

THE RACE TO EMPOWERMENT: A Marathon Story

26.2 miles. That is the distance the ancient Greek soldier Pheidippides ran to deliver the good news that the Greek army had defeated the Persians in the battle of Marathon.



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26.2 miles. That is the distance Kathrine Switzer ran to deliver the message that women too can run in the Boston Marathon.

The marathon race was first introduced at the Athens Olympics in 1896 as a tribute to the legend of Pheidippides, and by the early 20th century, its length had been set at 26.2 miles to approximate the distance between Marathon and Athens.

The Boston Marathon in the United States was first held on Patriot's Day 1897 and has

the same distance as the Greek marathon. Both races symbolize their respective country's battles for liberty and their race to victory.

Both marathons had one more thing in common: They did not include women. For decades, women did not run or even attempt to run the race. They were not expected to, not supposed to and not allowed to. But many tried, unofficially, to break the

boundaries and prove their potential. One woman in particular had the power to successfully overcome the obsta-

cles and break the gender barrier, and that was Kathrine Switzer.

In 1967, Switzer resolved to participate in the Boston Marathon. She registered as "K.V. Switzer," ensuring that the organizers accepted her entry without realizing she was a woman. Switzer received her race number and started running, but before long, a race official chased after her and tried to rip off her bib number and push her out of the race. But Kathrine did not stop. For a split second, she thought about quitting the race, but she knew that stopping would mean failing women all around the world; so she kept running. Switzer finished the race, becoming the first ever woman to complete the Boston Marathon as a numbered entry. She continued running, organizing races and advocating for all women to be able to run. She knew that "if we can empower women they can do anything, and sometimes putting one foot in front of the other, will do that."

Kathy Switzer and other female marathon pioneers such as Marie-Louise Ledru, Stamatia Revithi, Arlene Pieper and Roberta Gibb achieved what people believed they couldn't. They pushed their limits, they broke barriers, they inspired future generations, and they finished the race. Thanks to their efforts, the Boston Marathon officially allowed women to participate starting in 1972, and the women's marathon became an Olympic sport in 1984. Today, almost half of marathon runners in the United States are female, from young girls to women in their nineties and including double amputee Jami Marseilles, who became the first female bilateral amputee to complete the Boston Marathon.

We run to work. We run to appointments. We run to meet loved ones. We run to keep fit. But these women ran to change the course of history. 🏃‍♀️

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