

# Focus should be on Olympian Tomescu-Dita

Michael Phelps is a phenom, no question. He's also polite, self-deprecating, and humble, crediting his single mom as being his role-model for working hard in life and realizing his goals. I think he'd agree that at least some of the media attention focused on him Sunday should have gone to Constantina



Amy YANNI

Tomescu-Dita. Tomescu-Dita is a 38-year-old mom from Romania who ran away with the Women's Olympic Marathon Saturday, Aug. 16. In the build-up to the race, a lot of concern focused on the poor air quality and pollution, coupled with anticipated high temperatures. Whatever the reason, the runners went out at a slower pace than expected. The weather was overcast, with some light rain developing as the runners toured the streets of Beijing. At the halfway mark, just after the front pack passed Tiananmen and the Forbidden City, Tomescu-Dita made her move. Heading north to Qinhua University, she pulled out and took a lead that she never relinquished. It was a gutsy move. With 13 miles still to go, she tossed a gauntlet to the rest of the world-class, mostly younger, elite women runners behind her. Almost six miles later, at the 30K mark, she was a minute in front. In the last few miles, as she neared Bird's Nest Stadium, she started looking back. Still, no

one surged forward to challenge her. Slowing just a bit, she ran into the track for the final lap to the roar of the crowd, still alone. Her time was 2:26:44. Later, in interviews, Tomescu-Dita said she did not expect to break the pack as she did. Her husband and coach, Valeriu Tomescu, had advised her if the starting pace was slow, she should feel confident and push it at the halfway mark. This she did, and perfectly so. She is the oldest woman to win an Olympic gold medal in the marathon, and was the second-oldest woman in the entire field. To many of us, this is indeed news worth reading. Yet, the story was eclipsed in the reports of Phelps, and to a lesser extent, Jamaican Usain Bolt's breaking the record in the men's 100 meter dash. The day after the Olympic Women's marathon in Beijing, the 4th Annual Leading Ladies Marathon was run in Spearfish Canyon. Nearly 400 women participated in either the half or the full marathon events. Over the years, Race Director Elaine Doll-Dunn, a multi-talented educator, runner, mom, and wife, has faced harsh criticism for putting on an event limited to women. The reason why Leading Ladies exists is to celebrate and bring attention to women distance runners. This year, Kathrine Switzer, the first woman to officially run the Boston Marathon in 1967 traveled from New York to support Elaine's efforts and also to run the half-marathon. Yes, she won an age group award! Recently, Switzer published a book, Marathon Woman, chronicling a career

of creating opportunities and equal sport status for women. Indeed, she was instrumental in the campaign to institute the first women's marathon in the Olympics in 1984. Despite what some may imagine, however, the book is highly laudatory of our fellow male runners. The point is not to trash men, but to attempt to get women runners the attention and support they deserve. Sometimes, the best way to do that is to shine the spotlight on women only. The Olympics separates women's and men's running; similarly, golf and tennis distinguish between men's and women's competitions. A comment from a young woman posted on Amazon.com about Kathrine's book underscores the fact that while women's distance running has come a long way, the journey is not yet over: "As a woman born in 1980, I really had never grasped the concept of what the generation before my birth had done. I never really understood what the world believed about the abilities of women. Katherine Switzer's story is powerful and amazing." Kathrine supports Leading Ladies because it emphasizes giving women of all ages and abilities the chance to challenge themselves and achieve their goals. Having met Kathrine, and knowing Elaine, I believe they would say it is not their individual stories that are "powerful and amazing," but rather, the accomplishments of all the women over the decades who have recorded magnificent achievements in distance running. The latest of these is Constantina Tomescu-Dita.

