

TOP TEN WOMEN MARATHONERS

Joan Benoit, Freeport, Maine

There are good marathon performances. Then there are great marathon performances. And on the rarest of occasions there are legendary marathon performances.

On May 12, 1984 Joan Benoit ran a marathon that will stand forever as one of the most remarkable of all 26 mile, 385 yard races. It wasn't that her time was anything great—a 2:31:04, which she previously had bettered on three occasions. Or even that she won the race—the first U.S. Olympic Trials marathon for women—which she had done in five of her 10 preceding marathons.

It was the way she won. Just 17 days after surgery on her right knee, muscular compensation problems had her on the verge of packing it in and going home. Her demonstration of both physical and mental toughness was surely enough to bring both the national television audience and Joan to tears of joy when she breasted the finish line tape.

For more than a year Benoit had been an overwhelming favorite to win the Trials marathon on the strength of her phenomenal 2:22:43 world record set at Boston in 1983. That mark was also her fourth American record, the others being 2:35:15 at Boston in 1979, 2:31:23 at Auckland, New Zealand, in February 1980 and 2:26:11 at Nike in September 1982. The last performance still stands as the best ever by a woman on a loop course.

Benoit's marathon success is based on a strong track background from her years at tiny Bowdoin College in Maine (with a year's leave spent at North Carolina State). As a warmup for the 1979 Boston race, she ran a 2:50:54 "workout" on the rugged Bermuda Marathon course after racing a 10-K there the day before. Benoit completed her 1979 marathon campaign with a near miss on her Boston performance with a 2:35:41 at the Nike/OTC Marathon.

The following year saw perhaps her worst marathon, a dismal 2:38:42 fourth place in the Avon Marathon in London coming six months to the day after she ran the second-fastest time in history at Auckland. More non-winners would follow in 1981: a 2:30:16 third in Boston, a 2:37:24 second in Avon's Ottawa race, and a 2:39:07 second at the Bank One Marathon in Columbus, Ohio. Since then, she hasn't lost a marathon.

But as Joan Benoit proved in Olympia, there is more to first place than just winning.

Patti Catalano, Dedham, Mass.

At two hours, 50 minutes plus into the Houston Marathon in mid-January of 1984, a familiar face approached the finish line, struggling to ensure a time fast



Steven M. Jusseaume photo

Joan Benoit, world-record holder.

enough to earn a trip to the U.S. Olympic Trials marathon. She made it, but for Patti Catalano, who used to be able to run that type of time in a workout, it was a significant step on the long road back from injury.

Ironically, her problems dated back to the scene of one of her most imposing triumphs: Honolulu. She had just conquered the heat and humidity to run a 2:33:24 course record in the 1981 Honolulu Marathon when she decided to do some body surfing. She caught a wave the wrong way and the result was a severe injury to her lower back. As she slowly worked her way back from that problem, other injuries arose.

race in 2:20. Small chance. He not only defeated Ikangaa again (along with world-record holder Alberto Salazar), but it was how he did it that was so impressive. Clearly at less than full strength, he allowed the others to do the leading before unleashing the most feared kick in marathoning a couple hundred meters from the finish line to win in a sensational 2:08:52 and establish himself as a favorite in the Los Angeles Olympic marathon.

Seko leads a spartan life in Tokyo, living with his coach and master, Kiyoshi Nakamura. Seko has said that he's married to the marathon. If he is, it's a match made in heaven.

Frank Shorter, Boulder, Colo.

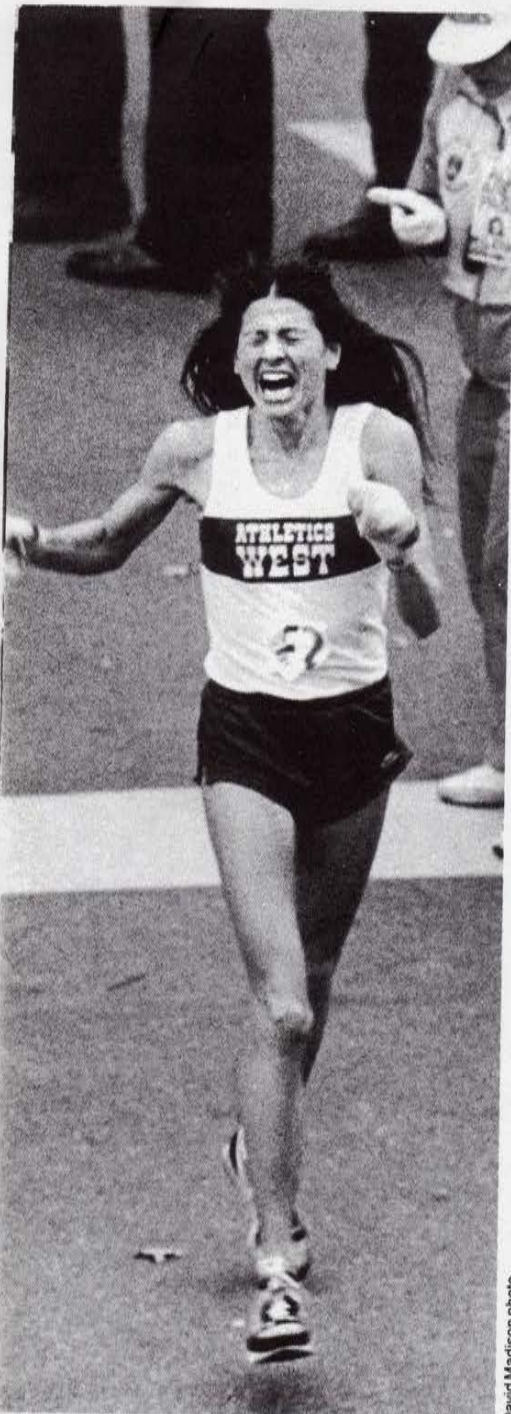
Frank Shorter's place in U.S. running history is secure: When he won the Munich Olympic marathon in 1972, he became the first American to win an Olympic gold medal in the event since Johnny Hayes backed into it in 1908. Shorter's win, on national television, had a lasting impact on the American running scene. It stimulated what has since become known as "the running boom," and while the boom was not entirely attributable to Shorter's win, he was certainly a major part of it.

But there's more to Shorter's career than just his Olympic win. He won the Fukuoka Marathon a record-tying four times, was American-record holder for the 10,000 (as well as the marathon), was a consistent winner on the road-racing circuit and, most important, he's been a eloquent spokesman for the sport and athletes' rights. His impact on long-distance running in the United States has been profound. His behind-the-scenes work to get TACTRUST (a trust-fund arrangement for track-and-field athletes) implemented was among his most noteworthy contributions. Shorter has been quoted to the effect that he's as proud of his work for athletes' right as he is of his gold medal.

Still, Shorter's greatest contribution was in bringing visibility to a sport which had long been considered nothing more than a freak show. Shorter's '72 gold medal also proved that Americans could win the long-distance races at the international level.

Although Shorter hasn't officially retired from competition, he's taken a low-key attitude toward road-racing. He races occasionally, but rarely in high-level competition anymore. His days as a world-class marathoner are over; he prefers the shorter races and is busy with network commentating chores as well as starting a fledgling company that represents athletes.

Honorable mention: Bill Adcocks (England), Ellison M. (Tarzan) Brown (Rhode Island), Gerard Cote (Canada), Jerome Drayton (Canada), Ron Hill (England), John A. Kelley (Massachusetts), John J. Kelley (Connecticut), Karel Lismont (Belgium), Mamo Wolde (Ethiopia), Juan Carlos Zabala (Argentina), Emil Zatopek (Czechoslovakia).



Patti Catalano: three U.S. records.

But she never gave up, continuing to strive for the form that brought her to the pinnacle as America's "Queen of the Roads." In the early 1980s Catalano had been an American-record holder at almost every standard distance and set an unofficial world best for 30-K of 1:44:25 in a Japanese race. At the marathon distance she was a model of consistency, becoming the first to accumulate 10 sub-2:40 performances.

Despite these accomplishments she was not able to achieve her biggest dreams: to win the New York or Boston marathons. In the former race Catalano was always up against the indomitable Grete Waitz, so she was elated with her 2:29:34 American record in 1980. At Boston the following April,



Miki Gorman gave the lie to talk of age and sex limitations.

even another AR of 2:27:51 couldn't take away from the bitter disappointment of losing to unheralded Allison Roe.

At the U.S. Trials she surprised a lot of people by finishing in 2:36. Perhaps it was just as much a victory as many of her other races, but this one was special: it was a victory over herself.

Miki Gorman, Los Angeles, Calif.

The Japanese have always been one of the dominant forces in men's marathoning. It is not without some irony, therefore, that one of America's greatest women marathoners of the mid-1970s—Miki Gorman—is also Japanese.

Michiko Suwa was born in China on Aug. 9, 1935 but moved to Tokyo at age 9 along with her mother and brothers. At the age of 28 she came to the United States, where she would eventually gravitate to Los Angeles and meet her future husband, Mike Gorman.

Never particularly athletic as a girl, Gorman began a jogging program in 1969. For years thereafter she was a recreational jogger and when she finally was talked into racing a marathon in mid-1973, she didn't finish. It didn't help that the week before, a 3:25 training run in another marathon had wiped her out.

With more judicious training, Miki exploded into world prominence with a women's world record of 2:46:36 at the 1973 Western Hemisphere Marathon in Culver City, Calif. Four months later she was to win the first of two Boston Marathons in 2:47:11.

Gorman didn't know she was pregnant when she won Boston, but her marathon career certainly did not suffer from her maternity leave. On two months of good training, she ran a respectable 2:53 in the '75 New York City Marathon.

Meanwhile she had come under the watchful eye of Laszlo Tabori of the San

Fernando Valley Track Club and, following his program, Gorman achieved one of the landmark performances of American marathoning: a 2:39:11 New York City Marathon win at age 41.

Gorman was to add second marathon titles at Boston and New York in 1977, but her fast days were behind her. Still, the diminutive champion was a pioneer in proving that not only could the female body withstand the rigors of the marathon distance, but that age would serve as no barrier.

Jacqueline Hansen, Santa Monica, Calif.

A fast course. A cool day. A steady training background. All the ingredients were there for Jacqueline Hansen as she stepped to the starting line of the Nike/OTC Marathon on Oct. 12, 1975 in a quest to do something that a woman had never done before: run 26 miles, 385 yards in less than 160 minutes.

Hansen, who had passed up the national championships in New York, knew all along it was her day. "Early splits led me to believe the record was possible," she said afterward. "6:07 for the first mile, 29:58 for five and 60:15 for 10. When I heard 2:01 for the 20-mile mark, I felt an overwhelming surge."

Surge she did, and when the Southern Californian reached the finish line the clock read 2:38:19. The world record was back in the hands of the woman who had it when the year started, albeit with a five-minute improvement. Hansen's 2:43:54 from the Western Hemisphere race in December 1974 had been the standard as 1975 began, but it was broken first by Liane Winter and then Christa Vahlensieck, both of West Germany.

Jacqueline Hansen was born in Binghamton, N. Y., on Nov. 20, 1948 and graduated from Cal State University-

Northridge. While living in Los Angeles she came under the tutelage of Laszlo Tabori, who used his refinement of the Mihaly Igloi interval system to produce champions such as Hansen, Miki Gorman and Leal-Ann Reinhart.

Hansen, who won the '73 Boston Marathon, never again broke 2:40, but 1984 brought immense personal satisfaction to

pened in 1984. Kristiansen began to beat Waitz and even broke some of what were thought to be Grete's untouchable records. Kristiansen resides in the shadows no more.

The pinnacle of Kristiansen's running career was reached in London on May 13 when she literally won by a mile in an incredible 2:24:26. That's the second-best

She arrived on the scene an unheralded cross-country runner. In fact, when Grete Waitz crossed the finish line in 2:32:29.2, the public address announcers were still trying to figure out her name. Oh, by the way, her time was also a world record by more than two minutes.

her. After several unsuccessful attempts to meet the qualifying standard for the U.S. Olympic Trials, she finally made it on the last possible day despite miserable weather at Boston. Her performance at Olympia was anticlimactic to the honor of earning a spot in the race.

time ever and a lowering of Waitz's European (and Norwegian) record of 2:25:29. Just eight days prior, Kristiansen had stunned Waitz in a 10-K road race with a personal best 31:27 after having beaten her in a 4-K cross-country race outside of Oslo.



Jacqueline Hansen was the first under 2:40, then worked on Olympic barriers.

Thirty-one women broke 2:40 the day of the U.S. Olympic Trials last May. More than a few of them surely didn't realize they had the honor of being joined in the race by someone special. The woman who had done it first.

Ingrid Kristiansen, Norway

Shadows can be uncomfortable. Especially the long kind one can find oneself in when almost literally following in the footsteps of a superstar.

That's the way it seems ever to have been for Norway's Ingrid Kristiansen, whose running career seems to have always been overshadowed by her illustrious countrywoman, Grete Waitz.

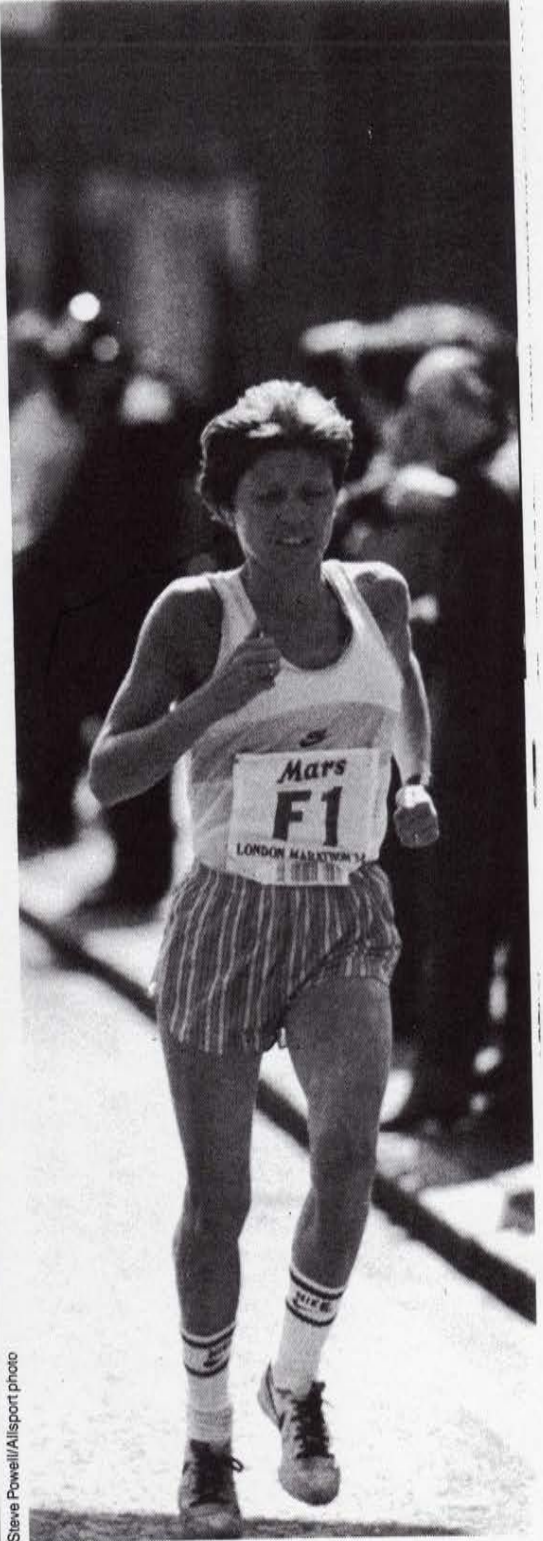
Only a funny thing seems to have hap-

Kristiansen had already gone into the London race as the yearly leader by virtue of her 2:27:51 victory at Houston in January. This followed an abbreviated leave of absence from the racing wars due to maternity. She had run until her eighth month of pregnancy and resumed training only a month afterward.

A cross-country skier on the international level, Kristiansen finished 15th in the 5-K and 15-K World Championships in 1978, but she switched to running when she began medical studies. Cross-country skiing's loss has been marathoning's gain.

Lorraine Moller, New Zealand

It was all rather simple, you see. Run a marathon. Break 2:40. Win.

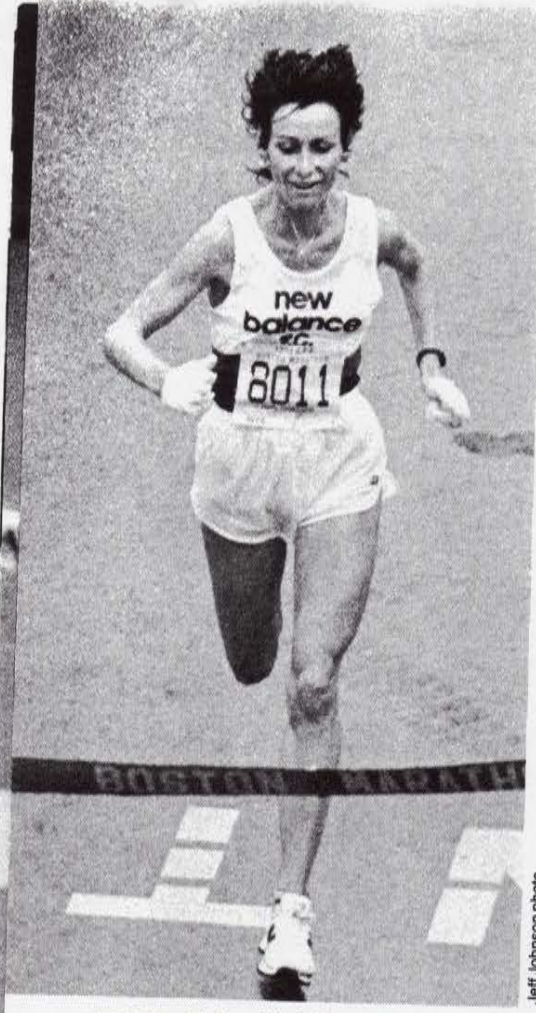


Steve Powell/Allsport photo

Ingrid Kristiansen, Norse Wonder No. 2.

That was the golden rule for New Zealand's Lorraine Moller. Grandma's Marathon, 1979—2:37:36.5. Grandma's Marathon, 1980—2:38:35.8. Avon Marathon, 1980—2:35:11. Nike Marathon, 1980—2:31:42. Rio de Janeiro Marathon, 1980—2:39:10. Grandma's Marathon, 1981—2:29:35.5. Rio de Janeiro Marathon, 1981—2:35:56. Nike Marathon, 1981—2:31:15.

Eight marathons, eight wins. The longest undefeated streak from the start of



Jeff Johnson photo

Lorraine Moller, Kiwi Olympian.

one's career by any marathoner, male or female. But then the winning skein came to an end at London in May 1982 despite another sub-2:40; a 2:36:15 by Moller left her more than 6½ minutes behind Joyce Smith. She returned to the winner's circle at the Avon Marathon in San Francisco four weeks later with a 2:36:12.5.

With 10 straight sub-2:40s, Moller seemed ready to give Grete Waitz a run for her money in the 1982 New York City Marathon. But that turned into Moller's worst race and she dropped out. A year later the results weren't that much better: 26th place in 2:43:59.

So the pressure was on the Colorado-based Kiwi in the 1984 Boston Marathon. A good showing was vital for her to be selected to New Zealand's Olympic team. Despite cold, rainswept conditions, Moller won in a personal best of 2:29:28. The reasons for her success were due in no small part to her abandonment of emphasis on track racing and a resumption of mileage and base training. It was all rather simple again: run a marathon, break 2:30, win.

Allison Roe, New Zealand

Look up in the sky some night and you may catch sight of a meteor streaking through the heavens. Or perhaps a comet will catch your eye, shining brightly month after month until it disappears, perhaps to

return again someday, and perhaps . . .

In 1981 a long-legged New Zealander named Allison Roe was the comet that lit up women's marathoning. As Allison Deed she had run a virtually unnoticed 2:51:16 in the Choysa Marathon at Auckland, New Zealand, in February 1980. That put her 20 minutes behind Joan Benoit's then second-fastest-ever marathon performance but more significantly earned her a trip to the Nike/OTC race that September. She ran a solid 2:34:29 to place third there. A 2:42 in Tokyo and a 2:36:14 in Auckland followed.

Still, she was a virtual unknown when she lined up at the start of the '81 Boston Marathon. Also on the starting line was Patti Catalano, the first American to break 2:30 and the prerace favorite. Catalano ran a strong, intense race but she was no match for Roe, who stormed past her with three miles to go to post history's No. 2 performance, 2:26:46.

Roe was certainly anonymous no longer when she entered the New York City Marathon six months later. Under ideal conditions, she ran even faster than at Boston, clocking 2:25:29 and ending Grete Waitz' three-year reign as world-record holder.

Allison Roe, New Zealand flash.



The fates, which had been so benevolent to Roe, soon turned. She was struck by a series of injuries culminating in a non-finish at the 1984 Boston race. Roe's star was still in eclipse and it remained for the future that someday her brilliance might shine again.

Joyce Smith, Great Britain

In 1956, Joyce Byatt was a reserve on the British cross-country team and three years away from winning the first of two straight English cross-country championships.

She was also 24 years away from recording the fastest time ever in a women-only race or on a loop course. It was also in this third stage of her running career that Joyce Smith would be achieving road-racing performances heretofore thought impossible for a woman in her 40s.

Following her cross-country stage and her 1500 meters/3000 meters success in the early 1970s, Smith took to the road after the birth of her second daughter. She set a UK best of 56:27 for 10 miles, an early indication of her talent in the event that would prove to be her forte, the marathon. In her debut in June 1979 she set a UK best of 2:41:37 and three months later won the Avon International race in West Germany in 2:36:27. She lowered that Commonwealth record to 2:33:32 in June 1980 and in November she won the Tokyo International women's race for the second consecutive year in 2:30:27.

London was to be the scene of her greatest accomplishments. In March 1981 she won in 2:29:57 to become only the third woman to break 2:30. The following May she was even better—2:29:43, her final world masters record. Smith was 44 years, 6 months old at the time.

Age finally began to make some inroads on Smith's performances in 1983, though she did break 2:40 four times, including a 2:34:27 at the Helsinki World Championships and a 2:34:40 at the Avon Marathon.

Joyce Smith, veteran non pareil.



Horst Muller photo

Her greatest honor came when she was named to the 1984 British Olympic team. In 28 years she has done it all in running—from a cross-country reserve to an Olympic marathoner.

Christa Vahlensieck, West Germany

About seven minutes after Julie Brown romped to victory in the 1983 Avon International Marathon in Los Angeles, the second-place finisher crossed the line. Yet how many in the crowd along the Olympic course realized that the 2:33:24 personal record time was turned in by one of the true pioneers of the women's marathon, Christa Vahlensieck?

Born Christa Kofferschlager, she had



Christa Vahlensieck, '70s pacesetter.

run long distances from her childhood and raced the longest ones available—first 1500 meters, then 3000. On October 28, 1973 she ran the first marathon ever held for women only at Waldniel, West Germany, and won in a European best time of 2:59:25.6.

Her next marathon was a 2:53 at Boston in 1974, where she placed second to Miki Gorman, but then at the first women's world marathon championship in September 1974 at Waldniel she was a disappointing fourth in 2:54:40. After substantially increasing the quality of her training, she produced a 2:42:38 in October 1974, which was first hailed as a world record until re-measurement proved the course short by 754 meters.

That time gave Vahlensieck incentive to try for a true world record. Her sights were set at 2:40 and she aimed for that mark at Dulmen, West Germany, in May 1975. (By that time the women's world record had



David Madison photo

Grete Waitz continues to be the standard-bearer of women's marathoning.

been lowered to 2:42:33 by Liane Winter.) Running a strong race throughout, Vahlensieck finished in 2:40:15.8.

Over the next few years, the women's world record would be passed back and forth among Vahlensieck, Chantal Langlace of France and Jacqueline Hansen of the United States. Vahlensieck had the distinction of becoming the first to break a significant barrier — 2:35—with a 2:34:47.5 at West Berlin in September 1977.

As the years went by, it looked like Vahlensieck's fastest times were behind her but then she ran a startling 2:34:42 in Osaka, Japan, in January 1982. Then came a 2:33:45 in Munich in May 1983, followed by her Avon performance four weeks later. Like the proverbial bottle of fine wine, Vahlensieck had demonstrated that through the years she had not just gotten older, she had indeed gotten better.

Grete Waitz, Norway

The addition of a women's marathon to the 1984 Olympic Games program was the result of the hard work of many people. Yet of all those who expended countless hours of toil could anyone have been more eloquent than Grete Waitz, who let her feet do the talking?

And what she did were shouts to the marathon establishment that yes, indeed, women could run the marathon and run times that the male hierarchy of the sport believed were impossible. She arrived on the marathon scene in New York City in 1978, an unheralded cross-country runner. In fact, when she crossed the finish line in 2:32:29.2, the public address announcers were still trying to figure out her name. Oh, by the way her time was also a world record by more than two minutes.

The following October she annihilated

the 2:30 barrier for women, cruising through the five boroughs of the Big Apple in 2:27:32.6. She finished 69th overall out of 12,000-plus starters and was exactly 11 minutes ahead of the next female finisher. Waitz was in a class by herself.

She improved her world record to 2:25:42 at the 1980 New York City Marathon, but the 1981 race proved to be a disaster. Waitz dropped out because of an injury and Allison Roe went on to take first and Waitz's world record. Seeking to regain that record in Boston in 1982, Waitz cramped up late in the race and again did not finish. By October, though, she was healthy once more and won New York in 2:27:14.

In 1983 Waitz ran her first marathon outside of the United States at London and equaled Roe's world mark of 2:25:29. (The next day Joan Benoit would obliterate the women's best with a 2:22:43.) One of her major lifelong goals, a major championship, was then realized that summer when she won the inaugural World Championship marathon in Helsinki in a time of 2:28:09; second place was three minutes behind. For icing on the cake, Waitz added a fifth New York City Marathon title that October in 2:27:00.

Of her nine marathons, Waitz had won all seven she finished and broke 2:30 six times. On the eve of the Los Angeles Games, Waitz was poised to go after the biggest prize of all: the Olympic gold medal. It is only fitting that the woman who did so much to bring women's marathoning to the public consciousness take part in the race. Win or lose, Waitz's place in history is secure. □

HONORABLE MENTION: Anne Audain, New Zealand; Julie Brown, USA; Jacqueline Gareau, Canada; Rosa Mota, Portugal; Charlotte Teske, West Germany