



Legislation Text

File #: 180778, Version: 0

Honoring Philadelphia tennis and basketball legend Ora Washington upon her posthumous enshrinement in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, Class of 2018.

WHEREAS, Ora Washington was born in Caroline County, Virginia in 1898, and journeyed as a teenager to Philadelphia to seek economic opportunity. Upon moving to Germantown, Washington lived with her aunt before finding employment in a home on Springfield Avenue; and

WHEREAS, Ora Washington was an outstanding athlete from the moment she stepped foot onto a court. In 1924, likely as a distraction from the grief she felt after the death of her sister, Georgia, Washington started playing competitive tennis at the segregated branch of the Germantown YWCA, which was founded in 1918 to provide activities for the growing population of young Black women who flocked to Philadelphia during the Great Migration; and

WHEREAS, Washington soon rose to the top of the Black women's tennis circuit nationally. In September of 1924, she won the singles, doubles, and mixed doubles titles at the city championships in Wilmington, Delaware. A year later, she won the women's doubles national championship at the American Tennis Association National Tournament with fellow Philadelphian Lula Ballard; and

WHEREAS, Over the course of her tennis career, Washington won eight national singles championships, 12 doubles champions, and three mixed doubles championships. As the *Chicago Defender* reported, Washington's "superiority is so evident that her competitors are frequently beaten before the first ball crosses the net." Despite her dominance and eagerness to compete across racial lines, however, competitive tennis was bound by unrelenting racial division until well after Washington's tennis career came to an end; and

WHEREAS, In the midst of her illustrious tennis career, Washington became a renowned basketball player. In the fall of 1930, she joined the YWCA-sponsored Germantown Hornets. She played center, averaging 13 points per game and helping the team reach a record of 22 wins and just one loss, which allowed them to claim the national championship. The *Philadelphia Tribune* noted that Washington was "in a class by herself"; and

WHEREAS, Washington soon joined the newspaper-sponsored Philadelphia Tribune Girls, joining rival basketball phenom Inez Patterson. The team quickly became a dynasty in the Black professional sports world during the 1930s. The Tribune Girls squashed their competition in front of sold-out crowds across not only Philadelphia, but also the South and Midwest. As a 1932 *Philadelphia Tribune* ad touted, "Don't miss seeing ORA WASHINGTON and INEZ PATTERSON in action. They are two of the greatest girl players in the world. They make you forget the Depression"; and

WHEREAS, Over the course of her 18-year basketball career, Washington was a part of 11 straight championship teams, serving as the center, leading scorer, and coach; and

WHEREAS, While Washington juggled her commitment to both professional basketball and tennis, she steadily worked as a housekeeper in order to support herself and her extended family. She also refused to

capitulate to social expectations of femininity: she never married, dressed plainly, and sought to reach the highest levels of sport, not social class; and

WHEREAS, She was undoubtedly one of the greatest athletes of her era; and

WHEREAS, After Washington retired from competition, she remained a Philadelphia resident until her death in 1971; and

WHEREAS, The Black Women in Sport Foundation and the Black Fives Foundation have actively worked to recover her story and promote it as one of perseverance, determination, and unparalleled athletic ability; and

WHEREAS, The long overdue recognition of Ora Washington's athletic prowess and contribution to the City of Philadelphia serves as a reminder of the way that extraordinary Black women have lived in the margins of our historical record. Washington, like many working-class Black women across the nation in the mid-twentieth century, reached remarkable heights, pushing against structural boundaries and creating space for new generations of Black women and Black athletes; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors Philadelphia tennis and basketball legend Ora Washington upon her posthumous enshrinement into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, class of 2018.