

SPORTS

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Iconic runner hoping for a new 'revolution'

Women's rights, running trailblazer is competing in National Senior Games

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Four hours, 20 minutes.

That was how long it took Boston Marathon participant No. 261 — a run that catapulted 20-year-old Kathrine Switzer from anonymity to historical icon in her sport and for gender equality.

As the first woman to officially complete the race as a registered participant, it was a watershed moment for the sport and, thanks to a series of photos of her being attacked on the course by a race official trying to rip off her racing bib once he discovered she was competing, it became a galvanizing moment in the women's rights movement of the era.

But that four hours and 20 minutes was also the time a group of curmudgeon old male sports writers had to stand in the cold, wet Massachusetts evening (the race started mid-day then), waiting not to talk to the winners for their story that day, but to the unknown Syracuse University student about her run, which they assumed was just a publicity stunt.

"There were these irascible journalists who had been standing out in the wet, cold for four hours waiting for me to finish," remembers Switzer, ironically studying to be a sports journalist herself at the time. "They were like 'What are you trying to prove?' and 'Are you a suffragette?'"

"One of them said, 'This is just a joke, isn't it? You're never going to run Boston again, are you? Never run another marathon?' And I looked at him really steely-eyed and I was 20 and I said, 'Buddy, someday you're going to read about a little old lady at 80 years of age who drops dead on a training run in Central Park. It's going to be me. I am going to run forever.'"

Fifty two years later, she's not the only one still running.

Switzer's historic jog through Boston on that cold April day in



GREG SORBER/JOURNAL

Marathon pioneer Kathrine Switzer speaks during the National Senior Games Celebration of Athletes on Wednesday night inside Dreamstyle Arena - the Pit.



PHOTO COURTESY BOSTON HERALD

In this series of photos from the 1967 Boston Marathon, Kathrine Switzer (261) is attacked by race official Jock Semple, who tried to rip her racing bib from her once he discovered she was racing. Her then-boyfriend Tom Miller knocked Semple to the ground.

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Switzer pushing for healthy lifestyles

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1967 kick-started the emergence of women's running in the United States. Later, she was the driving force behind the movement that landed women's marathon in the 1984 Olympic Games. Today, more women are considered avid runners than men and at 72 years old, Switzer is one of them.

She will compete Friday in the National Senior Games women's 5-kilometer road race at Balloon Fiesta Park and on Wednesday night was one of the speakers on behalf of the Games' title sponsor, Humana, at the event's Celebration of Athletes at Dreamstyle Arena — the Pit.

"They're the generation that's leading this revolution now," Switzer told the Journal on Wednesday, speaking of the nearly 14,000 athletes competing over two weeks in Albuquerque as part of the largest-ever National Senior Games.

"I was known for creating a revolution in women's running years ago and now there are more women running in the United States than men. These women and men (in the National Senior Games) are refuting all the myths about aging. They're out there doing it. They're showing people that it's never too late to start. You can have success, joy and good health. They're changing the way people think about aging."

Switzer, who says she has now adjusted the prediction she gave that Boston sportswriter a half century ago to at least 95 years old before she can't run anymore.

"Or later," she joked. "Who knows?"

When she completed a 50-year



GREG SORBER/JOURNAL

Natalie Miller of Albuquerque, Christine Savilla of Santa Fe, and Elsie Barber of Rio Rancho cheer during Wednesday night's National Senior Games' Celebration of Athletes at Dreamstyle Arena — the Pit.

anniversary marathon in 2017 in New York, Humana approached her about becoming an ambassador for their primary goal, and that of the National Senior Games. That is being a symbol of healthy, active lifestyles of people well into what is considered their "senior" years.

"They (National Senior Games competitors) are pursuing lifelong health," Switzer said. "Humana actually believes, and that's why I'm so happy to have a partnership with them, that health is a component of the whole person — emotional health, social health as well as the physical component."

In addition to her work with Humana, Switzer remains not only an avid runner, but earlier this month, she announced she had signed with Chastain Film Capital to release the screen

rights of her 2007 best selling memoir *Marathon Woman*. She also runs the global non-profit 261 Fearless, an organization that aims at using "running as a vehicle to empower and unite women through the creation of local non-competitive running clubs, education programs, communication platforms and social running events."

The 261 in the foundation's name is a nod to her bib number in the 1967 Boston Marathon, a number that has since been retired by the event because of the impact Switzer had on a sport and a county.

It's an impact she's trying to continue today.

"Probably somebody would have come along and pushed that (no-women rule in the marathon)," Switzer said. "But the point is it happened then. And I'm glad it did."