

# Francie Larrieu Smith

## Five-Time Olympian

Francie Larrieu Smith ran for the San Jose Cindergals, one of the first youth track clubs for women. She graduated before any high school in California fielded a girls' track and field team, so she trained with the boys' team. Her oldest brother, Ron, competed in the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo, running in the famous Billy Mills gold medal 10,000-meter race and was an inspiration for Francie that females could accomplish the same thing.

Francie started her career as an 800-meter runner, because at that time that was the longest race in the Olympics for women. In 1972, the women's 1500-meter run was added to the Olympics and Francie moved up to the 1500 meters and finished 8th in the semi-final but failed to make the final. She again made the team in 1976 at 1500 meters and finished 9th in the semi-finals but did not make the final. She made her third Olympic team in 1980, but the U.S. boycotted the Moscow Olympics and Francie missed an opportunity to display her abilities.

She failed to make the 1984 team, but in 1988, the 10,000 meters was added to the Olympics. She planned to compete in both the marathon and 10,000 meters in the 1988 Olympic Trials, but an injury forced her to focus only on the 10,000 meters. She had her highest Olympic finish that year, finishing fifth in 31:35.52.

After 1988, she focused on the marathon and ran a personal best of 2:27.35. She made her fifth Olympic team in 1992 at the age of 39 in the marathon, where she finished 12th and she held the distinct honor of being the flag bearer for the U.S. team for the opening ceremonies.

During a 30-year career that spanned four decades, she established 35 U.S. records and 12 world records in distances ranging from 1000 to 10,000 meters. She was selected by Runner's World magazine as "The Most Versatile Runner of the Quarter Century." Her five Olympic teams established her as an American running legend.

### Questions for Thought:

1. Francie Larrieu made five Olympic teams. Imagine how difficult it is to make one Olympic team. What would it take to make five?
2. Francie saw her brother achieve success and realized that females could do it also. How much of accomplishing a task is mental?
3. Women were denied opportunities to run longer distances because some felt they couldn't handle it. How have women proved they can be successful in endurance events?