8 months, to make her the oldest player to win a professional singles match in the Open Era.

Over the course of her career, Navrátilová won 167 top-level singles titles (more than any other player in the Open Era) and 175 doubles titles. Her most recent title came on August 21, 2005, at the Rogers Cup in Toronto, where she won the women's doubles event partnering Anna-Lena Groenefeld.

When not playing tennis, Navrátilová is involved with various charities that benefit animal rights, underprivileged children and gay rights. She released an autobiography, simply entitled Martina, in 1985, and also co-wrote three mystery novels in the 1990s. A vegetarian, Navrátilová has appeared in ad campaigns for PETA.
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As her career progressed, she gradually added new and more powerful dimensions to her game - which helped to become the best player of her generation.

Her strength, speed and tactical awareness made up for any perceived lack of agility. Her awkward, outswinging left-hand serve contributed to the downfall of many opponents, and her volleying skills were also superb.

Her strict emphasis on physical conditioning helped her to extend her playing career well into her 40s, which is a precedent in itself. Her achievements inspired many young girls worldwide to start playing tennis, which is one of her greatest legacies.

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Scott Burton’s Final Thought

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