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## In '67, Switzer was 'Magellan' in sweats

The Boston Globe

By John Powers, Globe Staff | April 13, 2007

Kathrine Switzer wonders what would have happened if that April day in 1967 had come up warm and sunny in Hopkinton. "History might have been different," she muses. "I would have had a really cute outfit on, shorts and a top, and I would have been stopped at the starting line."

Or if she'd entered the race as Kathrine instead of K.V., Boston Athletic Association officials might have noticed the feminine name and never issued her a number.

But the day came up raw, windy, and wet, Switzer wore a hooded sweatsuit into the chute, and she got 4 miles along before it became clear that No. 261 was a female.

Switzer wasn't the first woman to run the Boston Marathon. Roberta Gibb had done it in 1966 and ran again that day, outpacing Switzer by more than 50 minutes. But it was Switzer who was nearly chased off the course by race director Will Cloney and "guardian" Jock Semple, who was always on the lookout for frauds trying to crash the world's most august race. "Probably it was me being in the race with a number," says Switzer, "because they never tackled Roberta."

Switzer was no fraud. She'd run track against men at Lynchburg College before transferring to Syracuse, where she trained with the men's cross-country team. When she finished a 31-mile workout with coach Arnie Briggs, he agreed to bring her to Boston, albeit with reservations. "He thought we'd fall off the edge of the earth and that the monsters would get us," Switzer recalls. "But I felt like Magellan."

When she found herself being grabbed at by Semple before her hammer-throwing boyfriend body-blocked him out of the way, Switzer was startled, then frightened, then angry. Later, she understood where her pursuer was coming from. "The Boston Marathon was the thing that gave Jock his sense of purpose," Switzer says. "It was his baby, his love, his passion. So when I came along he thought that I was one of those clowns, that I was doing a prank."

She had come to stay the course, and when the next day's newspaper reports had her dropping out, Switzer was furious. "They almost wanted me to and certainly expected me to," she says.

Nobody could deny, though, that something historic had happened in Boston. "The picture was flashed around the world," says Switzer, who promptly was expelled from the Amateur Athletic Union. "Half of the public reaction was: She deserved it, she shouldn't be there. The other half was: Bravo! She did it."

The important thing was for women to keep coming back and finishing. Switzer returned twice more unofficially, along with fellow pioneers Sara Mae Berman and Nina Kuscsik and she was on the starting line in 1972 for the first official women's race. "It was so wonderful," she says. "The atmosphere was fabulous. We were all smiling. We were 'real' athletes."

Even Semple finally acknowledged that. "When I was on the starting line in 1973, I heard him shouting and I thought, 'My God, what have I done now?' " Switzer recalls. "And Jock grabbed me and turned me around and said 'C'mon lass, let's get a wee bit of notoriety.' Then he planted a big kiss on my face."

She was a Marathon Woman (the title of her new book) and Switzer went on to win in New York and become a key force behind the event's inclusion in the Olympics. "Just before Jock died [in 1988] I went up to visit him in the hospital and we relived a few minutes and laughed and had so much fun," she says. "It was the best possible way to say goodbye."■

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