



ARTHUR ASHE, JR.

1943 - 1993

Maxwell Finland Award Recipient
1993

Basic scientific research, and the gathering of knowledge about a disease, are the essential ingredients of success in combatting our plagues. Using that information to implement public health policies can lead to control of the disease, potentially its elimination.

Public health professionals can guide these efforts, but unless the people accept them, attempts at such control are unsuccessful. One popular way to get public acceptance of an all-important health message is through a celebrity.

In our day one of the most successful of these was **Arthur Ashe, Jr.**

Most of us remember that poster of little more than a decade ago. Next to Mr. Ashe's picture were the words: "A Million Americans Have Heart Attacks Every Year. I Was One."

It was Mr. Ashe's concern for public education about heart disease, after his own heart attack in July 1979, that prompted him to pose not only for that poster but also to spend time making radio announcements and filming television spots. He also served on the Advisory Council of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute at the National Institutes of Health, and as national campaign chairman of the American Heart Association.

Then, last April, Mr. Ashe made what was for him a painful public announcement. Knowing that press reports were about to appear he decided to go public and announce that he had contracted the dreaded plague of our time—AIDS.

Following his heart attack he had undergone two coronary bypass operations, one in 1979 and the other in 1983. During the second operation he received two units of blood. At that time there was no test available for detecting the AIDS virus antibody and the blood that he received was contaminated. He was diagnosed as having AIDS in 1988.

"I was not prepared to become a famous AIDS patient," he said. So, except for his immediate family and a few close friends, he decided not to disclose that he had the disease. He was worried about the effect the news might have on the career of his wife, Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, a professional photographer, and on his then two-year-old daughter Camera.

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His concern was not without foundation. Victims of AIDS have lost friends, jobs, housing, and insurance simply because they had the disease.

This didn't happen to Mr. Ashe, however, partly because of the high regard both the world of sports and the business community have for him. But the main reason is that, as he had done repeatedly throughout his career, Mr. Ashe had turned a negative situation into an advantage.

Within a few months of his announcement he formed a foundation, The Arthur Ashe Foundation for the Defeat of AIDS, and organized an exhibition tennis tournament in New York with top tennis stars to benefit it. He raised \$500,000. The goal is to raise \$5 million by the end of 1993. He received backing from individual players, the US Tennis Association and the International Tennis Federation.

Mr. Ashe also challenged the business community to take bolder steps in working to shape public opinion about the

disease and to deal with solutions to the pandemic. He was not afraid to tackle those who took issue over such matters as dispensing condoms or clean needles to drug abusers.

"Our Judeo-Christian morality tells us that there is something wrong about this," he said. "But in the context of AIDS, is it really? We must take steps to prevent as many future infections as possible. Necessarily, as different parts of America hold different opinions about the morality of these decisions, we should not expect some uniform, multifaceted moral edict to cover every situation, or be acceptable to everyone. No matter what solutions

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we come up with, somebody's not going to like it. And I think we should just accept that and move forward."

That Mr. Ashe moved as forthrightly in pressing enlightened public education about AIDS as he had done earlier about heart disease came as no surprise to those who knew him and remembered his road to fame.

Arthur Ashe was born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1943. A short distance from his family's house was Richmond's blacks-only playground with four tennis courts. On those courts he learned to play. One day he was spotted by Dr. R. W. Johnson, a general practitioner in Lynchburg, Vir-

ginia, who offered to take him on for a couple of weeks in the summers and exposed him to experienced players.

Dr. Johnson, a graduate of Meharry Medical College in Nashville, had taken up tennis to stay in shape and had become a major figure in the American Tennis Association, the black equivalent of the US Lawn Tennis Association. He was obsessed with developing good black junior tennis players, says Ashe in his autobiography *Off the Court*.

Mr. Ashe spent his senior high school year in St. Louis where he stayed with a good friend of Dr. Johnson's, Mr. Richard Hudlin, a tennis buff who had a court in his back yard. By this time young Ashe had won a number of important regional titles, among them the 1959 Maryland Juniors title. He was a member of the Junior Davis Cup team and was ranked among the top junior players in the country. Then in November 1960 he won his first national title, the US Tennis Association's National Junior Indoors.

That Christmas, Mr. Ashe was offered a tennis scholarship at the University of California in Los Angeles. He accepted immediately. He studied business administration and graduated in 1966. And he went on to international fame as a tennis player, winning the Davis Cup in 1968, 1969 and 1970, not to mention the Wimbledon Championship in 1975.

"Tennis," said Mr Ashe, "is a metaphor for life. There are ups and downs, like the ebb and flow of sets in a tennis match. You learn to follow through, to finish what you start." The ultimate connection between tennis and life, he continued, is in the doing, not the winning. "Winning isn't everything," he said. "Success is a journey, not a destination. Not everyone can be No. 1."

When he talked to youngsters, which he did frequently, he told them to spend more time in the library and less time on the playing fields. Because for every champion athlete there are 999 who don't make it. "Make sure you don't wind up on

street corners or in the unemployment lines," he warned.

Mr. Ashe retired from competitive tennis in 1980 after his first heart attack. But he went on to make major contributions to the game and, because of his interest in racial relations, significant contributions to society as well.

He helped found the Association of Tennis Professionals, and has served as its President and on its Board of Directors. He played a similar role in forming the National Junior Tennis League, a program designed to involve inner city youths in tennis. He was Chairman of the Black Tennis and Sports Foundation. The magazine *Sports Illustrated* honored Mr. Ashe as its 1992 Sportsman of the Year.

He also made his mark as a businessman. He was Chairman of the Tennis Advisory Staff of Head Sports USA, a consultant for the sports clothing firm of Le Coq Sportif and a board member of Aetna Life and Casualty Company.

Besides his autobiography, *Off the Court*, and a tennis diary, *Portrait in Motion*, perhaps the writing project closest to his heart was the three-volume history of black athletes in America called *A Hard Road to Glory*, published in 1988. Partly narrative and partly an exhaustive reference, it has been hailed as the definitive work on the subject. The work was adapted for television and earned an Emmy Award.

In announcing Mr. Ashe's selection for the 1993 Maxwell Finland Award, the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases said that the choice was based on Mr. Ashe's "deep concern for the humanitarian treatment of all peoples, especially minorities, and his leadership, public visibility and support of our understanding of AIDS and HIV infections. His thoughtfulness, caring qualities and compassion concerning these and other health and welfare issues have been inspirational and have had a profound impact on the daily lives of all Americans. We believe his outspoken efforts have made the na-

tion even more knowledgeable and sensitive about health care, HIV infections, minority concerns, and the status of our blood supply."

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Mr. Ashe admitted that he had major health problems, but he said, "I live with it. Like racism in Richmond, like heart attacks, like the wind and sun, as best you can you try to make the most of these obstacles. They're hurdles, but each hurdle you get over makes you stronger. I firmly believe that's why I have overcome my medical problems. Because in a very public way I had to deal with so many others."

Arthur Ashe, the 1993 Maxwell Finland Award recipient, died on February 6, 1993. He was 49 years old. After a courageous struggle, like 172,000 Americans before him, he succumbed to AIDS, that terrible scourge that today plagues all mankind.

Mr. Ashe was a trustee of the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) for almost 10 years, and he supported what NFID was doing and stood for. In honor of his devotion to justice, healthcare and mankind and to his unselfish contributions in helping to educate all Americans about AIDS, the Foundation is establishing the "Arthur Ashe Postdoctoral Minority Training Fellowship in Retroviruses (AIDS) and Blood-Borne Diseases," to be presented to promising young minority researchers in the field of AIDS and retrovirus research. In this way we carry on his work and celebrate the many gifts he left us. 