THE MIND POWER ISSUE

MEN'S Running

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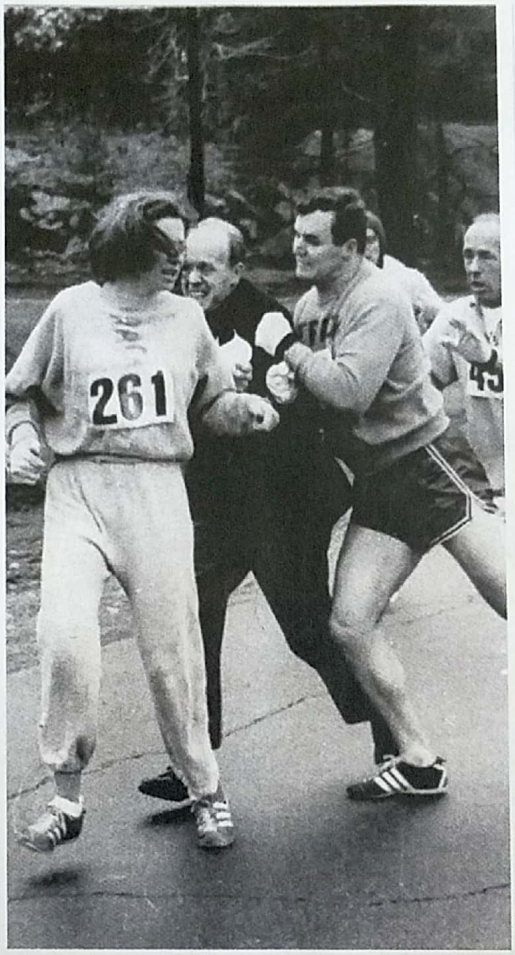
THE OTHER HALF

Are Good For Age times harder for men than women? **Laura Fountain** has her say

Protective boyfriend: Kathrine Switzer's partner prevents a Boston Marathon official from forcibly removing her from the race in 1967



© Boston Herald

In May, I achieved something I'd been working towards for a few years: I ran 3:30 at the Edinburgh Marathon, a time that would qualify me to enter the Boston Marathon.

Before this I'd spent a couple of training cycles trying to run under 3:45 to gain Good For Age (GFA) entry into the notoriously difficult-to-enter London Marathon. Once this had been ticked off, along with running the hallowed 26.2-mile route to The Mall, Boston became my goal.

As a 34-year-old woman, Boston demanded I run a marathon faster than 3:35 for my entry to be considered. A man of the same age would need to run under 3:05. Some guys feel that's unfair: that it's a harder task than that faced by women.

"AS A GENDER, MEN HAVE HAD A HEAD START IN THE MARATHON"

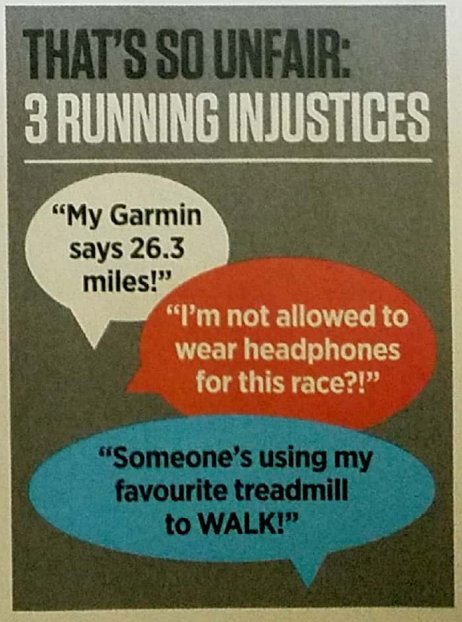
The Boston Marathon is significant to me as a female runner. Until fairly recently, women weren't allowed to run marathons and it was events that happened in Boston that helped change that. Roberta 'Bobby' Gibb was the first woman to run Boston – she gained entry by hiding in a hedge at the start and running without a number. Kathrine Switzer ran the men-only race with a bib after registering as the gender-neutral 'K Switzer'. A picture of an official named Jock Semple trying to forcibly eject her from the course is now more famous than any winner's photo from the race.

It wasn't until 1971 that women were allowed to run Boston, but we still had to wait until 1984 for the Olympics to add a women's race.

So when men tell me it's "unfair" on them that their GFA or BQ times are faster than for women of the same age, I'm not sympathetic, and I certainly don't think the answer is to make men's qualifying times more lenient. As a gender, men have had a head start when it comes to the marathon and women are still playing catch-up, both at an elite and amateur level. As much as I'd hate to see Paula Radcliffe's world record broken, I'm keen to see the gap between the men's and women's marathon records narrow and women of all levels get faster.

I'd be happy for London GFA times for women to get faster because these times are based on the average time women of each age group take to complete the race. It might make it harder for me to qualify, but it would mean women are getting faster and catching up with the men. And it means that when we do achieve these qualification times, they really do mean we're good for our age.

THAT'S SO UNFAIR: 3 RUNNING INJUSTICES



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