




# **First Ladies of Running: 22 Inspiring Profiles of the Rebels, Rule Breakers, and Visionaries Who Changed the Sport Forever**

*Amby Burfoot*

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Today, millions of women and girls around the world enjoy running and entering races. It wasn't always so:

- \* In 1961, when Julia Chase edged to the start of a Connecticut 5-miler, officials tried to push her off the road.
- \* At the 1966 Boston Marathon, Roberta Gibb hid behind a forsythia bush, worried that police might arrest her.
- \* The next year at Boston, Kathrine Switzer was assaulted mid-race by a furious race organizer.
- \* In the mid-60s, Indianapolis high schooler Cheryl Bridges was told not to run anywhere near the boys' track team because she might "distract" them.
- \* When Charlotte Lettis signed up for the University of Massachusetts cross-country team in the fall of 1971, she was told to use the men's locker room.
- \* A few years later in coastal Maine, young Joan Benoit would stop her workouts to pretend she was picking roadside flowers, embarrassed that her neighbors might spot her running.

*First Ladies of Running* tells the inspiring stories of these and other fiercely independent runners who refused to give up despite the cultural and sports barriers they faced. Legends such as Doris Brown, Francie Larrieu, Mary Decker, Jackie Hansen, Miki Gorman, and Grete Waitz are chronicled by *Runner's World* editor Amby Burfoot. Burfoot even runs the 1994 Marine Corps Marathon with Oprah Winfrey, whose successful finish opened the floodgates for other women runners. *First Ladies of Running* is a beautiful and long-overdue tribute to the pioneers of women's running, and a gift of empowerment for female runners everywhere.

## First Ladies of Running: 22 Inspiring Profiles of the Rebels, Rule Breakers, and Visionaries Who Changed the Sport Forever Details

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**Breakers, and Visionaries Who Changed the Sport Forever Amby Burfoot**

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## **From Reader Review First Ladies of Running: 22 Inspiring Profiles of the Rebels, Rule Breakers, and Visionaries Who Changed the Sport Forever for online ebook**

### **Christi says**

I am not sure what took me so long to finish this book except that I wanted to read every word about every person highlighted. But there were just too many. And so MANY valuable pioneers in women's running! Didn't need Oprah in the book.at.all.

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### **Stacy says**

It is unforgettable, startling, maddening, and absolutely inspiring to read what each of these women contributed to a sport we regard today as ordinary, popular, and totally mainstream. Although most stories were cloned into the same gratingly repetitious format: middle/beginning/end—their journeys will both baffle and inspire you. I don't think I will ever be able to put on my running shoes without feeling a certain amount of indebtedness. These women all had a common drive to do what they loved despite the obstacles. I think being acutely aware of the extraordinary women who paved the way for the rest of us to run in their shadows will give my running more strength and tenacity.

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### **Dana Mackey says**

In this important book, Amby shares the courageous stories of 22 female runners in the 1960's and 70's. I highly recommend this book for runners and non-runners, women and men! I loved it.

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### **Lize says**

I think it's hard for a man to give an accurate description of what it must have been like for female runners to compete during a time when women were not allowed on most courses. The individual stories are interesting, but there's a lot missing from this book. For example, there was no mention whatsoever of Stamatis Rovithi or Melpomene and very little mention of Violet Piercy and Arlene Piper. In terms of overall history in the sport, the book fell a bit flat. I preferred Loraine Moller's perspective in her book, "On the Wings of Mercury."

There were a few other minor issues I had with the book. Though Mary Slaney was rightfully included, there was no mention of her later drug use in the sport. Also, at the end of the book, there was a large grouping of runners listed as a nod to many who were pioneers during the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s. Missing from this long list is Ann Trason, an ultra runner who broke 20 world records and set an example, possibly the most impressive one ever, of how women can not just run ultras but win them outright. Perhaps her career started too late, but there were a few others on the list who were hitting their stride in the late 80s as well.

One last note is that, as someone who was cut off and blocked by men in several races in the 80s, I felt these incidences were downplayed in this book. In nearly every case, the author suggests these types of events

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didn't happen often and implies they weren't that big of a deal. It's possible the ladies themselves feel this way, but I disagree.

It's worth a read, though. Just note that there's more to the story.

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### **Cabra says**

Humbling and inspiring. I recommend reading slowly and not as a book to fully appreciate each of the First Ladies (I read it too fast!).

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### **Beth says**

Great read on the first ladies of running! Inspiring to know a bit more of the pioneering women who made running in public nothing to be ashamed of and you were no less female for competing in races, and winning them! The women who win the races they start to the woman who helped us all realize if you can run a marathon you can do anything.

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### **Cathleen Castello says**

It is crazy that it was not that long ago women were not allowed to run long distances. I really enjoyed this because I love reading about running and reading about badass women.

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### **Kelly says**

I absolutely loved reading this. Every single female runner's story featured in this book is so inspiring, and now, more than ever, I can't wait until I can train for another marathon again. If you're a runner, I can't recommend this one enough. Read it!

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### **Karina Dulin says**

It was very interesting to read the stories of these women who were at the forefront of long-distance running for women. I started running in 2006, and I'm sure I benefitted from the hard work and courage of those women who went before me. It's not a quick read simply because of the sheer number of runners profiled, and because the profiles are well-done, but it's certainly an easy read.

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### **Dan Becker says**

A very good book detailing the struggles of women in sports in the USA.

It is strange to think that in my lifetime, women could not run cross-country, 800/5k/10k events, or marathons similarly to men. I applaud these women and their supporters for breaking barriers and forging the way to the more healthy environment we have today.

Cheers to these pioneers and the tough struggles, and the visions they achieved to lead the next generations to a more equal playing field.

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## Martha? says

I felt quite misled as I read through these 22 runner profiles. I hoped to learn about the female movers and shakers in the world of running. Instead, I found huge gaps in Burfoot's work and was disappointed to see that my own sport of ultra-distance running was not mentioned at all.

This is a history of women's running in the United States with the marathon distance as its pinnacle. Although I enjoyed learning of these American running pioneers, Burfoot fails to mention that international women were already running and winning races at these distances while the USA kept its prohibition-like rules for keeping women off the track. It is very important to note that other countries did not have the same archaic rules banning women from participating in long distance running. Also, Burfoot makes it sound like the marathon is the maximum distance that has been attempted. There are real omissions in limiting his research to track and marathon. What about 100km and 100 mile races? Where is the data about those?

I did a little research of my own and found that women had results in 100 km races (Switzerland) as early as 1962, while the US did not allow women to run longer than 800 m at that time.

This is a case where the title of a book is immensely important - as I would not have picked it up if I had known it would share such a limited history.

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## Cindy Dyson Eitelman says

This is what it says in the subtitle--*22 inspiring profiles of the rebels, rule breakers, and visionaries who changed the sport forever*. Ms. Burfoot did a great job of balancing personal details with facts and numbers. It could have been longer and still held my interest, but it didn't need to be. And it was, indeed, inspiring.

In the 1922 Olympics in Amsterdam, the IOC permitted a women's 800 meter race. It had dire consequences for the sport of running. Ms. Burfoot writes that one runner collapsed on the track--briefly--and a few others looked so tired and harried that the IOC banned the distance. As the author mentions, some of the men looked equally exhausted but no one even noticed.

Actually her information was a little off. No one really "collapsed on the track". One woman was trying to lean forward to edge out her teammate at the finish, and she fell forward. She got up immediately. And there were eleven finishers--no dropouts. See this article for a good description of reality vs. sensationalized news reporting, aka, *fiction*: <http://www.runnersworld.com/running-t...>

Nit-picking aside, the spirit of the book is excellent and the stories are both uplifting and painful. It's

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heartbreaking to read about the many times these runners were sidelined with injury. The science of the sport has advanced greatly since the 50s-70s, when these record-breakers were training, making and breaking. Many of their injuries might have been prevented with better training, more rest, and less oppressive footgear. But of course, not all of them. These are athletes and athletes sometimes get hurt. They're aggressive, determined, and uncompromising competitors. They pushed themselves beyond the limits and didn't give up easily--if at all.

In other words, they were women.

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### **Jessica Larsen says**

I finished this book in tears. I was unaware of all the hard work women had to do to get this sport to where it was today. To think, we used to be viewed as too delicate to run!

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### **Wendy says**

This is a great read about the women pioneers of long distance running! Full review on my blog!  
<http://www.takinglongwayhome.com/2016...>

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### **Heather Rohrer says**

A great book about some of the pioneers of women runners. I love the in depth information about each women's upbringing and early running experience. The quotes by the runners are a perfect way to start each section. I thoroughly enjoyed this book.

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