

2012 State of the Sport Part I: Growth of Women's Running

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Since Title IX, women's running has come a "long way" and is now a driving force in Second Running Boom and running industry growth; Women's National Runner Survey released

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – (May 9, 2012) – With more than 7 million female U.S. road race finishers in 2011, a record high according to **Running USA**, it's difficult to imagine that just 40 years ago running was not widely considered an appropriate sport for women. The longest distance women were allowed to run in the 1960 Rome Olympics was just 800 meters, and later, until the marathon and 3000 meters were added at the 1984 Los Angeles Games, the 1500 meters. At organized road races, females often ran unofficially or faced being expelled or prevented from running at the starting line. Fast forward 40 years, and things are radically different. The **2012 State of the Sport – Part I: Growth of Women's Running** examines the statistics and trends on women's running today in the United States.

The Not-So Distant Past

In 1967, **Kathrine Switzer** registered and received a bib number for the famed Boston Marathon using only her initials, K.V. and last name, and during the race, official **Jock Semple** infamously tried to shove her off the course. The worldwide story led to an outcry for gender equity and pushed decision-makers for official inclusion of women in organized races. As gender and culture roles evolved in the U.S. from 1960-80, long distance running became part of this larger revolution.

In April, the Boston Marathon honored the women's class of 1972, which included nine runners who were "officially" entered to run in the Boston Marathon. Since those nine entries and groundbreaking Title IX legislation that was passed on June 23, 1972, women's participation in long-distance events has grown and later boomed, with female runners now accounting for more than 53% of event finishers nationwide compared to less than 20% of finishers during the 1970s First Running Boom. For the 2012 Boston Marathon, 42% of the entrants were women (11,152 out of 26,656).

Women's Running Apparel and Shoes

With the surge in women's running, both athletic shoe and large apparel manufacturing companies have shifted their marketing efforts in order to meet demand, and new companies have emerged to fulfill a growing need. These companies have found strategic ways to attract their growing target demographic: female runners. With women seeking both performance and style, manufacturers have specifically designed running apparel and gear for the woman's body including running skirts, female-fit tanks/shirts, running bras, tights, capris and shoes all in vibrant colors.

Early in women's running, there was no such category as women's running apparel. In fact, it wasn't until the late 1970s that the running bra was invented, based on the prototype of two male jockstraps being sewn together. The idea was to provide women with more support and less chafing during their runs (this product was initially called the "jockbra", and later, earned the official name Jogbra).

Nike, a leader in product innovation, has been part of this trend. In the mid-1980s, Nike developed a women's "last" for their women's shoe line. Prior to this time, any female looking for a running shoe had to purchase a men's shoe in a smaller size. But the shoe lasts used for men's running shoes weren't effective at addressing the biomechanical and anatomical differences for women, such as the ratio of heel-to-forefoot, arch support and the pronation pattern due to hip alignment. Most running shoe companies today offer a full line of women's running shoes that provide cushioning and stability specifically for the needs of female runners.

According to Running USA's **2012 Women's National Runner Survey**, 65% of the female respondents spent more than \$90 on running shoes last year and 80% spent \$100 or greater on running apparel in the last 12 months. In both cases, these female core runners were more apt to buy from the local running store.

Why She Runs

Why are more women running: young and old, heavy or thin, former athlete or not? Women run for innately personal reasons, but there are some universal tendencies. Kristin Armstrong, contributing editor to *Runner's World* and author of *Mile Markers: The 26.2 Most Important Reasons Why Women Run* talked about her own personal journey. "Running is connected to my family, my parenting, my spiritual life, my fitness, my friendships, my health, my sanity, my peace. I can clear my head and solve problems when I run, or make peace with not knowing. I can find beauty, or at least redemption, no matter what."

Perhaps this is why women run, because the sport touches them on so many levels.

In *The Complete Book of Running for Women*, author **Claire Kowalchik** states that running is one of the simplest, fastest, most accessible ways to fitness and good health. You don't need a partner, special equipment, a gym membership, or even much time. A mere 20 minutes three or four times a week is enough to make you fit. This convenience of the sport is an appealing factor to women and all the challenges they face with taking care of family, work and other stresses.

Women-Only Events

Running USA reports that there were more than 200 "women-only" events in the U.S. last year meeting the criteria of 95% female participation or more. In 2011, there were 18 women-only events with 2,000-plus finishers and 12 of the top 30 women-only events were half-marathons where females dominate the 13.1 distance with 59% participation.

Women-only events have surged in the last decade meeting the growing demand of female runners. Some ladies prefer the women-only events perhaps because they enjoy the camaraderie of other female runners, and still others feel less self-conscious about their pace. Also, many women-only events offer an array of activities including a health and fitness expo just for ladies and runner medals or gifts specific to the female participant. The Nike Women's Marathon offers each finisher a Tiffany's necklace handed to them by San Francisco firefighters in tuxedos – a perk certainly appreciated by the female demographic.

Regardless of whether an event is women-only or not, many race organizers have found ways to meet the needs of their female running participants by offering shirt styles in a female cut and offering larger cuts for all shapes and sizes. Many races are now promoting women-only destination events with the idea that participants can leave behind their work or family obligations and travel with a running girlfriend to enjoy competition and relaxation time simultaneously. The Disney and Nike women-only races, Lady Speed Stick Women's Half Marathon series, ZOOMA Women's Race series, Divas Half Marathon series, the new Thelma & Louise Half Marathon and Athena events are examples of such competitions.

2011 Top 5 U.S. Women-Only Events (95% or greater female)

	Finishers	Event Name
15,234		Nike Women's Half-Marathon, CA
13,106		Disney Princess Half-marathon, FL
10,790E		St. Luke's Women's Fitness Celebration 5K, ID (1,290 timed)
7,508		More/Fitness Women's Magazine Half-Marathon, NY
6,363		Tufts Health Plan 10K for Women, MA

E = Estimate; not all finishers timed.

Attracting New Runners

Running has turned into an appealing sport for many women, not just so they can become physically fit and lose weight. For others, it gives them the opportunity to train toward a goal and to join friends and family for a good cause. Training programs, both charity and non-charity alike, have contributed to the growth of women in running. These programs welcome women of all shapes and sizes, previous running experience or not.

Coach-led training programs provide a solid foundation for a new runner to safely and effectively learn how to run and be successful in the sport. With well-organized community events and large destination races, new runners can participate in any event and achieve their goals whether it means running in honor of a breast cancer victim, logging miles to raise money or simply crossing the finish line for the very first time.

Women's National Runner Survey

Running USA has just released the 2012 Women's National Runner Survey, which explores the demographics, lifestyle, attitude, habits and product preferences of female core runners nationwide.

For more information about the Women's National Runner Survey, click here:

<http://www.runningusa.org/node/57812>

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