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Women Make Their Own Way

It took years of work and the breaking down of many barriers, but women have finally come into their own

by Jacqueline Hansen

For the first time in the rich, storied history of the Olympic Games, there will be a women's marathon. Finally. Nearly everyone is aware of that by now, but what most people are not aware of is the long, frustrating struggle to include a women's marathon on the Olympic schedule. This struggle began in ancient Greece with the birth of the Olympic movement, and with it came sexual discrimination. Sporting events were so strictly segregated that women were forbidden even to view them (much less compete in them) under

the threat of death.

Although this threat certainly wasn't in effect at the revival of the Olympic movement in 1896 in Greece, women were still not permitted to compete. However, that didn't prevent the legendary Melpomene from crashing the men's marathon. Little did she realize that despite her brave act it would take nearly a century for women to officially become accepted in this event.

Pierre de Coubertin, a Frenchman, was responsible for reviving the Olympics. Once the Olympics were established on the international calendar, the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF) was founded in 1912 as the governing body for

Women-only races are growing.

track and field. But the attitude toward women and women athletes was, to say the least, discriminatory. That attitude was best reflected by de Coubertin's philosophy, which he expressed in a 1912 speech:

"We feel that the Olympic Games must be reserved for men. . . We feel that we have tried and that we must continue to try to achieve the following definition—the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism with internationalism as a base, loyalty as a means, art for its setting, and female applause as reward."

At least we could now applaud without

the threat of death. It wasn't for lack of interest on the women's part that their events were kept out of the Olympics. In 1917, Frenchwoman Alice Milliat founded the *Federation Sportive Feminine Internationale*, which paralleled the duties of the IAAF, stimulating international track-and-field meets of the 1920s and '30s. Initially, the FSFI represented three member clubs, and eventually France, the United States, Great Britain, Czechoslovakia, Italy and Switzerland.

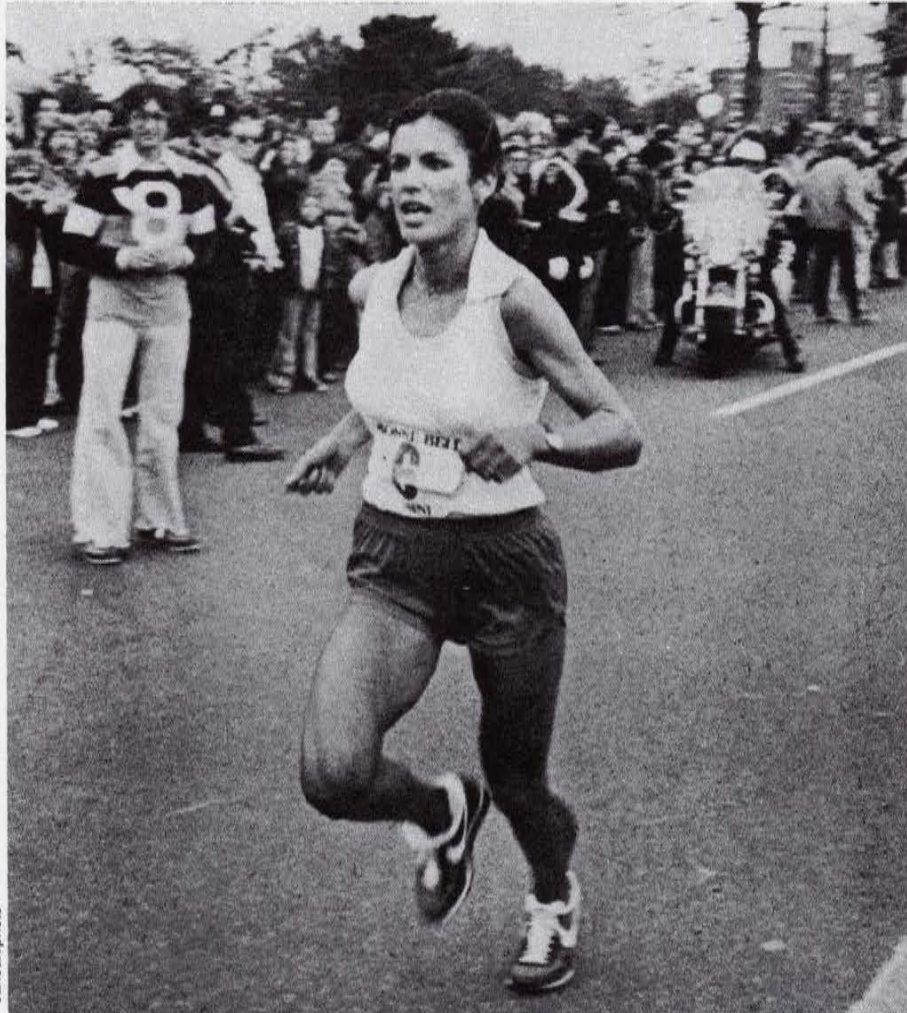
In 1919, the FSFI went before the International Olympic Committee to propose inclusion of track-and-field events for women in the Games. The response was astonishing: de Coubertin suggested all women's events be eliminated from the Olympics (swimming, golf, archery and tennis).

Milliat was undaunted. She organized the first women's track-and-field "Olympics" in 1922 in Monte Carlo, comprising 11 events: 60 and 300 meters, 100 and 1000 yards, 100-yard hurdles, 400-yard relay, high jump, broad jump, standing broad jump, shot put and javelin. Seven countries were represented with 300 competitors.

Again, in 1924, the women requested their events be added to the Olympic program, and again to no avail. The next Olympics for women were held in Sweden in 1925, this time staged as the Women's World Games, dropping the word "Olympics" at the insistence of the IAAF and IOC.

In a power play, the IAAF created a committee, gaining control of women's athletics. This resulted after two years of debate, at which time the women relented, providing they were included on the Olympic program. The IOC President, Count Henri de Baillet-Latour of Belgium, opposed their introduction to the 1928 Games, but was overruled by a majority vote. Nonetheless, the opposition to women's events kept their inclusion at a minimum—a sharp sacrifice of women's athletics for Olympic admission, and only a "provisional" admission at that. Five events were contested at Amsterdam: 100 and 800 meters, 4×100-meter relay, high jump and discus. In those games, the 800 meters for women played a most dramatic role in the history of women's athletics, the repercussions of which are still being felt today.

On August 2, Olympic officials took more notice that six of the nine finalists collapsed in a state of exhaustion at the finish than that all six had bettered the existing world record. In the U.S. Olympic Committee report of the 1928 Games, mention was made that "the sport governing bodies of America have not encouraged competitions for women in the half-mile or similar distances" and were not going to do so in the future. The IAAF adopted the American position, and the event was dropped from subsequent Olym-



Janeart photo

Gayle Barron was among those who quickly brought quality to women's racing.

pic Games until 1960.

Women's World Games continued until 1936 because of the resistance to expansion of women's athletics in the Olympics, because the IOC could revoke any event at any time and because by staging their own games, the women could assure themselves of a more complete slate of events. Relying on an IAAF promise to accept more events for world-record purposes, and for inclusion in the Games, the FSFI disbanded in 1938. But subsequent "progress" has been slow and remains so to this day. It took 32 years to reinstate the 800 meters, and it took until 1972 to add the 1500 meters for the first time—equaling the number of events of the Women's World Games of 1926, half a century later. And it has taken another 12 years to see the inclusion of the 3000 meters and the marathon for women.

The inclusion of the women's marathon should have been an indication that it was time for parity for women distance runners. But instead of seizing the opportunity for a goodwill gesture—if nothing else—to remedy the omission of women's events on the program, the IAAF and IOC continue to resist by refusing to add the 5000 and 10,000 meters.

The history of women's athletics is dotted with fine performances by a few women who dared to be different. Imagine the loneliness of Marie-Louise Ledru, when, in 1918, she completed a marathon

in France, or in 1926 when Violet Piercy of England ran 3:40:22. At Pikes Peak, two women entered the 13-mile race in 1936. And in 1951, a "mystery woman in red" from Canada was reported to have completed the Boston Marathon.

The Road Runners Club of America (RRCA), formed in 1957, vowed to give women equal recognition. More recognition was forthcoming as well. In 1963, Lyn Carman and Merry Lepper, who had already been running in road races for some time, jumped into the Western Hemisphere Marathon in Culver City, Calif. They avoided a race official who tried to stop them, by declaring their rights to public use of the roads. Lyn reportedly completed 20 miles, while Merry established a "best" marathon time of 3:37:07.

Also in 1963, Englishwoman Dale Greig began four minutes ahead of the field in the Isle of Wight Marathon. With an ambulance trailing her the entire route, she clocked 3:27:45, which has been claimed as the first recognized world marathon mark for women. But only two months later, that time was lowered by New Zealander Millie Sampson in the Owairaka Marathon with a 3:19:33. The race was on, as the women's marathon movement began in earnest.

The most famous marathon in the world—Boston—was infiltrated in 1966 by one lone 23-year-old woman, Roberta Gibb, who covered the distance in a re-

ported time of 3:21. She scored unofficial firsts in the next two Boston Marathons and in 1967 completed the course in 3:27:17, a performance overshadowed by the publicity surrounding Kathrine Switzer's (4:20) encounter and ensuing battle with the race director, Jock Semple.

Out of Canada in 1969 came an amazing report of a 15-year-old girl, Maureen Wilton, who had finished an otherwise all-male marathon in 3:15. Most of the running world was dubious of this accomplishment, but Dr. Ernst van Aaken was not. A long-time advocate of long-distance running for women and one of the pioneers in the growing field of sportsmedicine, van Aaken wrote, "What woman has not yet attained, she definitely will attain one day as the result of training methods specifically suited to her."

In his hometown of Waldniel in West Germany, van Aaken had been training several women on a daily diet of between 12 and 18 miles a day, so he was hardly surprised by the Canadian teen-ager's performance. Van Aaken was adamant in claiming that any of his runners could match the 3:15 that Wilton had run, so to satisfy the press he arranged a demonstration marathon. The result was yet another world best; this one was 3:07:26 by Anni Pederkamp.

Honoring its founding pledge to promote distance running for both male and female, the RRCA sponsored the American National Women's Marathon Championship in October 1970. The Amateur Athletic Union, which so far had not officially recognized women marathoners, did not sanction this closed-club race. Six women entered, and though it was run with the men, all received equal consideration. Sara Mae Berman of Cambridge, Mass., (the "unofficial" women's leader at the '69, '70 and '71 Boston Marathon) was the winner.

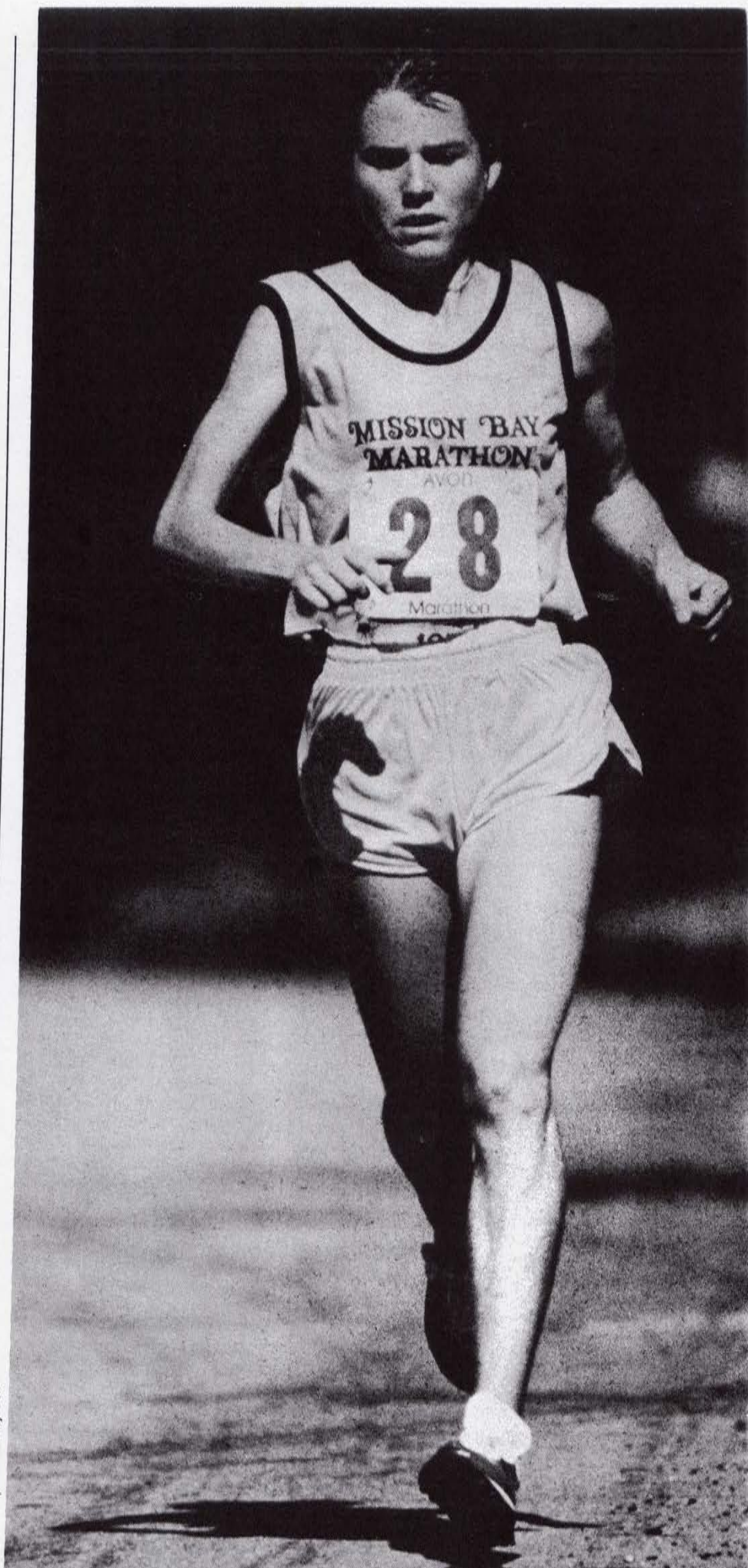
The world marathon mark for women changed three times during 1971. Beth Bonner, who had clocked 3:10:42 in her maiden marathon, became the first woman to break three hours with a 2:55:22 at the 1971 New York City Marathon.

At the AAU convention that year, the Women's Committee increased the allowable competitive distance for women to 10 miles. In addition, selected women, as designated by the chairwoman, were permitted to run marathons. The year ended with Cheryl Bridges' world-best mark of 2:49:40 at the Western Hemisphere Marathon in Culver City—the first sub-2:50 by a woman.

In 1972, the AAU recognized women as official entrants in marathons, although the Women's Committee insisted that the women start separately, in time or place. At the '72 New York City Marathon, when Chairwoman Pat Rico tried to enforce this rule, an impasse ensued. Rico insisted the women start 10 minutes ahead of the men,

Marty Cooksey won Avon in '78.

photo courtesy Avon



but the women runners argued that since they were being scored and awarded prizes separately, theirs could be defined as a separate race without a head start. Ignoring the early gun, the women forfeited those precious 10 minutes before starting to run.

Daring to question the authorities at the next AAU convention, the Women's Committee resolved that women could start on the same line with men. By the end of 1973, the world's best marathon mark for women was lowered to 2:46:36 by Miki Gorman, again at the Western Hemisphere

Daring to question the authorities, the Women's Committee resolved that women could start on the same line with men.

Marathon. A year later, on the very same Culver City course, I took the record down to 2:43:54.

At Boston in 1975, van Aaken, who accompanied West Germany's Liane Winter, predicted a world best and she complied with a 2:42:24. But dismissing that wind-aided, point-to-point mark as a curiosity only, he further predicted that another West German—Christa Vahlensieck—would run 2:40 and that I would be the first woman to run a sub-2:40. How correct he was! In Germany, Christa ran 2:40:15 and in October at the Oregon Track Club Marathon in Eugene, Ore., I ran 2:38:19.

Van Aaken hosted the first International Women's Marathon Championship in Waldneil (although not sanctioned by the IAAF) in 1974, which attracted 40 starters, with Liane Winter the victor in 2:50:31. In 1976, he again hosted the race, with 60 women this time, and Christa Vahlensieck won in 2:45:24.

The increasing display of women marathoners racing worldwide, however, apparently did not impress IAAF and IOC potentates. So, "political activists" among women runners pursued other routes in attempts to gain official recognition. Nina Kuscsik and others tediously guided petitions and proposals through proper channels until, at long last, the AAU encouraged the USOC to present a proposal to the IOC that a women's 5000 and 10,000 meters and a marathon be considered for inclusion at the 1980 Olympics. This proposal died in the wake of a similar, modest proposal to include the 3000, which was rejected. The committee argued the age-old myth of inherent physical inability of women to withstand the rigors of racing less than two miles, let alone a whole marathon.

By 1977, participation of women distance runners accelerated as the evolving

social phenomenon that became known as the "running boom" took off. New York's Mini-Marathon had a field of 2000 women that year. In the spring of 1978, the first Avon International Marathon for women was staged in Atlanta, with 20 sub-2:50 performances in a field of 186.

Women's marathoning took a great leap forward in 1978 when Norway's Grete Waitz astonished the world with her 2:32:30 marathon debut at New York City. Grete would go on to lower the world record for the marathon three more times, and win the first World Championship marathon in 1983.

At Montreal in the summer of 1979—as Grete Waitz was racing the 3000 in the World Cup—the International Runners Committee (IRC), in its inaugural meeting, set as a primary goal to increase her and all other women's opportunities to race longer distances. In brief, the IRC pledged itself to seek parity for women's distance events in the Olympics.

As if determined to satisfy the IOC demand for more proof of worldwide participation in women's running, more runners than ever competed in the marathons in 1974. Again in Waldneil, 250 women from 25 nations bore witness to the outstanding performance of Joyce Smith and her victorious team from England in the Avon Marathon. Smith, who was 41, won in 2:36:27. Witnessing her first women's marathon, Marea Hartman, chairwoman of the IAAF Women's Committee, took home to England newfound enthusiasm for the event.

A critical point in the battle for Olympic inclusion came at the Tokyo Women's Marathon in 1979. Twenty women from nine countries on five continents broke three hours, and again, Joyce Smith took the title in 2:37:48. This race was the first women's marathon to be sanctioned by the IAAF. IAAF President Adriaan Paulen, who viewed the race, declared his endorsement of women's marathoning that was to turn the tide in favor of a women's Olympic marathon.

Paulen's endorsement had been preceded, and quite possibly influenced by, Grete Waitz's historic performance in the '79 New York City Marathon. Her 2:27:33 was proclaimed by renowned track expert Roberto Quercetani as "the most advanced of women's achievements." If the performances of any single female marathoner can be said to have had the greatest influence on the Olympic advancement of her sport, it must be Grete.

By 1980, the campaign for inclusion of women's distance events in the Olympics nearly suffered a fatal blow. In light (or shadow) of the American boycott of the Moscow Games, it would seem other issues might take precedence at IAAF and IOC meetings. Whether or not the marathon nearly fell victim to a Soviet-bloc backlash will never be known. For certain, the 5000 and 10,000 events were not even proposed

by Hartman (Women's Committee, IAAF) and the marathon appeared faced with early dismissal by the IOC Program Commission. Telegrams flew back and forth between the International Runners Committee and IAAF President Paulen, until he succeeded in tabling the decision on the marathon until a future date. That decision was made in February 1981 at an IOC executive board meeting in Pasadena, Calif. A partial victory for women distance runners, it at least offered a new goal, a newfound Olympic hope for hundreds of

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women runners worldwide.

The omission of the middle-distance events eventually led to a lengthy, complex lawsuit. It was not resolved to the satisfaction of 82 women distance runners in 28 countries, but it stimulated world interest in the issue and will hopefully guide their admission to the next Olympics.

The ironic twist is that despite the IOC's continued concern over the capability of women to physically cope with the marathon distance—thus their resistance to the event as recently as the late 1970s—they've now put women in the precarious position of moving up to a distance that not all are suited for. What can one expect when there are no other choices available to the women distance runners? Mary Decker says that women deserve to have choices like the men.

That criticism aside, this should be a year of celebration for women marathoners the world over. For the selected few who make it to Los Angeles, it will be a quest for Olympic glory; for most, the first of their lives. Every male athlete, as former Olympian Dick Buerkle has said, is born with this opportunity. For women, it's a revelation.

When the first female Olympic marathoner crosses that finish line in Los Angeles on Aug. 5, more women all over the world will get up and take to the streets in their running shoes. The Olympic marathoners will become role models (*a la* Frank Shorter in 1972) who will affect the coming generations of young girls in every country on the globe. Whether or not they choose to run, there will be better reason for realizing they, too, have a choice. □

Jacqueline Hansen, the first woman in history to break the 2:40 barrier, has been instrumental in the inclusion of the marathon in the Olympics.

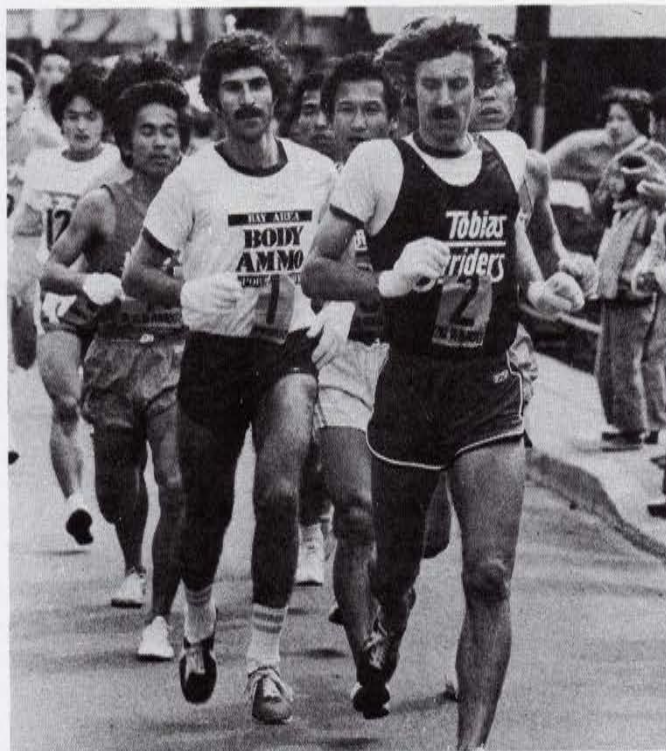
2:27:49	10. Fusashige Suzuki (JAP)	Tokyo	3/31/35
2:26:44	11. Yasuo Ikenaka (JAP)	Tokyo	4/03/35
2:26:42	12. Kitei Soh (JAP)	Tokyo	11/03/35
2:25:39	13. Yun Bok Suh (KOR)	Boston	4/19/47
2:20:42.2	14. James Peters (GBR)	Chiswick, Eng.	6/14/52
2:18:40.2	15. James Peters (GBR)	Chiswick, Eng.	6/13/53
2:18:34.8	16. James Peters (GBR)	Turku, Fin.	10/04/53
2:17:39.4	17. James Peters (GBR)	Chiswick, Eng.	6/26/54
2:15:17	18. Sergey Popov (SOV)	Stockholm	8/24/58
2:15:16.2	19. Abebe Bikila (ETH)	Rome	9/10/60
2:15:15.8	20. Toru Terasawa (JAP)	Beppu	2/17/63
2:14:28	21. Leonard Edelen (USA)	Chiswick, Eng.	6/15/63
2:13:55	22. Basil Heatley (GBR)	Chiswick, Eng.	6/13/64
2:12:11.2	23. Abebe Bikila (ETH)	Tokyo	10/21/64
2:12:00	24. Morio Shigematsu (JAP)	Chiswick, Eng.	6/12/65
2:09:36.4	25. Derek Clayton (AUS)	Fukuoka, Jap.	12/03/67
2:08:33.6	26. Derek Clayton (AUS)	Antwerp, Bel.	5/30/69
2:08:13	27. Alberto Salazar (USA)	New York	10/25/81

Progress of World Record (Women)

Time	Name (Country)	Location	Date
3:27:45	1. Dale Greig (GBR)	Ryde	5/23/64
3:19:33	2. Mildred Simpson (NZL)	Auckland	7/21/64
3:15:22	3. Maureen Wilton (CAN)	Toronto	5/06/67
3:07:26	4. Anni Pede-Erdkamp (GFR)	Waldniel	9/16/67
3:02:53	5. Caroline Walker (USA)	Seaside	2/28/70
3:01:42	6. Elizabeth Bonner (USA)	Philadelphia	5/09/71
2:46:30	7. Adrienne Beames (AUS)	Werrabee	8/31/71
2:46:24	8. Chantal Langlace (FRA)	Neuf Brisach	10/27/74
2:43:54.5	9. Jacqueline Hansen (USA)	Culver City, Calif.	12/01/74
2:42:24	10. Liane Winter (GFR)	Boston	4/21/75
2:40:15.8	11. Christa Vahlensieck (GFR)	Dulmen	5/03/75
2:38:19	12. Jacqueline Hansen (USA)	Eugene, Ore.	10/12/75
2:35:15.4	13. Chantal Langlace (FRA)	Oyarzun	5/01/77
2:34:47.5	14. Christa Vahlensieck (GFR)	West Berlin	9/10/77
2:32:29.9	15. Grete Waitz (NOR)	New York City	10/22/78
2:27:32.6	16. Grete Waitz (NOR)	New York City	10/21/79
2:25:41.3	17. Grete Waitz (NOR)	New York City	10/26/80
2:25:28.8	18. Allison Roe (NZL)	New York City	10/25/81
2:25:28.7	19. Grete Waitz (NOR)	London	4/17/83
2:22:43	20. Joan Benoit (USA)	Boston	4/18/83

Progress of US Record (Men)

Time	Name	Location	Date
2:55:18.4	1. John Hayes	Shepherd's Bush, Eng.	7/24/08
2:52:45.4	2. Robert Fowler	Yonkers, N.Y.	1/01/09
2:46:52.6	3. James Clark	New York	2/12/09
2:46:04.6	4. Albert Raines	New York	5/08/09
2:41:30	5. Joseph Organ	Antwerp, Bel.	8/22/20
2:38:27.4	6. Frank Zuna	Windsor, Eng.	5/30/25
2:29:01.8	7. Albert Michelsen	Port Chester	10/12/25
2:28:51.8	8. Ellison Brown	Boston	4/19/39
2:26:51.2	9. Bernard Smith	Boston	4/19/42
2:24:52	10. John J. Kelley	Yonkers, N.Y.	9/30/56
2:20:05	11. John J. Kelley	Boston	4/20/57
2:18:56.8	12. Leonard Edelen	Fukuoka, Jap.	12/02/62
2:14:28	13. Leonard Edelen	Chiswick, Eng.	6/15/63
2:13:27.8	14. Kenny Moore	Fukuoka, Jap.	12/07/69
2:11:12	15. Eamon O'Reilly	Boston	4/20/70
2:10:30	16. Frank Shorter	Fukuoka, Jap.	12/03/72
2:09:55	17. Bill Rodgers	Boston	4/21/75
2:09:27	18. Bill Rodgers	Boston	4/16/79
2:08:13	19. Alberto Salazar	New York	10/25/81



Progress of US Record (Women)

Time	Name	Location	Date
3:21:19	1. Sara Berman	Atlantic City, N.J.	9/28/69
3:02:53	2. Caroline Walker	Seaside, Ore.	2/28/70
3:01:42	3. Elizabeth Bonner	Philadelphia	5/09/71
2:55:22	4. Elizabeth Bonner	New York	9/19/71
2:49:40	5. Cheryl Bridges	Culver City, Calif.	12/05/71
2:46:36	6. Miki Gorman	Culver City, Calif.	12/02/73
2:43:54.5	7. Jacqueline Hansen	Culver City, Calif.	12/01/74
2:38:19	8. Jacqueline Hansen	Eugene, Ore.	10/12/75
2:37:57	9. Kim Merritt	Eugene, Ore.	9/11/77
2:36:23.1	10. Julie Brown	Eugene, Ore.	9/10/78
2:35:15	11. Joan Benoit	Boston	4/16/79
2:31:23	12. Joan Benoit	Auckland	2/03/80
2:30:57.1	13. Patti Lyons-Catalano	Montreal	9/06/80
2:29:33.6	14. Patti Lyons-Catalano	New York City	10/26/80
2:27:51	15. Patti Catalano	Boston	4/20/81
2:26:11	16. Joan Benoit	Eugene, Ore.	9/12/82
2:22:43	17. Joan Benoit	Boston	4/18/83

Olympic Marathon Winners

Time	Name (Country)	Location	Date
2:58:50	1. Spiridon Louis (GRE)	Athens*	4/10/96
2:59:45	2. Michel Theato (FRA)	Paris**	7/19/00
3:28:53	3. Thomas Hicks (USA)	St. Louis*	8/30/04
2:55:18.4	4. John Hayes (USA)	London	7/24/08
2:36:54.8	5. Kenneth McArthur (SOA)	Stockholm**	7/14/12
2:32:35.8	6. J. Kolehmainen (FIN)	Antwerp***	8/22/20
2:41:22.6	7. Albin Stenroos (FIN)	Paris	7/13/24
2:32:57	8. Boughera El Ouafi (FRA)	Amsterdam	8/05/28
2:31:36	9. Juan Carlos Zabala (ARG)	Los Angeles	8/07/32
2:29:19.2	10. Kitei Son (JAP)	Berlin	8/09/36
2:34:51.6	11. Delfo Cabrera (ARG)	London	8/07/48
2:23:03.2	12. Emil Zatopek (CZE)	Helsinki	7/27/52
2:25:00	13. Alain Mimoun (FRA)	Melbourne	12/01/56
2:15:16.2	14. Abebe Bikila (ETH)	Rome	9/10/60