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OFFER THE ULTIMATE
GIRLS' WEEKEND.**

WOMEN ON THE RUN

An all-male sport at the inception of the first running boom, recreational running is now dominated by women

BY LINZAY LOGAN

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While we know it looms large, only the tower tips of the iconic Golden Gate Bridge are visible through the thick fog as we run up through the Marina to the hills of the Presidio. When we hit the first big hill we all slow our pace, but the energy and determination of the 25,000 women surrounding me never waivers. I run next to two women running to celebrate the life of a friend who recently died of cancer at the age of 25. Three girls wearing matching, bright pink tutus stop together to chat and wait for the port-a-potty. And both sides of the hill are filled with friends, husbands, parents and other supporters there to cheer all of us up and over San Francisco's infamously hilly terrain.

It's when I hit the bra exchange just after mile six, where runners can exchange their bra for a new Nike sports bra, that I realize what I am doing—I'm not just running another half-marathon. I'm in the middle of the second running boom; and this time women are leading the charge.

The original running boom sprouted in the U.S. in the early 1970s after Frank Shorter ran to Olympic marathon victory, inspiring more than 25 million dads, brothers, men and boys to lace up their Nikes and pull up their tube socks. Steve Prefontaine and Bill Rodgers became household names, running shoe and apparel manufacturers grew exponentially and road races began popping up all over the U.S. The marathon, and other road running distances, were becoming an attainable feat for nearly everyone. That is, as long as you were a man.

Women weren't just outnumbered at races back then, they simply weren't allowed.

"Women of that era were raised believing that if you were going to do anything arduous or athletic, you would lose your femininity, never have kids and your uterus would fall out," explains Kathrine Switzer, the first woman to run the Boston

Marathon wearing an official bib. "There was this myth that a female athlete was going to turn into a guy, that we were fragile and needed to be looked after and it was somehow inappropriate [to run]."

Switzer had no idea what kind of race she was in for when she toed the line at Boston in the spring of 1967. As she headed into the fourth mile of the race, race director Jock Semple jumped off the press truck and tried to grab Switzer after hearing a woman had "infiltrated" his race.

"He jumped off the bus and came after me from behind," Switzer recalls. "He screamed at me 'get the hell out of my race and give me those numbers.' The guys were yelling, the people on the press truck were screaming and Semple grabbed the bib on my back. As my boyfriend hit him hard with a cross body block, I heard my coach yell, 'run like hell,' so I did."

Looking at the runners all around me, it's clear the tables have turned. Out of the nearly 25,000 runners at the ninth annual San Francisco Nike Women's Marathon and Half-Marathon on Oct. 14, fewer than 700 of them are men. This race is for the girls. As I walked through the "expotique" (a refreshing blend of race expo and high-end fashion boutique) to pick up my race bib, I noticed the tent wasn't filled with the typical road race vendors and testosterone. To my right women were sitting in salon chairs getting their hair styled, and, in the center of the gigantic tent covering San Francisco's Union Square, there were several changing rooms with fashion stylists outfitting runners for both on and off the course.

But how did this happen? How did road racing in the U.S. transition from a male-dominated sport to one where nearly just as many women are winning Olympic medals than men? Why are more than half the runners toeing the line at 5Ks and half-marathons across the country women?



“RUNNING BUILDS CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM THAT MANY WOMEN HAVE NEVER HAD.”

In 2011 nearly 14 million people ran a road race in the U.S., and according to Ryan Lamppa, research statistician at Running USA, more than 7.6 million of those runners, or 54 percent, were women. That’s up from just 25 percent in 1990 and an essentially nonexistent women’s long distance running field 40 years ago.

“It’s quite possible that women could make up 60 percent of finishers in the future,” he predicts. “There is no doubt women will continue to drive the growth of the sport.”

Recognizing women as the driving force in running, The Nike Women’s Marathon and other women’s-specific races, such as the Disney Princess races, She Runs and the Women’s Running series are taking place in most major U.S. cities. The draw for most women? A non-intimidating and welcoming opportunity to run with their girlfriends and reach a goal—while having fun.

Not just creating an opportunity for women to run, these women-only races offer the ultimate girls’ weekend. From a Tiffany necklace handed out by firemen in tuxedos at the finish line of the Nike Women’s races to a single stem rose and a pink boa for all runners at the Diva Half-Marathon Series, these races provide a supportive atmosphere and enough glitter and gump-tion, pink and passion to encourage even the race averse to give it a try.

“We wanted to create a women’s race that would celebrate the power of women’s running,” says Jacie Prieto, Nike’s media representative. “We’re excited to see all these girls discovering their love and passion for running.”

Although Nike says even though everything about the race is for the girls, men are more than welcome to participate.

“We certainly don’t want to discourage any men from running the race because a lot of them do it in honor of their mother, sister or wife battling cancer,” Prieto says. “We welcome everyone

who is looking to enjoy the race experience.”

However, not every woman’s race feels the same way. At the Disney World Princess Half-Marathon in 2011, officials politely shunned winner Ken Brooks around the finish line tape because the race series is all about encouraging the efforts and accomplishments of women. When he finished more than eight minutes ahead of the fastest woman, Brooks joked that spectators were so silent he could hear crickets. Much like the turnout at Nike Women’s races, only 683 of the 17,000 Disney Princess half-marathon finishers were men.

Every woman in the room is all smiles, picking up her bib and checking out the expotique. The energy of the thousands ready to line up the next day and put all of their training to the test is undeniable. But when four of the biggest names in women’s running—Allyson Felix, Kara Goucher, Shalane Flanagan and Joan Benoit Samuelson—come out on the stage the tent truly comes alive.

The gold medalist in the first women’s Olympic Marathon in 1984, Samuelson has been a tireless pioneer for women’s long distance running. The Nike Women’s Marathon credits her as the inspiration behind the race, though Samuelson, who continues to set national age-group records into her 50s, humbly shrugged off the compliment when we sat down together after the race.

“Everyone here inspires me,” says Samuelson, who ran the race alongside Goucher, Flanagan and her daughter, Abby. “The inspiration has come full circle. Everyone has their own story.”

Beginning as a man’s sport that sidelined women because of the “scientific” evidence that it was physically unhealthy for women to run, running as a sport today is dominated by women of all ages, races, body types and running abilities. The stigma that you have to be a man, young and have a runner’s body type is no longer an excuse not to run. Everyone can.

“And that’s what is really cool about our sport,” Samuelson gloats. “It welcomes everyone: Game on.”

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Courtesy of Nike

RUNNING WITH PASSION AND PURPOSE

➔ Professional runner, businesswoman and soon-to-be mom, **LAUREN FLESHMAN**, has figured it all out. The 31-year-old Oregonian has co-founded two companies, Picky Bars and Believe I Am, writes a popular blog, is a two-time national 5K champion and owns a 14:58 personal best in the distance.

WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE TO WOMEN WHO WOULD LIKE TO BECOME MORE COMMITTED RUNNERS? "I would encourage women to do more shorter races as opposed to longer races. It gives you more structure and more stepping stones along the way as you improve. I'd recommend doing 10Ks and half-marathons at the longest so you can recover faster. [Running shorter races] also makes the risk of injury less and you're less likely to get discouraged. 5K, 10K, half-marathon—those are your money events. Don't be in a rush to do a marathon. And don't be afraid to cross-train."

HOW CAN FEMALE RUNNERS HELP BUILD THE SPORT OF RUNNING? "It's awesome to see a bunch of girls in Spandex and sweaty running shirts in coffee shops after their workouts. All it takes is people continuing to be open and welcoming and supportive of one another. Also, think global, act local. If we can apply that to our running and support women's events and professional female runners I think that will really help build the sport."

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH A BUSY LIFE AND RUNNING? "The most important tactic I use is working with other people. If I leave training to my own devices, and I get too busy, my training suffers. I'll skip an afternoon run or something. But if I plan my runs with one of my buddies and plan out when we're going to run I plan the rest of my schedule around

that. And it's really hard to flake out on a friend for a run but it's really easy to flake out on yourself. Plus training just flies by when you're with other people."

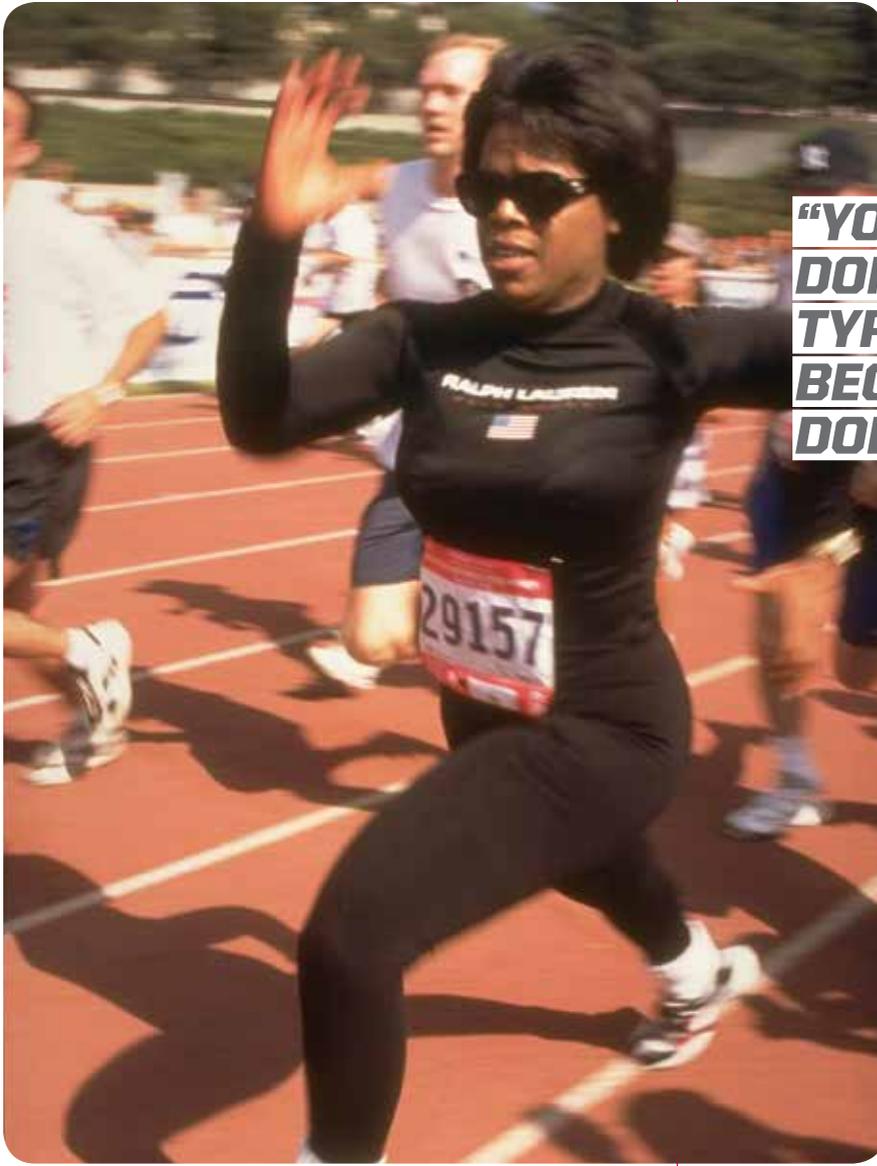
GOING THROUGH INJURIES IS OFTEN AN UNAVOIDABLE PART OF BEING A RUNNER. WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE TO RUNNERS GOING THROUGH INJURY?

"There are two different ways to approach injuries. My first approach is to work with it and work around it by staying really engaged and committed to my goals. Do the rehab, get treatment and do whatever else is needed to make this better. This approach really requires being a fighter, super tough and smart, which is a challenge. Most of the time this will work. But then there are those injuries where it doesn't work. Pretty much every runner has gone through that or will go through that and no matter what you do, the injury just hangs around and the more you try to fight it the worse it gets. You get to a point where you have to let it go. I think that is a more advanced strategy that takes runners longer to get to. Some runners never learn and will keep fighting and fighting to their own detriment. You need to be OK to get out of shape and to let a goal go, because it will be healed when it's healed. Once you let it go, it comes together." — L.L.

Go to www.asklaurenfleshman.com to read Lauren's blog or follow her on Twitter at @laurenfleshman.



“RUNNING SHORTER RACES ALSO MAKES THE RISK OF INJURY LESS AND YOU’RE LESS LIKELY TO GET DISCOURAGED.”



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However, just 30 year ago, this was not the case. Prior to 1972, the year Title IX legislation passed, providing women the right to participate in school sports, athletic opportunities for women and girls were few and far between.

“I was in high school before Title IX legislation passed,” said Samuelson, the only woman to run a sub-3-hour marathon in five different decades. “So running [for the school team] wasn’t even an option for me. When I first started to run I was embarrassed to be seen. I would stop when cars passed and pretend I was picking flowers.”

When schools began implementing Title IX legislation and offering girls the opportunity to play on sports teams, including track and cross country, “it really transformed the landscape,” Switzer says.

Girls and young women were spreading their athletic wings and beginning to experience the sense of empowerment inherent in sports and running.

“Running builds confidence and self esteem that many women have never had,” according to Switzer, who introduced more than 1 million women to running through the Avon Global Women’s Running Circuit with more than 200 events in 21 countries between 1978 and 1986. “It gives women the sense of feeling that ‘I can do anything.’ And there are more women running than men now because of that.”

Running has always been a way to ward off stress, lose weight and get fit, but now more than ever Americans, and women in particular, are hitting the roads for their health.

“There are more resources than ever promoting health and

Jan Casciari, who also ran the Nike Women’s Half-marathon with her daughter, agrees.

“Anybody can do it,” says the 55-year-old from San Diego. “Just put on a pair of shoes, walk out your door and run.”

Take a look at any race today and it is clear anyone can be a runner, but when Oprah ran the Marine Corps Marathon in 1994 she opened up the door for millions of women to call themselves runners.

“Prior to the second running boom runners were skinny ectomorphs,” Lamma says. “That’s not the case any more. We are all runners. It doesn’t matter how fast or slow, or what body type you have. When someone like Oprah does a marathon you can’t say you don’t have the body type of a runner because neither does Oprah. She is a cultural icon and exposed our sport to millions and millions of people, mainly women. That was 18 years ago but it still resonates today.”

fitness,” says Juli Benson, the Air Force Academy men’s and women’s cross country head coach. “Even if you just watch the nightly news, more often than not, there is a segment on health care. With all the available research and resources, I think [the importance of living and healthy life] is a little more in your face now.”

But good health isn’t enough to be driving running’s second coming. People run and do races because it’s fun and social. In a time when most Americans live in overdrive, running provides women a respite to their day, a time when it’s OK to relax and have fun with their girlfriends.

“It’s a social thing,” says Nike Women’s Marathon participant Mona Matheus, 51, of San Diego. “In our community we run early, early in the morning before work, and it’s mostly women running out there because that’s the only way you can do it all. If you want to exercise, be a mom and have a career, you’ve got to be done running in time to make lunches and get to work.”

Crossing the finish line, I smile and throw my hands up for the cameras, happy to add another notch to my half-marathon belt. I wait for my best friend to cross the finish line, and when she does, firefighters give us our Tiffany necklaces and we pause for a picture. Our smiles of joy, accomplishment and camaraderie are bigger than when we began, and I remember all over again why I and so many other women love this sport. **CM**



► Three of the biggest names in running, Samuelson, Flanagan and Goucher cheered runners on at the finish line of the 2012 Nike Women’s Marathon.

**“WE RUN EARLY, EARLY
IN THE MORNING
BEFORE WORK BECAUSE
THAT’S THE ONLY WAY
YOU CAN DO IT ALL”**



• WOMEN'S RUNNING •

JUST FOR HER

➔ Founded in 2009, *WOMEN'S RUNNING* is the only women-specific running magazine in the U.S. The go-to source for fitness-minded females is expanding to 10 issues in 2013. For more on where to find the magazine or its digital edition, go to www.womensrunning.com. The *WOMEN'S HALF MARATHON SERIES* (www.womenshalf.competitor.com) will visit five cities in 2013.