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SONY ERICSSON WTA TOUR CELEBRATES MILESTONE 35TH ANNIVERSARY

- **On eve of US Open, Tour and USTA co-host benefit celebration in New York featuring Billie Jean King and past and current legends of game**
- **Celebration of Tour founding and famous “Battle of Sexes” match recognizes pioneering achievements and milestones in history of women’s professional tennis, with proceeds benefitting the Women’s Sports Foundation**

NEW YORK, NY – The Sony Ericsson WTA Tour marked the historic 35th anniversary of the Tour’s founding this evening at a star-studded benefit celebration at the Billie Jean King International Women’s Sports Center at the Sports Museum of America in New York City. The event, co-hosted with the United States Tennis Association, featured current and past stars of the game, with proceeds benefitting the Women’s Sports Foundation, a groundbreaking organization dedicated to equal play and inspiring girls to be active and take part in sports.

A host of the games most recognizable names, including the founder of the Tour, Billie Jean King, were in attendance for the celebratory occasion on behalf of the Sony Ericsson WTA Tour and the United States Tennis Association (USTA). Champions of the game and guests alike were treated to a unique historical perspective of the Tour, with pioneers of women’s tennis from King herself through Martina Navratilova, Chris Evert, Tracy Austin, Steffi Graf, Kim Clijsters, Serena and Venus Williams featured in a retrospective on the sport through the decades of development and growth of women’s tennis.

From the Tour’s revolutionary beginnings behind locked doors at a London hotel in the 1970s and the famous “Battle of the Sexes” match won by Billie Jean King over Bobby Riggs, through to the monumental achievement of realizing equal prize money at Wimbledon and Roland Garros in 2007, the players and personalities central to the development of the sport to the global enterprise that it is today, treated the enthralled guests to tales of insight and accomplishment. The evening included a special lifetime achievement award to Peachy Kellmeyer, Senior Vice President of Tour Operations, who played an integral role in the growth of the sport from its very beginnings as the first employee of the Tour in 1973.

Larry Scott, CEO of the Sony Ericsson WTA Tour said: ‘It has been wonderful to host this fantastic event which has brought the best of women’s tennis together to celebrate the historic achievements on the past 35 years in our sport. For the Tour to be able to host this celebration in a building dedicated to the advancement of women in sport, the Billie Jean King International Women’s Sports Centre, named after the pioneer of women’s tennis, is fitting and telling of how far the sport has come.’

Billie Jean King said: “Thirty five years ago we had a vision and today, because of the hard work, dedication and compassion of so many women and men, we are celebrating a reality. The Women’s Tennis Association has grown from a dream that came to life during a meeting in a hotel in London to a major force in sports and entertainment.”

Jane Brown Grimes, President of the USTA, said: “Women’s professional tennis and the Tour have had so many incredible milestones over the years and made tremendous progress as a sport. It is also a sport that

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more than any other has challenged the social norm and broken barriers beyond the playing field in the process. The USTA is proud to have worked so well and closely with the Tour since its inception.”

Venus Williams, seven-time Grand Slam champion and reigning 2008 Wimbledon champion and Olympic doubles gold medalist said: “As a player it’s inspiring to think about all of the amazing women who were not only incredible athletes, but also social pioneers for women’s rights and equality. As athletes we are proud of how far the sport has come both on and off the court, and feel a responsibility to carry the mantle of our founder, Billie Jean King.”

From 1973, when 63 players met in the Gloucester Hotel, London to form an association seeking equality, recognition and respect, with King anointed as President, there have been a number of significant milestones in 35 years –

- **1973** – WTA founded. US Open offers equal prize money. ‘Battle of the Sexes’ between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs. 50 million watch the game on television. King wins in straight sets.
- **1977** – Season ending Championships are held in Madison Square Garden for the first time. They remain there for the next 23 years.
- **1982** – Martina Navratilova passes \$1 million in prize money in a single year, the first woman to do so. She jumps ahead of Jimmy Connors as the sports all-time money leader.
- **1987**- Steffi Graf takes the No 1 ranking from Navratilova. She holds it for 187 consecutive weeks, more than any man or woman in the history of tennis until the emergence of Roger Federer.
- **1988** – Graf achieves the ‘Golden Slam’ winning all four slam titles in a single year and winning Gold at the Seoul Olympics
- **1990** – With 60 events in 18 countries the Tour offers \$23 million in total prize money. The season-ending Championships boasts the first-ever \$1 million tournament and the first women’s five-set match in 89 years between Monica Seles and Gabriela Sabatini.
- **1991** – Monica Seles becomes the youngest player to take the No 1 ranking, aged 17 years and three months
- **1997** – Martin Hingis becomes the youngest player to take the No 1 ranking, aged 16 years and six months
- **2002** – Venus and Serena Williams become the first sisters to hold the No 1 and No 2 ranking.
- **2003** – Kim Clijsters becomes the first woman to earn \$4 million in a single season
- **2005** – The Tour signs a landmark \$88 million six-year sponsorship agreement with Sony Ericsson, the largest sponsorship in the history of tennis and women’s professional sport. Record sponsorship deals are also announced with Whirlpool and Dubai Duty Free. Equal prize money is agreed at the Sony Ericsson Open in Miami and the Dubai Duty Free Open in Dubai.
- **2006** – Landmark global partnership struck with UNESCO to further gender equality and promote women’s leadership.
- **2007** – With Wimbledon and Roland Garros’ historic decisions to award equal prize money, an over 30 year campaign for equality comes to a successful conclusion, and there is equal prize money at all four Grand Slam events for the first time in the history of tennis. The Tour passes its landmark Roadmap plan bringing the most sweeping reforms to the Tour’s circuit structure in the sport’s history. The Tour signs historic back-to-back \$42 million deals with each of Doha, Qatar and Istanbul, Turkey to host the year end Sony Ericsson Championships for each of 2008-2010 and 2011-2013 respectively.
- **2008** – The Sony Ericsson WTA Tour in an historic move opens an Asia-Pacific HQ in Beijing, China.

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MEDIA CONTACT: Andrew Walker, Sony Ericsson WTA Tour, +1.727.871.5666, awalker@wtatour.com
Ben Wyatt, Sony Ericsson WTA Tour, +44.7919.203411, bwyatt@wtatour.com

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