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Arthur Ashe: A Hero On and Off the Court

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ARTHUR ASHE: A HERO ON AND OFF THE COURT

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The first U.S. Open was played in 1968 and established an open era of tennis. A historic tournament, it was the first time that prize money was offered to victors. Competitors fought tooth and nail to win a share of the \$100,000 dispersed among the participating athletes. Massive media coverage followed the event and national interest spiked as viewers waited to see who would triumph.

On the men's side of the championship, Arthur Ashe competed in the semi-final round against Clark Graebner, a fellow teammate on the U.S. Davis Cup Squad. Graebner, who was white, grew up unfazed by adversity. His family was wealthy and he was accepted naturally into the tennis community. Ashe described Graebner's style as, "stiff, compact, Republican tennis" (Barbee, 2014). Born and raised in segregated Richmond, Ashe was a black man and a part of the working lower class. Through hard work, he had slowly and meticulously gained the respect of the tennis community. Graebner once commented that Ashe was an African American man with a foot in the white, conservative worlds of tennis and business. Graebner respected Ashe on a personal level, and while he recognized Ashe's success was imminent, he wasn't

as confident in the success of the rest of the African American race. Both were strong competitors, and many informed fans speculated that the winner of the first U.S. Open championship would be determined in this match. Ashe lost the first set 4-6, but then persevered in winning the next three 8-6, 7-5, 6-2. Ashe advanced to the championship round where he triumphed over Tom Okker. Following match point, Ashe immediately turned to both his father and Dr. Johnson, his closest coach and mentor, and he bowed to them (Barbee, 2014).

On January 11, 1985, Ashe was handcuffed and arrested outside the South African Embassy in Washington D.C., for participating in the largest American anti-apartheid demonstration to date. In his memoir, *Days of Grace*, Ashe said, “Although this was not a particularly risky act, I nevertheless found it disturbing. Because I had spent my life making sure no one would ever have cause to arrest me for anything. The experience of being handcuffed, carted away, and booked was daunting” (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993).

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER: PURPOSE AND THESIS

The purpose of this chapter is to offer an analysis of the many reasons why Arthur Ashe is one of Richmond’s greatest heroes. One definition of heroism, focusing on the phenomenon’s subjective nature, is that “heroism is in the eye of the beholder” (Allison & Goethals, 2011), an idea that recognizes that people have their own intuitive beliefs about what comprises a hero. A more objective definition offered by Kohen (2014) identifies heroes as “people who faced the fact of their mortality, who took serious risks and/or overcame major hardship, and who did so in service of a principle.” This definition would seem to have subjective components, as “serious risks” and “major hardship” would appear to be open to interpretation.

From these considerations, I urge you to view Arthur Ashe’s heroism throughout the rest of this chapter subjectively, as I have by connecting Ashe’s values to his actions and evaluating whether they are heroic. As the result of extensive research, I believe Ashe proved himself a hero in four ways: he was someone who had the drive to be his best every day; someone who lived courageously to face the evils of the world; someone who not only performed one heroic act but who lived a consistent life of heroic behavior and actions; and someone who had a selfless heart

and who loved and helped others. These are the qualities I found to be most inspiring and central in appreciating Ashe's heroic legacy.

In the following chapter, I will prove these qualities to be true of Ashe by first describing the nature of the hero monomyth. Then, I will review Ashe's life from childhood to death, explaining in detail the impact of his mentors, the adversity he faced, and the values and beliefs that led him to unparalleled success. Finally, I will relate these life events back to heroism theories and demonstrate how Ashe grew far beyond a tennis player to become one of Richmond's greatest heroes.

THE HEROIC JOURNEY OF ARTHUR ASHE

Prior to the 20th century, heroes were described as powerful, masculine, and possessing God-like characteristics. Today's heroes are often best understood using Joseph Campbell's (1949) monomyth of the hero. Campbell described the meaning of the monomyth as follows: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (Allison & Goethals, 2017). The basic structure of the hero's monomyth can be found embedded in every hero's story. Every heroic journey follows the pattern of *departure*, *initiation*, and *return* with the purpose of growth, change, and learning. A hero can embark on this journey multiple times, constantly learning and evolving to transform both himself and society (Allison et al., 2017). I will demonstrate that Arthur Ashe's life can be well understood through the lens of the hero monomyth. As befitting a hero, Ashe faced a great deal of adversity, grew from it, transformed himself, and ultimately changed society, too. Through all the challenges he faced, he grew physically, emotionally, socially, and morally in the hope of bettering himself and the world.

Ashe's Beginnings: Family Lineage and Broken Hearts

In 1735, the *Doddington*, which was "a square-rigger of eighty tons and Liverpool registry, [that] sailed into the York River in Virginia, carrying a

cargo of 167 West African Blacks” brought over a nameless girl. This girl was sold to Robert Blackwell, a tobacco grower in Lunenburg County. She in time married another slave and had a daughter named Lucy who is positioned as the head figure of the Ashe family tree. This family tree hangs in the home of Ashe’s cousin, Thelma Doswell, and was carefully recorded and preserved in a six-by-seven foot rendering. Every member within this matrilineal tree is represented with a leaf on the tree and every leaf is colored the same, with the exception of Ashe’s leaf, painted gold (Barbee, 2014). It is a rarity to have this much knowledge of any family, especially an African American one due to the political and social turmoil that prevented records of traditional familial bonds from being preserved. Aware of his family background from a young age, Ashe had a unique perspective growing up as all of the oppressive and dehumanizing actions of slavery were personally relevant to him. The challenges his family faced and overcame, or didn’t, could be clearly traced and Ashe could follow the journey of blood traveling from generation to generation, which led to an emphasis on the value of family for him. Following this idea was the understanding that those who raised him had the power of imprinting indelible marks, shaping who he would or would not become. Finally, it gave him the realization that people do not last forever, but the legacy they leave behind and the values they instill in those around them have everlasting effects on the world.

When Ashe was seven, his mother died from surgical complications. He did not have many memories of her but remembered the last day he saw her, standing in a doorway in a blue corduroy dressing gown looking at him lovingly, while outside he heard birds singing. He reflected in his memoir, *Days of Grace*, “I have never sinned or erred without knowing I was being watched” (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993), and then further discussed how every day since then he thought of her and knew she had been watching over him. The loss of his mother at such a young age impacted him greatly. As a result of her loss, his father became much more disciplined with his children, requiring them to keep a strict schedule and not stray far from home. Although Ashe’s father did remarry and had a live-in housekeeper, Arthur Ashe childhood, as told by McPhee in *Levels of the Game*, “was one of a father and two sons caring for and tending to each other” (Barbee, 2014).

The Makings to Ashe's Manner: Pragmatism and Discipline

Ashe's father was a key factor in helping form who Ashe became. Life lessons, faced by Ashe Sr. were passed down to Ashe and influenced the way he saw the world. One of his most influential life events happened while Ashe Sr. was working at a Jewish department store. His boss had him drive them to a piece of land he wanted to buy. The man selling the land did not want to sell it to a Jewish man (his boss), making it clear through the use of vulgar language and ridiculing his beliefs. In the end, the Jewish man got the land. Ashe Sr. couldn't wrap his mind around why his boss had endured the insults and slurs, so he asked him. His boss responded by saying he had come to purchase the land, and he did, and now he owned it, so who cares. This life event had a great impact on Ashe Sr., deepening his pragmatic sense and ability to see the world in a whole new way. This pragmatism, combined with his determination, served Ashe Sr. well. He had a steady job patrolling and maintaining an African American park as a special police officer, which provided a home within the park for his family and him. In his time off, he worked at a number of part time and odd jobs. Ashe Jr. described him as a "hustler" or someone who works two or three jobs to make ends meet. His disciplined behavior and hard work gave him a step up within segregated Jim Crow Richmond. The characteristics and values his father held were mirrored by Ashe and were clearly seen throughout the many obstacles Ashe overcame.

Arthur Ashe grew up in the middle of eighteen-acre Brook Field Playground, a massive park that held baseball fields, tennis courts, play grounds and a swimming pool. With all of these attractions he was constantly drawn to the four tennis courts. He would frequently walk by the sixteen tennis courts that were white-only and he would admire their beauty until he would get yelled at to go back to his "own part of town" (Collins, 1984). At the age of seven, Ashe got to know Ronald Charity, a college student and arguably the best black tennis player around. Charity offered to give Ashe lessons and taught him the basics. He began playing in tournaments when he was eight and was hooked. But his untapped potential required more thorough training in order to excel. Charity connected Ashe to Dr. Johnson who later became Ashe's lifelong coach and mentor.

Dr. Johnson ran a tennis program in the summer which emphasized practice and drills. Six black males were picked to be groomed to their full potential, and Ashe was one of them. He attended Dr. Johnson's summer program for eight years. When the young men weren't at tournaments, practicing or eating, they were assigned to do chores around the house. Johnson did this to emphasize how tennis wasn't the end-all-be-all to one's life, but hard work was a sustaining factor. At this camp, they not only learned how to be better tennis players but also stand up, good mannered men. Dr. Johnson didn't want to give anyone a reason to hold them back. His focus on manners intended to avoid negative attention that might be directed toward them at tournaments and to prevent anyone from having any reason to think of them as low-lives. He also taught them integrity, which was drilled intentionally and rigorously into their tennis game. If they were not positive the ball was out then they played it, or if they called a ball out then they always returned it. They learned never to cheat an opponent on a point. Putting it simply, Johnson demanded quality behavior both on and off the court. He would say, "There can be a good excuse for a missed shot. There is no excuse for poor manners" (Collins, 1984).

Johnson realized these young men were entering a white dominated sport. In a world that viewed black people as inferior, these men would face adversity. He knew the athletes he was training would be scrutinized every step of their journey and people would be hoping they would fail. Therefore, he realized they couldn't make a mistake. They had to be more than the average player mentally and physically, always level-headed and more respectful than others. Even after all of this added effort, there would still be obstacles to overcome. He was meticulous because he knew they were representing African Americans as a race and be looked upon to be leaders of change in case they became well known. Dr. Johnson gave Arthur the knowledge and tactics to succeed. Ashe's father gave him the hard work ethic and discipline Ashe then needed to implement Johnson's ideals.

Ashe's father and Dr. Johnson played critical roles in Ashe's eventual transformation as described by Campbell's (1949) hero monomyth. In Campbell's detailed multi layered social landscape of the hero's journey, the hero is always helped along the pathway. This assistance comes from the actual,

implied, or imagined presence of friends and mentors. The hero generally befriends people who possess qualities that they lack and must acquire to triumph. Or they gain a mentor; this relationship is looked upon as the most essential form of social assistance (Allison & Goethals, 2017). The mentors Ashe found in his father and coach produced in him qualities he lacked: a strong work ethic, pragmatism, being respectful, and truthfulness. All of these factors proved to be instrumental in shaping who Ashe became as a man and how he viewed the world.

Segregated Richmond: Impact on Ashe's Childhood

Ashe knew at an early age the realities of racism, partially due to his lineage but also due to its clear presence in the world of tennis and in everyday life. He discussed the impact of prejudice in his childhood in his memoir *Off the Court*: "The inequities imposed by racism were frustrating, but I was fortunate to be surrounded by a devoted father and other black people determined to push me along, broaden my horizons and help me develop a sense of myself that ignored the limits white Richmond wanted to impose at the time" (Ashe & Amdur, 1981). Here Ashe attributed who he became to the handful of individuals who constantly supported him. He recognized he was lucky and that the majority of people growing up with him did not have this support or hope that the world could be different. The unrelenting passion Ashe possessed and which led him to change the world can all be traced back to a single point: he was groomed to be aware, but not ignorant of the disadvantages of his race. The tools and strategies he learned from his coach and from his father ultimately allowed him to create the change he wished to see in the world.

The segregation laws in Richmond set a limit on Ashe's ability to improve his tennis game. He was only allowed to play on certain Richmond tennis courts which were generally in bad condition. In addition, he could only play against black opponents and enter all black tournaments within the city. The lack of good competition thereby limited his ability to grow as a player. In the winter, Ashe was not allowed to play on the indoor courts, which in turn severely limited his practice time. As a very young player, these factors did not have much of an effect. But as he progressed and became more serious about tennis, these conditions became a problem, stunting his ability to grow

in the game. The lack of competitors during the school year and practice time in the winter were great enough that players could be left behind and forgotten in the rankings. In a highly competitive sport, tennis players must work constantly to improve.

The segregated conditions became a significant factor in Ashe's junior and senior years of high school, when no equal competitors were left in Richmond and college recruitment was beginning. For Ashe to be considered for NCAA Division I recruitment, something needed to change. Dr. Johnson proposed that Ashe move to St. Louis and live with one of Johnson's friends, Richard Hudlin, during his senior year of high school. In St. Louis, there would be plenty of competition and he could play year-round. After much debate and discussion between Ashe's father and Dr. Johnson, Ashe's father said he could move, but left the decision up to Ashe. Ashe was torn between staying with his family and friends for his senior year and moving to improve his chances. Mr. Hudlin promised Ashe that; "There's no color line in sports around here" (Collins, 1994), and after struggling with the choice, Ashe decided to go. When he got to St. Louis, Mr. Hudlin laid down harsh restrictions with the reasoning that Ashe was there to focus on tennis and school. For example, he made an 11 o'clock curfew for every night including weekends, which Ashe protested strongly but still followed.

During this time, Ashe instilled within himself an ethic of hard work and sacrifice. He would go to school, then go straight to the courts where he would practice for a few hours, and then go home to do school work. In one of the letters sent home at this time he wrote, "I am always busy here, but it's a good busy. I feel I'm spending my time right, because there isn't a minute to waste." The students at his new school were in awe of his tennis stature and national ranking, which was within the top ten at the time. In addition, his intellect put him first in his class. While he was at first nervous and shy, his classmates quickly pulled him out of his shell. As Mr. Hudlin realized Ashe's dedication to school and tennis, his drill-sergeant demeanor relaxed and the 11 o'clock rule gave a bit. His hard work was paying off; he entered the U.S. Lawn Tennis Association's Junior Indoor singles tournament and came out victorious. After a grueling four and a half hour match against a kid two years

older than him, Ashe became the first black person to capture the coveted title (Collins, 1994). This was the first of many tournaments he would win.

During Christmas break, he got a call from UCLA's tennis coach J. D. Morgan, who offered him a spot on the team, as well as a scholarship. This was UCLA's first offer of a scholarship to a black tennis player. Ashe accepted; it was the best Christmas present he ever received.

New Found Freedom and Continued Oppression: Life at UCLA

As Ashe arrived in California, there was a whimsical air of happiness surrounding him. He thought about how he could now sit in the front of buses, and how the Jim Crow laws that suppressed his hometown life were now far behind him. As much as he would miss his father, he now had a say in what he was doing and when. He had the freedom to lead himself for the first time.

Although Ashe had a new say in decision making, he knew he still had responsibilities to fulfill. Most important were the work requirements for his scholarship, which demanded he complete 250 hours of work on campus during the academic year. All students also had to do ROTC for two years, and had then the option to stop. Ashe was aware of the strong possibility of being drafted after college, so he completed four years of ROTC in order to assure that he had an officer's position in the army after graduation (Collins, 1994). Of course, he had to practice and keep up with school work as well. At first, the school work presented an unexpected challenge for Ashe.

In his first meetings with his coach J. D. Morgan, three things were emphasized. First, there was the importance of time management. UCLA was a daunting school without being a Division I athlete, and Morgan stressed that point to Ashe. The second was Morgan's requirement to graduate all of his tennis students in four years. He warned he would often find out bad grades or problems before Ashe did. Finally, Morgan said he was always there for Ashe, gave him his home phone number, and told him to call at any time. In spite of the warning of UCLA's rigorous academics, Ashe failed his first essay. He was devastated and it was the first shock he faced, learning that he wasn't the smartest student anymore. This early lesson was important and led him

to the conclusion that he needed to get good grades, but not necessarily kill himself to always be number one. This created more time for him to focus on his tennis game and allowed him more time to socialize.

One of Ashe's biggest fascinations was with foreign students. He stated in his memoir, *Off the Court*, that if his "trip from Richmond's Broad Street to Hollywood's Sunset Strip seemed like a quantum leap, the shock for foreign students was even greater" (Ashe & Amdur, 1981). Ashe's high level of empathy and compassion, as well as his awareness and curiosity, allowed him to put himself in other students' shoes. As a result, he became more knowledgeable in helping others assimilate easier. It also helped him learn more about other people's cultures and thereby gave Ashe a better understanding of a world unknown to him. Finally, it allowed him to take an outsider's view on his own country and draw new and different conclusions about the U.S. Ashe's conversations with foreign students would go on for hours, but the true excitement for Ashe came from being in contact with real Africans for the first time. He would discuss with them meaningful topics such as sports equality in America, freedom of speech in Ghana and the Congo, or why only thirty-six universities existed in Africa. Ashe described seeing their authentic clothes, their scarification marks and discussing issues with them as "pure intellectual and emotional pleasure" (Ashe & Amdur, 1981).

Even with Ashe's newfound freedom at UCLA, smooth sailing was not a guarantee. Morgan called Ashe into his office one day in the first few weeks of his freshman year with bad news. The Balboa Bay Club, which had always hosted one of the tournaments the team attended, had not extended an invitation to Ashe. Morgan offered to not send the team and asked if he wanted to make an issue of it, saying he would react however Ashe wanted him to.

Ashe was too stunned to say anything at first. California was the land of milk and honey, free spirits and golden opportunity (Ashe & Amdur 1981). He was uncertain of how to react. Morgan had opened the door to protest this discrimination. But Ashe hardly felt in the position to fight against the establishment, being only a few weeks into his freshman year. He didn't want to make a big issue of this discrimination yet, and that he definitely didn't want to hold back his teammates. Morgan nodded and responded saying, "You can't

make a little issue. If you want to fight something like that, you have to fight it to win it. And you have to prepare for it... There will always be clubs like that and people like that. If you want to make a career out of fighting them, your tennis is going to suffer. When you're more established, you can be a good tennis player and be in the position of fighting them on your terms." Ashe took this advice to heart. Even in the face of challenges to come, Morgan's advice remained at the forefront of Ashe's mind. The advice from his UCLA coach helped sharpen Ashe's decision making and had a lasting impact on when and how Ashe went about making changes in his life.

As Ashe became a top-ranking player at UCLA, more controversial questions and accusations were leveled at him. The majority of these issues surrounded the idea that Ashe's position on race inequality was not defined enough. He was questioned regarding what he was doing for Black kids and the racial equality movement. He was labeled as not "black enough" by many people. When confronted by black members of the media, he would respond, "Well, how many black kids in the mid-sixties have you taught how to handle a microphone?" (Ashe & Amdur, 1981). Ashe further explained in his memoir that there was very little he could do in those days because most tournaments were held in exclusive locations. He experienced small triumphs in which he got to express his feelings, such as refusing The Balboa Bay invitation after they deemed him good enough to play. But he also dealt with the struggle of balancing his tennis career with spending time in the black community. Few people were satisfied with Ashe's answer at this time that he couldn't be his best at tennis and pour all his efforts into promoting racial equality. One effort would falter at the gain of the other, though Ashe realized the problem still needed to be addressed and fixed. He also recognized there was a time and place for everything. First, Ashe needed to discover where his path to greatness was and how to break down the stereotypes and barriers within tennis. He also knew that in doing so he would attract the eyes of the world, requiring him to be chose his strategy carefully. His unique platform would give him a promising stage to battle the prejudices and inequalities he witnessed all around the globe.

ASHE'S ROAD TO BECOMING A TENNIS CHAMPION

In ascending to greatness in the world of tennis, Ashe was forced to endure many instances of prejudice and discrimination. He nevertheless became an elite and accomplished athlete, overcoming many stereotypes and barriers in his path. Below I offer a timeline of Ashe's greatest tennis achievements along with the difficulties he faced. The points are rather brief but illustrate many of the highlights of Ashe's remarkable career. A whole book could be devoted to describing any one of his many inspiring accomplishments. Following the timeline is a quote by Ashe in which he discussed his achievements within tennis.

1963 - Ashe made his debut on the U.S. Davis Cup team and continued to play on the Davis Cup team for the USA in the years, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1975, 1977 and 1978. He compiled a 28-6 record (27-5 in singles) and played an integral part on the team in 1968, 1969 and 1970, helping the United States win the Davis Cup.

1964 - Ashe went to Wimbledon for the first time and lost to a fellow American.

1965 - Ashe became the first African-American to win the NCAA singles crown as a junior at UCLA.

1968 - Ashe won the first US Open. It was the first time the US National Tennis Championships were open to both professionals and amateurs. At this time, Ashe was a 25-year-old lieutenant in the U.S. Army, which placed him in the amateur category and ineligible to receive the \$14,000 first prize. Instead, he was paid \$280 for his expenses over the fourteen days competition. At this event, Ashe became the first African-American man to win a Grand Slam men's singles title. The New York Times called Ashe's victory "the most notable achievement made in the sport by a Negro male athlete."

1969 - Ashe, with his friends Charlie Pasarell and Sheridan Snyder, founded the National Junior Tennis League, a tennis program designed to provide tennis opportunities to economically disadvantaged children. In 2002, there were over 900 programs nationwide and featured nearly 200,000 children.

This was the first organized tennis program that Venus and Serena Williams (current tennis professionals) participated in.

1970 - Ashe won the Australian Open men's singles title.

1973 - Having been turned down for a visa three previous times, Ashe traveled to South Africa for the first time. He became the first black man to compete in the South African Open, winning the doubles title with Tom Okker. South African poet Don Mattera told Ashe, "You have shown our black youth that they can compete with whites and win." During this trip, Ashe was given the nickname "Sipho" which means "a gift from God" in Zulu, by the Black South Africans.

1975 - Ashe staged one of the greatest upsets in tennis history, defeating number one seed Jimmy Connors to win the men's singles title at Wimbledon. Richard Evans wrote of Ashe's victory in World Tennis, "It was a destiny richly deserved, a triumph that spread happiness and satisfaction throughout the world of tennis because it had turned a good man into a great champion."

1978 - Ashe played in his final US Open, reaching the round of 16 before losing to Raul Ramirez. More importantly, Ashe was paired up in doubles with an 18-year-old Frenchman of African-descent named Yannick Noah. Seven years earlier, Ashe had discovered Noah while visiting Cameroon and called the French Tennis Federation President Philippe Chatrier to help with Noah's development. Noah went on to become the most successful black tennis player since Ashe by winning the French Open singles title in 1983.

1979 - Ashe suffered a heart attack forcing him to retire from professional tennis. He concluded his career with 33 singles titles in 65 singles finals. He also won 18 doubles titles in 46 doubles finals.

1981 - Ashe showed leadership within the tennis community again by becoming the captain of the U.S. Davis Cup team. He led the team to victory in 1981 and 1982 and continued to coach the team until 1985.

1983 - Ashe suffered a second heart attack and, after heart-surgery, became the national campaign chairman for the American Heart Association.

1985 - Ashe was inducted into the international Tennis Hall of Fame

ASHE'S PERSPECTIVE ON HIS OWN CAREER

In reflecting upon his career, Ashe said: "I had been top ranked in the world once in my career and co-holder of the number-one position at another time. I had won three of the four Grand Slam tournaments that constitute the pillars of international professional tennis: the United States Open, the Australian Open, and Wimbledon. I had shared the doubles crown in the fourth Grand Slam event, the French Open, and also won, with Tony Roche of Australia, the Australian Open doubles crown. In the decade since 1968 -- the start of the open era of professional tennis -- I had played steadily and won thirty-three events. This is quite a good record. Perhaps I was even more pleased by the way I played than by my results in terms of wins and losses, or even in terms of prize money. I had done nothing, through scandal or bad behavior, to bring the game into disrepute. And I was also proud that fans and other players had found my game adventurous" (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993).

Life and Death Off the Court

Ashe knew heroism at a deep level. He once said, "True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever costs, but the urge to serve others at all costs." And serve he did. Arthur Ashe's impact was not restricted to one area, but instead stretched well beyond the realm of tennis. The number of lives he touched were too profound to number. Not only an exemplary role model for kids, Ashe was also a forward thinker who revolutionized the tennis community. His contributions within the community included: being the first to break down racial barriers; raising millions of dollars for inner city tennis programs; being a tennis captain and coach for the Davis cup team; forming the Ashe-Bollettieri Cities tennis program; forming the Athlete's Career Connection. Through these actions, Arthur Ashe forced change within a sport previously limited to a select few.

The truly profound impact of Ashe's life was shown in the issues he represented, supported, and advanced outside of tennis. Ashe advocated for better treatment of Haitian refugees and was arrested during a protest outside of the White House five months before his death. He was the national campaign chairman for the American Heart Association. As a board member for Aetna Life and Casualty Company, he represented minority concerns, the causes of the sick, and better healthcare for American citizens. He raised millions for the United Negro College Fund and pushed for higher academic standards for athletes, particularly minorities. Ashe also established the African American Athletic Association and wrote a book called *A Hard Road to Glory*, which chronicled famous African-American athletes and their struggles due to the color of their skin. When Arthur Ashe died in 1993, more than 5,000 people attended his funeral. Ashe embodied his definition of a hero and dedicated his life to serving others.

Two integral aspects of Ashe's heroism are missing from the timeline sequence above. The first was Ashe's passion for change within apartheid South Africa, and the second Ashe's was diagnosis of AIDS along with the aftermath of that diagnosis. Many view his exposure to South Africa's apartheid as the turning point for Ashe and the root of his desire to create change and formally seek equality. While AIDS was a forced reality and became a last battle and a singular focal point for Ashe in his final days, it allowed for an opportunity for the disease to become humanized. Ashe evoked awareness and strength for others through an illness which was taboo and highly misunderstood at the time.

Ashe's Passion for Change: South African Apartheid

Ashe first became interested in South Africa in 1968 during a conversation between himself and other tennis professionals. They were discussing the South African Open, which is the last grass court opportunity before Wimbledon. During the conversation, one of the South African players casually mentioned that they'd never let Ashe play. Ashe inquired whether it was really that bad. The South African responded that the Lawn Tennis Association would love to have him play but the South African government would never permit him a visa. Ashe was astounded since the world was

relatively unaware of the white supremacy occurring within South Africa at this time. Out of a fierceness to break the system, curiosity to see the country, and desire to be prepared for Wimbledon, Ashe applied for a visa in 1969 and was rejected. The same response came in 1970. Finally, in 1973, his visa was granted.

He visited again in 1974, 1975, and 1977 (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993). Each time, he requested there be no segregated seating at his matches, and the LTA obliged. While tennis was the focus of his visits, he was also eager to learn as much as he could about the people of South Africa. Learn he did, and people were remarkably open and willing to share their lifelong experience of apartheid and what they hoped their lives might look like in the future.

When Ashe visited South Africa in 1974, he noticed that he had a shadow, a fourteen-year old boy who shyly lingered around him during his trip. Ashe asked the child “Why are you following me around?” The child responded by saying “Because you are the first one I have ever seen.” Ashe responded, “The first what?” and the boy said, “You are the first truly free black man I have ever seen” (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993). This conversation left Ashe with the feeling of a distant chill. The aim of the apartheid system was to prepare, to program, and to destine young blacks for a lifetime of servitude. It left them yearning for freedom and Ashe embodied their desires.

After the early 1970s, Ashe made South Africa the focus of his political energies. He supported the international sanctions placed on the country. He played a major role in having South Africa banned from the Davis Cup tournament and he pushed for individuals not to play there. One individual affected by Ashe’s activism was John McEnroe. McEnroe was scheduled to play a match in South Africa against Borg to determine the number one ranking in the world with a guaranteed payout of \$600,000, with an additional \$150,000 going to the winner. Ashe applied gentle pressure on McEnroe, who agreed not to play at the event, thereby forfeiting significant financial gain. In many ways large and small, Ashe was able to help bring about change in South Africa.

Ashe became involved in TransAfrica, an organization set up by the Black Congressional Caucus serving as a think tank and lobby group for African and Caribbean affairs. He also became a founding member of Artists and Athletes Against Apartheid, whose main goal was to persuade athletes and performers not to perform there in hopes to increase pressure on South Africa.

Ashe was arrested on January 11, 1985, outside the South African embassy. While this negative attention was something his father and Dr. Johnson encouraged him to avoid his whole life, his efforts to bring attention to the cause were finally flourishing. Within that year, Ashe finally felt satisfied that “the anti-apartheid movement, once exotic, was blossoming in America” (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993). Ashe discussed within his book, *Days of Grace*, that the core of his opposition to apartheid was due to his memory of growing up in segregated Richmond. In discussing his first visit to South Africa, he wrote “I looked apartheid directly in the face, saw the appalling WHITES ONLY and NONWHITES ONLY signs, the separate and drastically unequal facilities very much like those of my childhood in Virginia. I saw the sneer of superiority on the faces of many whites, and the look of obsequiousness, fatalism, cynicism, and despair on the faces of many blacks” (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993). These signs created the image Ashe was fighting against. The cause of inequality he faced time and time again both on and off the court was still being enforced as law throughout much of America and the world.

As the 1980s came to a close, news of South Africa’s emergence as a democracy became a reality. Although change was coming imperfectly, it was coming due to the pressures exerted on anti-apartheid. Ashe remained skeptical of social reform so he didn’t get ahead of himself in thinking his work was done. But, he still was ecstatic about any progress. When Nelson Mandela visited New York, Ashe got the opportunity to meet and befriend him. Mandela was a hero to Ashe, and Ashe was thrilled when Mandela invited him to visit South Africa his last time there in 1991. Ashe found there were two significant changes. The WHITES ONLY and NONWHITES ONLY signs were gone and the Black people seemed transformed. Ashe wrote “The old subservience and obsequiousness had vanished, and the same people now seemed self-assured and even fearless. They were ready for the future” (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993). Even with this good news, Ashe and those fighting with him for justice did

not stop. They continuously discussed fundraising and the obstacles they still faced in their battle for equality.

Being Diagnosed with AIDS: Strength, Pain, Mortality

On Friday, December 9, 1988, Arthur Ashe was diagnosed with AIDS. It was determined that the virus was transmitted through a blood transfusion during his second open heart surgery in 1983 (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993). When he was told of the diagnoses he did not cry. He was not terrified for his life. His history of health issues had prepared him to face his mortality. He accepted the news and learned as much as he could about AIDS and proceeded by following his thirty-pill daily regimen. Within his book *Days of Grace*, Ashe went into great detail regarding the events that occurred from the time of his diagnosis to the time he made it public. He detailed his thinking and how he dealt with the news of his illness. In the book Ashe exhibited a mental toughness that he always held, and he shared a perspective of clarity along with the actions he took in the limited time he had left.

Ashe knew the suicide statistics for people with AIDS, which in 1988 were 7.4 times the baseline rate (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993). But for Ashe, suicide was out of the question. He wrote in his book that, “Despair is a state of mind to which I refuse to surrender.... I fight vigorously at the first sign of depression. I know that some depression can be physically induced.... But depression caused by brooding on circumstances, especially circumstances one cannot avoid or over which one has no control, is another matter. I refuse to surrender myself to such a depression” (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993). He went on to say that the situation of his life with AIDS had many parallels to his previous life as a world-class athlete. The mentality one needed to survive and thrive in the sport of tennis revolved around controlling mood swings and remaining calm in the face of known obstacles. Ashe applied this knowledge on a bigger scale in order to remain human in his last years. He was a rarity and in the face of demise still found joy, love, and meaning.

When first diagnosed with AIDS, he and his wife discussed how and why he had acquired it. This is a common question addressed when it comes to bad things happening in people's lives, and it generally produces much frustration

and anger. As opposed to the normal response, Ashe accepted it. “If I were to say, ‘God, why me?’ about the bad things, then I should have said, ‘God, why me?’ about the good things that happened in my life” (Arthur Ashe Quotes, 2016). The moral ground that supported him also allowed him to accept the diagnosis quickly and move on with his life. While many people with AIDS focused on clearing their name of being declared homosexual or a druggie, Ashe gave little thought to this. When he was forced to tell the public about his sickness, he clearly stated the facts and refused to focus on retaining pride or clearing his name. Instead, he focused on having a greater sense of meaning in everything he did. Ashe was constantly living to love his family the best he could and to improve the lives of others.

Once Ashe was forced to publicly release his diagnosis in 1992 he was left with two options. The first one was to retreat from the world, spend time with his family, and try to enjoy life away from the press. His second option was to make something of his diagnosis and infuse purpose into it. With requests to publically speak now tripled, and given the country's general ignorance and fear over the topic of AIDS, Ashe decided to step up as only heroes can (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993). One of his most urgent decisions following the announcement was to establish the Arthur Ashe Foundation for the Defeat of AIDS. While he already supported and participated in other organizations involving AIDS, this one was international. AIDS harbored no national boundaries and affected many underdeveloped countries without the resources to treat those diagnosed. Half of the money raised through his organization would go to AIDS treatment and research outside of the U.S. The overall goal of the organization was to ensure the maximum part of each contribution went to alleviate the suffering of AIDS patients, or promoted some vital aspect of AIDS research (Ashe & Rampersad, 1993). Ashe also went to high schools, colleges, teacher unions, conferences, and foreign countries to speak about his experience with AIDS in an effort to make the world more aware of the facts. During the last two months of his life, he spoke at the U.N. and urged them to increase funding for AIDS.

In accordance to the hero monomyth discussed in the beginning of this chapter, Ashe embarked on his heroic journey three distinct times. His first heroic journey came through tennis. His departure began in his childhood with the act of falling in love with the beautiful game for the first time and through the guidance of Dr. Johnson and his father, Ashe Sr. Then came the stage of initiation, which includes the challenges, obstacles and foes that the hero must overcome to prevail (Allison & Goethals, 2017). Racial barriers were the main challenge that Ashe faced while switching high schools and not being allowed to play at the Balboa Bay Club. The moment directly leading into the initiation was the conversation Ashe had with Morgan, his coach at UCLA regarding how to deal with the Balboa Bay Club scandal. It was in this moment that Ashe deepened his commitment to tennis. Ashe was initiated through hard work and combatting the racial stress in finding success in tennis, which culminated in the thirty-three events he won in the era of his open professional tennis career.

Finally, the return stage of his hero's journey consisted of going back to Richmond and raising millions of dollars for inner city tennis programs and supporting the development of the next generation of tennis professionals. The ensuing chaos that occurred in this part of his life transformed Ashe from being success-driven to being more helpful and generous to society. Elements of the hero's monomyth can also be found throughout Ashe's commitment to the anti-apartheid movement and his AIDS battle.

Allison and Goethals (2017) analysis of the hero's transformation can be applied to Ashe's life in many useful ways. The breadth and scope of his heroic journey and the stages of development he underwent reveal a depth of transformation. Allison and Goethals outline three major transformations that can occur: egocentricity to sociocentricity, dependency to autonomy, and stagnation to growth (Allison & Goethals, 2017). According to Campbell (1988) egocentricity to sociocentricity occurs, "when we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness." In most hero stories, the hero begins his journey disconnected from the world. Ashe was aware of this disconnect due

to his focus on tennis and his inability to fully participate in the civil rights movement. After he traversed the tennis portion of his heroic journey, he became connected to the greater world. His heart yearned to make a difference and he moved from an athletic state of mind to a mindset of serving others, exemplified by his involvement in the anti-apartheid movement and AIDS activism.

According to Bronk and Riches (2017), there exists a clear relationship between one's purpose in life and one's ability to perform heroic actions. Damon, Menon, and Bronk (2003) suggest that a purpose in life represents a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once personally meaningful and also leads to productive engagement with some aspect of the world beyond the self (Bronk & Riches 2017). There are three main points to this definition of purpose: it is a highly meaningful long-term goal, it is something individuals actively work toward, and it is relevant to the broader world. With these ideas in mind, we can see that Ashe had three different purposes that guided his life journey. The first was Ashe's tennis career and his dedicated athletic work geared toward reaching his greatest potential within the sport. The joy Ashe experienced while playing tennis and the discipline he acquired gave him the tools to overcome many obstacles such as prejudice. The ultimate success of Ashe's tennis career provided hope for other Black athletes, broke racial barriers within the sport, and inspired people to be creative. This demonstrated how his purpose of tennis is relevant to his later contributions to the broader world.

The second purpose Ashe exhibited was his desire to help and serve others. He contributed his money and time to many prestigious organizations and served on the Board of Directors of many of them. All his volunteer work was borne out of a hope to make the world a better place. Some especially notable examples of organizations Ashe was involved in include the African American Athletic Association, Aetna Life and Casualty Company, and several groups opposing South African apartheid. Ashe's third purpose was demonstrated with his battle with AIDS and his selfless decision to help fight AIDS as much as he could until the end.

This chapter draws four parallels between purpose and heroism. Purpose and heroism both involve goal-oriented activities; both are voluntarily performed and deliberately executed; and both require sacrifice. Purpose and heroism overlap in Ashe's life in two ways. The first is purpose-guided heroism which proposes that the existence of an enduring purpose in life readies individuals for action (Bronk & Riches, 2017). The second, heroism-guided purpose, involves a heroic act that serves as a springboard for the development of an enduring purpose in life. Ashe's purpose-guided heroism was seen in the three categories of purpose he possessed, through which his heroism emerged. Through Ashe's long term purposeful involvement in tennis, he became a hero through pioneering (adventurer, explorer, discoverer) as categorized by Franco, Blau, and Zimbardo's (2011) taxonomy for situationally determined heroism. The best example was Ashe becoming the first Black man to win major tournaments. Proof of Ashe's purpose to help and serve others was exhibited through his involvement in multiple organizations, through which he made heroic contributions to all of the lives he touched. Finally, Ashe's battle with AIDS showed his persistence to educate and better the lives of those affected by the disease. Even in the face of his own suffering, he demonstrated heroism.

Janoff-Bulman (2017) offered a useful analysis of social heroism which can also shed light on Ashe's heroism. Social heroism is defined as behavior that entails risks and dangers to the actor, which may have serious negative outcomes on a financial, social, emotional or physical level, particularly when the heroic actions are carried out over a long period of time. Those acts of social heroism were further broken down by Janoff-Bulman (2017) into two types of people who perform them, resisters and rescuers. Resisters are individuals who engage in risky public actions to promote a moral cause over a long period of time (Janoff-Bulman, 2017). This category describes Ashe; through his actions he opposed anti-apartheid in South Africa thereby acting as a resister. One could make the connection that Ashe engaged in risky behavior by getting arrested at a public rally in an effort to promote the moral cause of establishing equality among all races, a cause he championed for twenty-five years.

Moral conviction is also important in understanding heroism (Janoff-Bulman, 2017). It refers to potent beliefs about how things should be in a morally ideal world. If people's moral convictions are violated then they typically feel strong moral outrage, contempt, and disgust. The violation of Ashe's moral convictions occurred during his first trip to South Africa and his conversation with the fourteen-year-old boy, who told Ashe he was the first free black man he'd seen. Ashe's feeling of a distant chill stemmed from Ashe's recollection of his own lack of freedom that experience during his childhood. It also no doubt stemmed from the disgust he felt from the inequality he was witnessing in South Africa.

Janoff-Bulman (2017) proposed that, "Moral convictions seem to involve certainty about one's position and certainty about the need to act; a strong belief in the truth value of one's view coupled with motivational force suggests the ready path from moral convictions to the courage to act -- and ultimately to heroic action." Ashe demonstrated this principle through his moral conviction that everyone is equal and should therefore be treated as such. Combined with the moral basis of his trips to South Africa, Ashe found the courage to respond when he joined TransAfrica, when he implored athletes and artists not to compete in South Africa, and when he actively engaged in anti-apartheid rallies. These actions represented social heroism because he risked his safety, sacrificed his time, and often suffered socially and financially.

Allison and Goethals (2011) proposed eight characteristics of heroes, called the great eight. The eight traits are selfless, smart, strong, resilient, reliable, charismatic, caring, and inspiring. Most heroes only possess a few, although Arthur Ashe was one of the rarities in that he possessed them all. Ashe graduated as valedictorian in his high school class, an example of smart. Ashe devoted his final years of life to educating and raising awareness for AIDS, which demonstrated his selflessness. He won three of the four grand slam tournaments and ranked number one in the world for tennis, clearly proving his strength. Ashe's resilience is demonstrated by the loss of his mom when he was seven, he faced and lived through two heart attacks and faced having AIDS with elegance. He was a perfect patient, taking all of his thirty-pill regimen daily like clockwork, showing his reliability. Ashe was charismatic, constantly winning people over with his respectful demeanor and charm. Ashe

loved and watched over his family intensely, constantly caring for them. Finally, the amount of effort he put into living meaningfully and selflessly was inspiring to millions around the world.

Ashe was undoubtedly one of the greatest heroes to emerge from the city of Richmond. He broke down racial barriers in the sport of tennis and is considered one of the greatest athletes of all-time. He was a major participant in the anti-apartheid movement and he made the world aware of the inequality that existed on a large stage, forcing changes to occur. Finally, he handled the burden of AIDS with grace, stayed engaged, and served the world up until his last day. Ashe possessed athleticism, poise, wisdom, class, and integrity; he shook the stagnant world and helped that fourteen-year-old hopeless boy enjoy freedom. Ashe was a transcendent hero who inspired the world and whose legacy will no doubt continue to inspire many generations of people to come.

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