

## BOSTON MARATHON

## NP resident recalls landmark Boston Marathon entry

50th anniversary of Switzer entering traditional men's-only race

The Associated Press

## 121st Boston Marathon

BOSTON — One is a neuroscientist-turned-sculptor, the other an activist and organizer. Taking different paths to the same goal, Bobbi Gibb and New Paltz resident Kathrine Switzer outran Boston Marathon tradition and trampled the notion that women were too frail for a 26.2-mile race.

"When you're trying to overcome a prejudice and do something you're not allowed to do, how do you do it?" Gibb said this week as she prepared to serve as grand marshal for the 121st edition of the race, which Switzer will run again on the 50th anniversary of her landmark entry.

"I was hacking through the jungle. There was no path at all," said Gibb, who actually hid in the bushes before becoming the first woman to run Boston, a year before Switzer strutted up to the starting line as the first official female entrant. "But I think we need all kinds of people. She's an extrovert, I'm an introvert. Everybody has a gift to give."

The Boston Marathon traces its origin to an ancient Greek battle and has a rich history of its own, filled with war heroes and Medford milkmen who persevered through oppressive heat, blinding rain and the occasional fox terrier that strayed onto the course.

But the story of the race's distaff division didn't begin until 1966, when it was still a fringe footrace of amateurs running only for an olive wreath and a bowl of beef stew. Told she was too pretty for medical school — "the boys in the lab," and all that — Gibb trained for the race in solitude while on a cross-country road trip in her Volkswagen Microbus, then persuaded her mother to drive her to the starting line by saying: "This is going to help set women free." Jumping out of the forsythia bushes after the gun, she joined a field of 415 men and began what has only recently been recognized as the "unofficial era of women's participation."

A year later, Switzer told her coach at Syracuse, Arnie Briggs,

When: Monday, TV coverage begins 8:30 a.m.

Where: Race begins in Hopkinton, Mass., ends in Boston

TV: NBCSN

about Gibb and said she also wanted to run Boston.

His response: "No dame ever ran no marathon."

But Briggs struck a deal with her: If Switzer could complete the distance on a training run, he would bring her himself. They ran 26.2 miles together three weeks before the race, and Switzer suggested they go five more — just to be sure. He passed out.

"And when he came to, he was so impressed," she said. "He was like an evangelist and helped me sign up."

The two pored through the race's entry rules — Briggs insisted that Switzer, "a card-carrying member of the (Amateur Athletic Union)," could not be a bandit and would have to register — and found nothing about gender. Switzer, an aspiring journalist who thought her first name didn't sound writerly enough, signed up using her first initial, K.

"I generally am pretty law-abiding. I don't speed in my car," Switzer said. "But am I bold? I'm also bold. And am I the type of person who asks for forgiveness or begs for forgiveness? I ask for forgiveness."

Although Gibb was also in the race for the second year in a row, it was Switzer in official Bib No. 261 that so offended race director Jock Semple that he ran after her, in his blazer and slacks, and tried to pull her off the course.

"We thought we were following the rules," Switzer said. "And Jock thought we were trying to pull a fast one."

Switzer's boyfriend shouldered him out of the way, and Switzer ran on. (Semple, who died in 1988, maintained he was trying to protect his race from international rules that sanctioned only men's marathons; by 1972, when women were first admitted to Boston, he



## Switzer's bib number retired

BOSTON — The Boston Marathon will retire Bib No. 261 in honor of Kathrine Switzer.

The Boston Athletic Association said Thursday it will no longer assign the number that Switzer wore in 1967 when she became the

first woman to officially enter the race.

Switzer was given a number for the men's-only race in 1967 only because she used her initials — "K.S." — when she filled out her entry forms. A race official tried to push her off the course, tearing a corner from her bib.

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women's races that showed the IOC there were enough women to fill out an Olympic field. When the women's marathon was added to the Summer Games in 1984, the qualifiers at the U.S. Olympic trials were given trophies of a girl running. It was sculpted by Gibb.

"Bobbi doesn't like us to call her the hippie love child of the '60s," said 1968 Boston Marathon winner Amby Burfoot, noting that she was a serious student who switched from medicine to law after her path to med school was

blocked. "But nevertheless, she's a spirit child."

Gibb is working on a new sculpture — a life-sized bronze that she hopes will be the first of a woman along the Boston Marathon course. Switzer credits her for starting a movement, and Gibb acknowledges that it probably needed someone else to carry it forward.

"She (Gibb) said, 'I'm not an activist or an organizer.' Well, I am an activist and an organizer," Switzer said. "It takes all kinds."

New Paltz resident Kathrine Switzer (261) ran in the Boston Marathon in 1967 despite officials trying to pull her off course. Switzer will celebrate the 50th anniversary of her run on Monday when she runs the race again. (The Associated Press)