

Serena Williams to play in S.C. at Family Circle Cup tennis tourney

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Serena Williams, who withdrew from the Family Circle Cup two years ago to honor the NAACP's boycott of South Carolina for flying the Confederate flag, has told officials she'll play in this year's tournament.

Williams will join defending champion Jennifer Capriati, Monica Seles and Anna Kournikova in the clay-court event April 15-21 at the Family Circle Tennis Center.

"Serena Williams is a remarkable tennis player and has accomplished so much in her young career so far," said Frankie Whelan, Family Circle executive director. "What is equally important, Serena serves as such a positive role model to young children who dream of success not only in sports but in their everyday lives."

Two years ago, Williams was one of the first to commit to the tournament. But she became the biggest sports name to back the economic sanctions by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to force the removal of the Confederate flag from atop the Statehouse dome.

Williams, 18 at the time, said not playing in South Carolina "was based on a much deeper issue and one that I feel strongly about."

The South Carolina Legislature agreed to a compromise that removed the flag and put a similar one up at the Confederate Soldier Monument on Statehouse grounds in July 2000.

The NAACP has continued its economic sanctions, wanting the flag removed from the grounds altogether. Last year, the group picketed outside the Tennis Center during the Family Circle. Williams didn't play in last year's event.



Williams

Black woman president of AARP

WAILUKU, Hawaii — A Maui woman has been elected national president of the American Association of Retired People.

Marie Smith, 62, was elected to the position at a board of directors meeting in Washington, D.C., last month. Next month, she will begin a two-year term as president-elect and then will be president of the 35 million-member organization for two years starting in 2004.

The group acts as an advocate for the elderly in national, state and local governments.

Smith said she hopes to push for social change, including Medicare coverage for prescription drugs.

She has served as a volunteer on numerous boards and commissions, and said it seems as though she has been preparing all her life for this role.

"Everything seems to be leading to this," she said.

Smith, an African American, said she did not let racial obstacles stop her from succeeding.

There was an obstacle every step of the way, but she didn't see it as an obstacle, she said.

"I don't think I saw it as anything. This is life happening," she said.

After graduating from college, Smith worked in various cities as a manager for the U.S. Social Security Administration before transferring from San Francisco to Maui about 25 years ago.

She retired about 15 years ago and has worked with her husband in operating Aina Anuhea Tropical Garden in Kahakuloa.

Barry will run again

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Former District of Columbia Mayor Marion Barry, the 1960s civil rights leader whose 1991 crack bust made international headlines, announced last week that he is running for at-large seat on the district City Council, which he says should once again be majority black.

Barry, who began his D.C. political career as a councilman in 1975, told reporters he is running because he believed his opponent, council member Phil Mendelson, who is white, has been "woefully lacking" in his leadership.

"The City Council ought to reflect the demographics of the city," he said. "If the city's majority black, it makes sense the City Council ought to be majority black."

The 66-year old Barry was elected to the council a second time in 1992, after serving six months in jail for cocaine possession. In 1994, he was elected mayor for the fourth time.

Barry, who announced in 1998 he would not seek another term as mayor, helped build the District of Columbia into a corporate center in the 1980s. He is a grass-roots politician best known for his championing of the city's poor residents, frank talk about race and a patronage system of rewarding supporters with government-sponsored jobs.

In 1990, he was videotaped in a Washington, D.C., hotel room smoking crack cocaine, and arrested during a FBI drug bust.

Press reports quote Barry as saying "unqualified white people" were getting city jobs over more qualified African Americans. He also believes the City Council — now holding a one-vote white majority — should reflect that D.C.'s population is 60 percent black.



Barry

Brazile, former head of Gore campaign, has new gig at DNC

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chairman Terry McAuliffe last week announced that Donna Brazile, former campaign manager for Gore-Lieberman 2000, has been appointed to the position of national chair of the Voting Rights Institute (VRI), the party's major initiative to promote and protect the right to vote. She takes the helm from Maynard Jackson, former mayor of Atlanta, who has served in the position since 2001.

"I would first like to thank Maynard Jackson for his tremendous leadership and tireless work on behalf of the Democratic Party. Under the leadership of Donna Brazile, we will continue to build on the solid foundation created by Maynard and the staff of the Voting Rights Institute. Maynard has been and will continue to be a powerful advocate and dynamic member of our party," said McAuliffe.

"It is with great pride and excitement that we welcome Donna Brazile as the national chair of the Voting Rights Institute. From her historic role as the first African-American woman to manage a presidential campaign to her extensive grassroots organizing successes, Donna has been a national leader in empowering and energizing voters. Her vision, passion and unparalleled experience make her the ideal leader to direct the critical effort of ensuring that every American can properly and freely exercise their constitutional right to vote. The Voting Rights Institute was one of my first initiatives and stands at the top of our priorities moving into the coming election cycle," McAuliffe said.



Donna Brazile chats with former Vice President Al Gore. Brazile led Gore's presidential campaign in 2000. She now works for the DNC.

The DNC Voting Rights Institute was created in response to the rampant violations of constitutional and legislatively protected voting rights for all Americans.

Brazile said, "The Democratic Party, through the work of the Voting Rights Institute, will ensure that no American is left behind at the polls. We will not allow the 2000 election to become an interest-

ing chapter in our nation's history.

"We will make sure it never happens again. Some Americans saw their most basic rights trampled and it is our responsibility to channel the anger from November 2000 into positive energy to revive American democracy and give every citizen a voice at the political table."

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8 firefighters claim racial discrimination

BY JENNIFER HOLLAND THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Capt. Robert Goodson says he's watched less experienced white colleagues promoted past him during his 22-year career with the Columbia Fire Department and he thinks it's because he is black.

After at least 10 years of city officials ignoring the complaints, Goodson said Friday he is taking action with seven fellow firefighters who have asked the federal government to investigate.

"We have no choice," said Goodson, 48. If the department had followed a fair promotion policy, "I'd probably be battalion chief or better," he said.

The firefighters want the city to create a clear promotion policy and equitable pay system or they will sue for back pay.

"There are a lot of other people in the Fire Department trapped in their positions," said Capt. Sherman Hollins, 47.

Charles Austin, Columbia assistant city manager for public safety, said city officials will cooperate with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's investigation of the allegations and the city's promotion policy.

"We will continue to assess the validity of the claims," Austin said.

The firefighters say Columbia Fire Chief John Jansen made it easier to discriminate against employees when he abolished seniority as a factor for promotions. Jansen also eliminated a portion of the exam that tested firefighters' knowledge of the city's streets, which the firefighters say opened the gate for those with less experience to move up in the ranks.

"How can you challenge anything when you have the head of the department saying it's the good ol' boy system," said Deputy Fire Marshal Kent Scott, 36.

Of the city's 340 firefighters, 120 are black. There is one black assistant chief, compared with five white. Of the 17 battalion chiefs, two are black. Fifteen captains are black, while 61 are white.

"We know we have a flawed system," Goodson said. "They know we don't like it. We've told them over the years."

Jansen did not return two phone calls from The Associated Press seeking comment.

"We will not tolerate discrimination and we want a

diverse work force," Columbia Mayor Bob Coble said.

The city has faced four discrimination lawsuits challenging promotions, he said. Two cases filed by black employees were dropped, while the other two cases, which were filed by white employees, were settled.

"Many have raised issues with pay equity and the promotion system," Coble said. "I don't know if it means we haven't done a very good job with it or it is just a difficult issue to get resolved."

An attorney for the firefighters, Donald Gist, said he hopes to find an "equitable and amicable resolution" following the federal investigation. Otherwise he will file a

lawsuit seeking actual and punitive damages.

Gist had a copy of a letter firefighters sent to Coble in 1997, complaining about unfair promotions of whites over blacks in the Fire Department and that white recruits from Lexington wore Confederate flag insignia on their helmets.

"These men have laid their careers on the line because they are tired of not being promoted," Gist said.

Goodson said he was not concerned about retaliation from his supervisors. "It's nothing new," he said.

"My clients are very honorable gentlemen," Gist said. "They have taken a lot of heat on the job."

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The Chronicle offices will be closing at 1 o'clock Thursday, March 14, due to our 19th Annual Community Awards Banquet