

# Violence at the Women's Marathon Race<sup>1</sup>

*Karl Lennartz*

## 1. From Melpomene over the Olympic 800m Race to a public race

Before and after the first Olympic Games 1896 in Athens two women, Melpomene<sup>2</sup> and Stamatia Rovithi<sup>3</sup>, ran the marathon course<sup>4</sup>. This was noticed, amazed.

Because of the inexistence of the women's athletics this performance had no result for the development of women's sport. It was already forgotten for a long time, that in the period of Pedestrianism many women even participated in Six-Day-Races<sup>5</sup>.

When under immense pressure of the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI) at the Olympic Games 1928 in Amsterdam women were allowed, for the first time, to run, jump and throw, an 800m race was included in the programme.

When two Canadian women arrived at the finish and laid down on the grass, upset because they didn't win, it was a welcome opportunity for officials, journalists, doctors and especially for IOC members to demand an interdiction of women sport in general, especially athletics<sup>6</sup>. This failed. But the 800m race was banned from the programme and did not come back into it until 1960, after long arguments and under pressure from the East Block countries.

## 2. Ernst van Aaken and Robert Mall

At the beginning of the Sixties first public races were advertised in the USA and Central Europe. The first distances around 10 km were run. The training for that was usually based on the endurance principle, longer and slower runs in the nature. By time the runners' average performances improved and their distances became longer until marathon, and even the 100km.

First sporadically than more often women began to take part in open events.

A part of them were still active or formerly active middle distance runners, who tested themselves and ran. Because of their preceded training they achieved good times straight away. Otherwise women participated for health reasons or to "imitate" their husbands.

The sights of Ernst van Aaken, a Sports physician from Waldniel, who demanded, at the end of the Forties and the beginning of the Fifties, the long distance run for women and children, and who never became tired to protect his thesis, that children, adolescences and women are the predestined endurance runners.

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<sup>1</sup> Cp. LENNARTZ, Karl, *Marathonlauf*, Bd. 3. Frauen – geborene Marathonläuferinnen, will appear in 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Probably a nom de plume.

<sup>3</sup> A 35 year old farmer.

<sup>4</sup> LENNARTZ, Karl, "Two Women ran the Marathon in 1896", in: *Citius, Altius, Fortius* 2(1994)1, pp. 19-20.

<sup>5</sup> SEARS Edward, "Deerfoot, Howard, and Sohn, Unlimited", in: *Marathon & Beyond* 7(2003)2, pp. 126-132

<sup>6</sup> ODENKIRCHEN, Edeltraud, "The discussion about the women athletic in Amsterdam 1928", in: *Stadion* 29(2003), pp. 183-198.

Van Aaken, who was smiled at, mocked and attacked, aggressed and fought, saw himself fully confirmed.

Analogous to the development of the men's long distance running sport and the development of women's took place. Whoever runs ten kilometres will also be able to run ten kilometre a bit faster or even a longer distance. Soon women weren't content anymore by running just for training or running in open races with men. They demanded to be ranked separately and to be divided in age groups like men.

When exactly the first woman achieved this stage until this day cannot be said for sure.

The world best scores for women at the beginning of this continuous development can be fixed in 1964, when Mildred Sampson from New Zealand undercut the 3½ hour mark, on April 21 in Auckland, within 3:19:33 h, followed by the Briton Dale Grieg, on May 23, 1964 at the Isle of Wight within the time of 3:27:45 h.

On December 16, 1963 the American Marry Lepper ran, in Culver City, the shorter distance in 3:37:07 h.

On the occasion of the 100 years anniversary of the Canadian Athletic Association a Marathon was carried out on the May 6, 1967 in Toronto, where the 15 year old girl Maureen Wilton participated. Under official supervision she finished the competition in 3:15:22,8 h. The public was less impressed by the fact, that a young woman ran the Marathon, rather than that a 15 year old teenager was able to run such a time, which meant further a new world best time. Journalists doubted the correctness of this performance and enquired Ernst van Aaken, if women and especially teenagers were able to endure so much. When van Aaken foretold much better times he was punished with mockery and derision.

To produce evidence to counter his thesis van Aaken asked two female runners, 27 year old Anni Pede<sup>7</sup>, mother of two children and middle distance runner, and 19 year old Monika Boers, to participate in a marathon race in his hometown Waldniel, where his Club, the Olympic Sport Club was the organizer.

Both women were not supposed to be officially considered, because the German Athletic Association (DLV) did not permit an official start for women for the marathon race at this time.

They started 30 m behind the men. This was tolerated by the officials. Annie Pede arrived in third place on the overall placing with a time of 3:07:26 h and Monika Boers finished within 3:19:36,3 h.

In 1968 the SV Donaueschingen organized another marathon race. The Initiator, Roland Mall<sup>8</sup>, wanted to facilitate the marathon distance for men, but also to give access to women. Because advertising a marathon event for women was not allowed, further possibility of female participation was not mentioned in the approval application to the DLV.

Mall was convinced about the endurance skills of women, because he coached the women's cross country skiing team of his club in the Fifties.

In the periods when it did not snow female athletes prepared themselves for the competition season with long distance running and cross country running.

In the International Ski Federation and in the German organisation cross country skiing (5km and 10km races) had already been included, since 1952 and also at the Olympic Games.

Back to the marathon in Donaueschingen! To avoid the cause of a big sensation just the local press was informed. The DLV note of permission, which was just correct for men's races, was placed in the advertising in this way, that non informed would think that it was also valid for women. On October 6, 1968 the event was carried out. 51 women from five countries participated in the 1st Schwarzwald Marathon. Even a few members of the National team

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<sup>7</sup> **Pede**, Anni (\*14.01.1940); *OSC Waldniel*; GC: 1966 Waldlauf 1.230 m 4:29,0 min (3.), 3x800 m 7:02,8 min (3.); PBT: 800 m 2:19,5 min (1965), after Wedding: **Erdkamp** (AMRHEIN).

<sup>8</sup> **Mall**, Roland (1914-1993), long standing chairman member of the *SV Donaueschingen*.

started, including the German Ski Champion Michaela Endler<sup>9</sup> and the Vice Champion Ingrid Rothfuss<sup>10</sup>, both of them had already participated in Olympic Winter Games. From 51 female competitors, two did not pass the finish line. The winner was Marthel von dem Berge from Münster in 4:19:57<sup>h</sup> followed by Michaela Endler and Ingrid Rothfuss who finished together within 4:25:45<sup>h</sup>

Local press evaluated the 1st Schwarzwald Marathon where women participated as a big success. For the 2nd Schwarzwald Marathon in 1969 the organising committee applied to the DLV for an approval for women. The warder for women sport Heinz Fallak gave a positive feedback, but the DLV did not give their permission for 1969 and 1970.

He did not express a particular interdiction; consequently women were starting in these two years. In 1969, 876 runners participated. 53 women passed the finish line.

In 1970 1,151 participants from eleven countries were announced at the 3rd Schwarzwald Marathon. This event, as the running magazine *Condition*<sup>11</sup> said, that according to the number of participants the biggest marathon race in the world. 62 women started and just one failed to finish. After the successful participation in the three events in Bräunlingen, the DLV permitted an application for women on the January 27, 1971. Thus the DLV became the first national federation world wide, which officially allowed the start of marathon races for women. This happened in a period, where the 1500m- (1967) and 3000m- races (first race test 1970, first German Championship 1973) for women were carried out.

### 3. “K.V. Switzer”

The developments at the Boston Race were important to the history of the women’s marathon. Here all the events from 1928 reoccurred, but without the disadvantage of women’s interdiction. The Boston Marathon was, after the Olympic Marathon the second classical race over this distance. Since 1897 it was carried out regularly and it was strictly forbidden for women to participate. In 1951 a woman “in red” ran the marathon. Her name and the time she needed are not known until this day. In 1964 the American Roberta Gibb<sup>12</sup> applied for participation. It was rejected with the comment that women were whether able and nor allowed to run a marathon. Roberta Gibb did not accept this. She hid herself behind a bush, waited and then trotted behind the 415 participating men. She overtook 290 runners before she arrived at the finish after 3:21:40 h.

Will Cloney<sup>13</sup>, organizer of this competition, claimed that no female creature participated in this race, but he had to admit, that a woman used the same route as the men did. Gibb ran again the Boston route again in 1967 and reached an unofficial time of 3:27:17 h.

The tactic of Katherine Switzer<sup>14</sup> was much more valuable for the history of the women’s marathon. She announced herself with the initials of her name “K.V. Switzer” and got an

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<sup>9</sup> **Endler**, Michaela (\* 20.12.1945); multiple German Champion in Cross country skiing; participated three times in the Olympic Games, over 5 km (1968 - 25.; 1972 -3x5 km-relay; 1968 - 7.; 1972 - 4.); the Schwarzwald Marathon 1972 in 3:37:17 h.

<sup>10</sup> **Rothfuss**, Ingrid (\* 10.10.1948); Olympia Participant 1972 in Sapporo over 10 km (32.) and in the 3x5 km-relay (4.).

<sup>11</sup> *Condition* 2(1971)5,p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> **Gibb**, Roberta (\* 1943), studied art in Boston, lived shortly in California and was married with a sailor named **Bingay**, in 1967 divorced. She ran for many years, but was more a jogger and did not participate in competitions.

<sup>13</sup> **Cloney**, Will (1912-2003), from 1947 until 1982 Director of the Boston Marathon, sport journalist, wrote for several daily newspapers in Boston.

<sup>14</sup> **Switzer**, Katherine (\* 1947), participated in many marathon races, never reached top times. When she was an employee of the cosmetic company Avon she had the idea, to make her company popular

official starting number. When Will Cloney saw the woman shortly after the start, it was too late to take her out of the race, but Jock Semple<sup>15</sup>, the second event director, being the quicker of both, ran after her and tried to push her away from the route. Katherine Switzer's friend, the sturdy hammer thrower Tom Miller, who accompanied her, helped and pushed the official to the side<sup>16</sup>. Switzer finished the race, like she claimed, after 4:20:--°h, but was excluded from the Amateur Athletic Federation for lifetime.

A journalist had recorded this scene. The pictures went all over the world and pushed people to reflect. This caused tolerant event organizers to give women the liberty to decide, if they wanted to participate in the Marathon or not. In conclusion to that decision one could say that this behaviour of the officials was a very embarrassing general situation, but it was also very helpful for women runners at this period. Because of this occurrence the justified admission of the long distances in the canon of the athletic disciplines, was shorted by years.

When Kathy Switzer participated with her official starting number at the Boston race in 1972 it came to reconciliation. Semple, who felt very remorseful in the meantime about his "uncomfortable celebrity" joined her and gave her demonstratively a kiss.

#### 4. The way to recognition

In these years the number of American organizers who tolerated women in their races rose, but they were still not officially recorded on the result lists. The female runners had to remember, shortly before finishing, the number of a male runner, who was closest to them and overtook his time onto the record lists.

February 28, 1970 16 year old Caroline Walker improved Annie Pede's time to 3:02:53 h. The women approached a first dream limit, to undercut the three hour barrier. In October of the same year the Road Runners Club of America whose president, Vincent J. Chiappetta, was a big supporter of the women's long distance race, organized a kind of unofficial American Women's Marathon Competition. The race was registered as a club internal race and no official permission by the responsible federation was needed.

Six women started and four crossed the finish line. The first one was Sara Berman, who reserved an unofficial first place before Nina Kuscsik<sup>17</sup>. In 1971 the world best time had been at least broken three times and was clearly under three hours, even "pressed" under 2:50:00 h. May 9, Beth Bonner<sup>18</sup> ran the Marathon in Philadelphia in 3:01:42 h. One month later Sara Berman in 3:00:35 h. Probably the distance was not 42.195 km long. Beth Bonner and Nina Kuscsik trained very hard during the summer in Brockton to undercut the three hours in the New York Marathon.

Bonner and Kuscsik ran together for a long time. After 22 Kilometres Beth Bonner pulled away but from the 32 km mark Nina Kuscsik came closer and closer, but could not reach her

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becoming the sponsor of Avon Marathons, the first in 1978 in Atlanta, than 1979 in Waldniel, 1980 in London etc.

<sup>15</sup> **Semple**, Jock (1903-1988), immigrated from Scotland, carpenter, later independent masseur, marathon runner with a top time of 2:44:29 h (1930, 7th in Boston), finished ten times the marathon under the top ten, 1953 Co-Director of the Boston event.

<sup>16</sup> Cp. SONNTAG, Werner, "The man, who attacked Kathy Switzer", in: *Spiridon* 14(1988)10, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> **Kuscsik**, Nina (\* 1939), Kathy **Switzer** can be considered as a pioneer of the women marathon in the USA, started 1967 with jogging, ran her first marathon in 1969 in Boston within 3:46:-- h, won there 1972 and in New York 1972 and 1973, finished 80 Marathon races; Best times 2:50:22 h, put 1977 with 6:35:53 h a US-Record for over 50 miles, wrote several articles about long distance races for women in subject- und fitness-magazines.

<sup>18</sup> **Bonner**, Beth (\* 1952), was middle - distance runner first, ran 1971 3,000 m in 9:48,1 m, 11. resp. 14. in the cross World Championship 1971 resp. 1972.

opponent, who arrived after 2:55:22 h before Nina Kuscik (2:56:04 h). Third was Sara Berman in 3:03:46 h. Two months later, on December 2, the Californian Cheryl Bridges<sup>19</sup> ran the marathon distance within 2:49:40<sup>o</sup>h in Culver City.

The performance of the 30 year old Australian Adrien Beames, mother of three children, who ran a marathon in Weribee on August 31, 1971 in 2:46:39<sup>o</sup>h, must not be ignored. This performance is not listed in the most world's best lists, because no official time was recorded from this woman. The Australian Federation reacted very hard and disqualified Adrien Beames.

The times of American runners forced the American federation to increase the distance limit to 10 miles and permit also the marathon to "certain" women. These were those, who had already completed a marathon. This decision was a bit curious, because one year later the federation gave permission to women even without this limitation. In this year also Will Cloney allowed an official women rating in Boston. In April 1972 eight women were standing on the start line. Nina Kuscsik won within 3:10:21 h.

The American Athletic Federation still tangled itself in fights of retreats and used tactics of delay. In 1972 Fred Lebow, the director of the New York Race, was instructed, that women should start ten minutes earlier. The female runners resented it as an unjustified discrimination and countered in their way. After the starting shot they did not start running and waited ten minutes until the men started. They did not care, that their times were evaluated worse, because of these ten minutes: 1. Nina Kuscsik in 3:21:54,8 h. In the following year women and men were allowed to start together and Nina Kuscik won in 2:57:02,2 h before Kathy Switzer, who ran the distance in 3:16:02<sup>o</sup>h. She dominated the New York Race also in 1974 with a time of 3:07:19 h.

In 1972 a health test was requested, that was not required by men. Women also had to fight against this restriction and were successful.

This way to definitive recognition could not be stopped and is best shown by the following table:

Oct. 28, 1973	1st Women's marathon in Waldniel 1. Christa Kofferschläger in 2:59:25,6 h
Oct. 1973	US Athletic Federation recognized the women's marathon
Jan. 10, 1974	1st US Championships in San Mateo 1. Master Judy Ikenberry in 2:55:17 h
Sept. 23, 1974	1st International Women's Marathon in Waldniel
Oct. 11, 1975	1st German Women's Marathon Championships in Bräulingen 1. Christa Vahlensiek (née Kofferschläger) in 2:45:43,0 <sup>o</sup> h more national competitions are due to follow
Mar. 19, 1978	1st Avon Marathon Race in Atlanta
1980	IAAF decision, to include the first Women's World Championship in their programme in 1983
Autumn 1981	The IOC-Session Baden-Baden decides to include the Women's Marathon into the program
Sept. 12, 1972	1st Women's Marathon European Championships in Athens 1. Rosa Mota (POR) in 2:36:03 <sup>o</sup> h
Aug. 7, 1973	1st Women's Marathon Championships in Helsinki 1. Grete Waitz (NOR) in 2:28:09 <sup>o</sup> h

<sup>19</sup> **Bridges**, Cheryl (\* 25.12.1947), track runner in the first place; PBT: 5,000 m 16:47,7 min (1986), 10,000 m 35:33,6 min (1976); 11., 4., 18., 28., 38. at the Cross World Championships 1968, 1969, 1970, 1974, 1976.

Dec. 5, 1984      1st Olympic Women's Marathon in Los Angeles  
1. Joan Benoit (USA) in 2:24:52<sup>o</sup>h  
2. Grete Waitz (NOR) in 2:26:18<sup>o</sup>h  
3. Rosa Mota (POR) in 2:26:57<sup>o</sup>h

With that, all resistance should have been broken. A court decision was even necessary, which the women lost, before the first 10,000m race became "Olympic". In 1996 the 3,000m, which existed since 1984, became the 5,000m distance and in 2008 women will have the possibility to overcome in the Olympics the last "Bastion" of the long distances, ergo 3,000m hurdle race.