



The Arthur Ashe Courage Award is given each year to a sports-related individual who, in the face of great adversity, has shown great courage. In addition, the recipient is selected because of the humanitarian effort put forth, despite this adversity.

Arthur Ashe, whose legacy lives on with this award, was diagnosed with AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) in 1988, an often fatal illness. At that time, he had retired from professional tennis. He had earned his place among other groundbreaking African American athletes, such as his boyhood hero Jackie Robinson, for pushing through racial barriers in sports. His name was not only recognized around the world for his outstanding tennis career, but also for his activism against racism and apartheid. He didn't need to be in the public view once again. He could have waited out the end of his life comfortably and quietly. However, that was not Ashe's style.

In 1988, AIDS was a disease with a stigma. Ashe most likely contracted AIDS from a blood transfusion he received after heart-bypass surgery. After he made his public statement that he had AIDS in 1992, he became a new voice for increased AIDS awareness and research. As his body became weaker from the illness, he willed himself to stay strong to be a champion for this cause.

Ashe never wanted pity and faced his illness with courage. In his memoir, *Days of Grace*, he wrote,

Quite often, people who mean well will inquire of me whether I ever ask myself, in the face of my diseases, "Why me?" I never do. If I ask "Why me?" as I am assaulted by heart disease and AIDS, I must ask "Why me?" about my blessings, and question my right to enjoy them. The morning after I won Wimbledon in 1975 I should have asked "Why me?" and doubted that I deserved the victory. If I don't ask "Why me?" after my victories, I cannot ask "Why me?" after my setbacks and disasters.

After his death in 1993, in this same spirit that Arthur Ashe showed the world, the Arthur Ashe Courage Award was born. Each year, at the ESPYs (Excellence in Sports Performance Yearly Award), a sports humanitarian who has demonstrated a similar fortitude in facing adversity is awarded the Arthur Ashe Courage award. With this award, the courage of Arthur Ashe lives on.

Footnotes:

1) ESPN, Arthur Ashe Courage Award, espn.com, Jun/28/2015, Jun/28/2015,

<http://espn.go.com/espys/arthurasheaward>

2) Finn, Robin, NY Times Ashe Obituary, On This Day, Feb/08/1993, Jun/28/2015,

<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0710.html>

3) Ashe, Arthur, Days of Grace, Google Books, Jun/28/1993, Jun/28/2015,

https://books.google.com/books?id=xjTIM-_9bVIC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Days+of+Grace&hl=en&sa=X&ei=2DCQVdqwI5DboATS07aoCQ&ved=0CB8Q6wEwAA#v=onepage&q=Days%20of%20Grace&f=false

4) Borg, Chris, On This Day: Arthur Ashe retires from tennis, April 16 1980, [cnn.com](http://edition.cnn.com), Apr/16/1980, Jun/28/2015,

<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/16/tennis/arthur-ashe-retires-tennis-april-1980/>

5) [arthurashe.org](http://www.arthurashe.org), [arthurashe.org](http://www.arthurashe.org), Arthur Ashe Learning Center, Jun/28/2015, Jun/28/2015,

<http://www.arthurashe.org/?gclid=CK3iq7-RrMYCFZFafgodoScExA>

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Arthur-Ashe-Courage-Award>

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Jackie Robinson - Baseball Hall of Famer

Jackie Robinson and Branch Rickey - on July 20, 1962 - celebrating Robinson's induction into the Hall of Fame. Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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