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A Long Time Coming: Running through the women's marathon revolution

Jacqueline Hansen

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Women had to travel a long, hard road to equality in long-distance running. The 26.2-mile distance was the least of this effort. In the 1960s, when Jacqueline Hansen began running, the longest Olympic women's race was 800 meters – less than half a mile. She grew up with the sport, running her first marathon in 1972, winning the Boston Marathon in 1973, then setting world records in 1974 (first sub-2:45 time for a woman) and 1975 (with the first sub-2:40). Her efforts for women's running rights were just beginning then. Hansen became a crusader for this cause, and her work with the International Runners Committee helped convince sports officials to add the marathon to the Olympic program in 1984. The inaugural marathon champion, Joan Benoit Samuelson, writes in the Foreword: "How fitting it was that the first Olympic Marathon for women was run in Jacqueline's hometown of Los Angeles. Her book tells the story of a true pioneer, who has lived the history of our sport and has helped make possible all that we runners do today."

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