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Rose's Body:
**Portuguese Women Runners Surprising
Bodies, Images and Representations**

In a country dominated by men's football, women's running is an exceptional case that captures our attention. Since 1984 and the international consecration of long distance runner Rosa Mota, the first Portuguese female Olympic marathon winner, running has become a particularly important track and field sport among Portuguese women. As results in international events improved, the specialized sporting press and general daily press turned their attention to the phenomenon.

Words, values, ideas, symbols and images concerning women's bodies, efforts and performances would probably give a clear notification about the press' representation to the public of female runners' bodies. To understand how these bodies have been represented within the Portuguese press over the last twenty years (common daily press, daily sporting press and specialty athletic magazines) through written texts and photography is the main purpose of this study.

At the turn of the nineteenth century women were encouraged to participate in sporting activities, but this was restricted to an elite few, and the main concerns were health, elegant leisure and flirtation. The participation of Portuguese women in the Olympics started in 1952. Until then there were only a few references to their scarce activities as true professionals. Gymnastics and swimming were the main disciplines available to women in terms of serious competition. These were vehicles where they were able to experience success in sport while preserving their femininity. Professional running for women is a recent development.

By 1920, in Portugal, as men's sport was becoming more and more professional, competitive sporting women experienced limited options and found themselves open to ridicule. There were subtle references to their bodies' masculinization, doubts about their feminine nature, and fears about their motherhood capacity and secondary effects on

their reproductive health. The support given to women and sport by the Estado Novo regime (1926-1374) gave a clear hygienic interpretation to the matter. If sport practice was a good way to assure a sane body, competition should be seen strictly as a way of exalting national values.

But for some, running seemed to offer a chance to go further. Yet women's excellence at the international level arouses some doubts about their training methods and suspicion of the possibility of doping. Surprise seems to be word that stresses, even within the Portuguese press, the obvious improbability for Portuguese women to have bodies of the very first level. Do they remain women? Do they have balanced emotional lives? Do they really exist? A search through periodicals that cover the more important national and international sporting events offers the possibility understanding the permanent fear that society seems to express every time women dare to experience and thus call attention to something that is still viewed as men's territory.