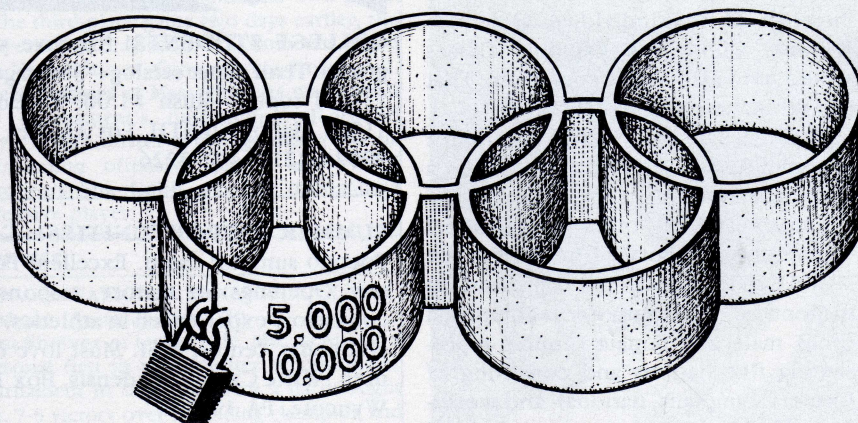


by Jacqueline Hansen

## END ZONE



Larry Baumgardner

■ This summer, for the first time in Olympic history, women will be able to compete in both the 3,000 meters (on the track) and the marathon. But between these two races yawns a 39-kilometer gap in which languish several of the world's most brilliant women distance runners: American Mary Decker, who in her first-ever 5,000-meter race ran a world-record 15:08.26; Paula Fudge of Great Britain, who has run a 15:14.51; the Soviet Union's Lyudmila Baranova, who lowered Decker's world record for the 10,000 meters on the track from 31:35.3 to 31:35.01; and the current world-record holder, Raisa Sadretdinova, also of the Soviet Union, at 31:27.57. Norway's great marathoner Grete Waitz owns an unpressed 31:00 world-best road mark at 10,000 meters.

All of these women, and scores of other proven distance runners throughout the world, want and deserve the opportunity to participate in races for which their talents are best suited. If the 5,000- and 10,000-meter events for women were added to the Los Angeles Olympic program, the finals would almost certainly be won in times faster than those recorded by men at the same Olympic venue in 1932 (14:30.0 and 30:11.4, respectively). Yet as of this writing, the Olympic track and field program for women still lacks both events.

Why is that? And how valid are the arguments?

1. For generations, the international and national governing bodies for athletics (track and field) have ruminated gravely over the medical and physiological effects of endurance events on women. As recently as 1979, proponents of a women's Olympic marathon were still forced to prove that women were physically capable of running the 26.2-mile event. (Curiously, the physical welfare of male distance runners has never warranted such concern.) Meanwhile, particularly during the past decade, the performance of tens of thousands of women runners should have forever laid to rest any doubts on the female's ability to survive the rigors of racing over any Olympic distance.

2. This brings up a more modern, "of-

ficial" requirement imposed on women athletes: "evidence of interest and participation." According to the International Olympic Committee's two-part Rule 32, "only sports widely practiced by women in 25 countries and two continents may be included in the program of the Games of the Olympiad." (The part pertaining to men has historically never been applied.)

A little research reveals that such participation requirements have never been applied across the board for Olympic participation; as recently as 1972 several sports had fewer than ten nations represented. How many African and Arab nations—often cast as the villainous objectors to women's distance running—support the winter sports or yachting? Moreover, women distance runners are not asking for the addition of a new sport to the Olympic roster, simply for the addition of two events within an existing program.

3. Then there are the age-old bureaucratic dodges of "going through proper channels" and following "correct procedures." IOC Rule 33 states that "the program of the events for each sport shall be decided at the [IOC] session four years before the beginning of the Olympic Games." As with Rule 32, however, there is ample room for exception. The IOC executive board accepted women marathoners in February 1981.

Similar additions of new events within other existing sports (e.g., last year in women's canoeing) would seem to place responsibility for initiating the necessary proceedings in the hands of the international governing bodies. But despite a formal plea from my organization, the International Runners Committee, for in-

clusion of two more track events for women at the 1984 Games, the International Amateur Athletic Federation would not address the question at its congress in Athens in 1982. Following "normal" procedures means, at best, the *probable* addition of the 10,000 meters in the 1988 Olympic Games and of the 5,000 in . . . ?

4. Finally, there are the no-room-at-the-inn arguments. But the logistics of fitting in heats for the women's races are simple. The races could be run on one of Los Angeles' newly refurbished alternative tracks, most likely near the Olympic Coliseum by the University of Southern California. And if the 3,000 meters—which is a middle-distance race that does not really parallel the men's 3,000-meter steeplechase—were changed to 5,000, officials would need to add only the 10,000-meter race to the schedule.

In its booklet "Our First 1,000 Days," the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee says it is "committed to make efforts to provide employment and business opportunities to persons in groups which have suffered from discrimination in the past, including racial minorities, females and the handicapped." This commitment echoes a similar objective enshrined in the official IAAF handbook: "To strive to ensure that no racial, religious, political or other kind of discrimination be allowed in athletics and to take all necessary measures to stop such discrimination."

And the LAOOC is proud of having succeeded with its bold "commercial" bid to have private businesses fund the '84 Games—a radical departure from the IOC's hallowed Rule 4, which requires the host city to guarantee financial support of the Games. (cont. on page 107)



(cont. from page 108) This would suggest that the governing bodies can bend rules and procedures when deemed necessary, legally or financially. In all matters, the interests of the individual athletes—without whom the Olympic Games would not exist—must come first. That should include women runners.

The International Runners Committee is committed to securing for women a full program of distance races, at the Olympics and all other international championships. Formed in 1979 at the World Cup track and field championships in Montreal, the committee is composed of 13 male and female runners representing five nations and consisting of former Olympians, national- and world-record holders, coaches, statisticians and track writers.

After we exhausted formal procedures for redress through "proper channels," the IRC contacted the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, a public-service organization that fights discrimination through legal channels. After a review of the evidence, the ACLU agreed to represent women athletes in a lawsuit against the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, The Athletics Congress of the USA, the United States Olympic Committee, the International Amateur Athletic Federation and the International Olympic Committee. This suit doesn't seek any monetary relief or interference with the Games, only to add the 5,000- and 10,000-meter events for women to the 1984 Olympiad. More than 60 women runners from 25 countries support this suit, including 1983 world champions Grete Waitz (marathon) and Mary Decker (1,500 and 3,000 meters).

Says Decker of the latter race: "It is really a middle-distance event, not long distance. The reason women don't run [the 5,000 and 10,000] more is that they don't want to waste their time running distances that are not included in the Olympics."

And Waitz points out, "If women wish to run a long-distance event, they have to go for the marathon."

It's a pity that these two women and so many others may be deprived of an opportunity to compete in the events that suit them best. A delay of just one Olympiad may forever deny an athlete a chance at Olympic gold during her competitive lifetime. The distance gap must be remedied.

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