

Kyri Willing To Offer Life

Marathon Saga Should Give Pride of Two Nations a Lift

By BILL CUNNINGHAM

The national sports pages carried the news that a 35-year-old Grecian athlete, Stylianos Kyriakides (Kee-ree-a-KEE-dees), flew the wide blue yonder from his native land and won the Golden Anniversary Boston Marathon in the fifth fastest time on modern record from a field of 101 well fed Americans and one Englishman.

The rest is that Kyriakides was sent here by the sportsmen of his afflicted nation, at the cost of five million drachmas, or \$1000, at the current rate of inflation, which they contributed. The motivating idea was for him to win, if possible, in order to gain sufficient prominence to be listened to as he made a plea for food, medicine and clothing for his impoverished fellow-citizens. The significance was probably missed by the thousands who lined the route, but there's seldom been more drama behind any single human being's athletic effort, and none probably ever felt himself so truly obligated to give better than his best in an attempt to do something for others.

He said after the race that he had been determined to win, or die, that he would have given his life for victory, if necessary, for he would have felt that he was giving his life for his people. Happily, that didn't become necessary, and the entire story took on a handsome extra patina when it developed that Johnny Kelley, the little American veteran who finished second, and who was a favorite with many to win, not only advised the Greek concerning such vital matters as shoes and socks, but in the final gruelling furlongs of the 26 miles 385-yard grind, signalled short cuts and such to the unfamiliar son of Hellas although it meant losing the race for Kelley.

KELLEY PROVES SELF EQUAL SPORTSMAN

Those standing close heard the wrinkled little victor gasp "For Greece" as his ultimate stride broke the tape. Then he turned to look for Kelley, and he waited for Kelley, to kiss him and praise him as the finest sportsman, which, indeed, he came pretty close to proving himself to be. Then the Greek went ahead with the rest of his program. To the writers, he told, and he'll continue to tell, the plight of his people. He makes a sincere and impressive ambassador.

The victory, as such, he took very modestly. As a straight athletic experience, it was no new thrill. The man, for years, has rated amongst the best of his people in this oldest of all classic competition. He ran the marathon for Greece at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, finishing in 11th place, although his name is carried in the records as Stelios Kyriakides. Twice his status as an Olympic athlete saved him from death during the occupation. Once he was rounded up with 200 other hostages, evidently to be shot. The SS officer, searching him, found on his person an old photograph of him in his Olympic outfit and detoured him out and away. The others were never heard of again.

The man will spend a month in this country on his solo relief project, and instead of flying back, he'll go by boat in order to superintend such supplies as he can get. He will make as many appearances as he can before Greek-American societies, and as many appeals as he can to the American public, telling the plight of his nation first hand. He may not know it, but he'll be appealing to as generous a group of people as we have in this land. There is probably no finer story of the war than the work already done for Greek Relief by such men as Nick Skouras of Hollywood and Tom Pappas of Boston.

It may sound pretty close to unbridled superlatives, but Greece might literally have perished but for the efforts of these men. Working through the Swedish Red Cross, as this reporter heard the story, and so as not to compromise this nation before we entered the war, they chartered ships, and had them loaded in Canada. They sent wheat, food, medicine, into a land that had nothing. But the land still needs everything, and it doesn't need Kyriakides to tell us.

Remembering back to Kyriakides and that Berlin marathon, we were seeing history and getting a warning that day, but nobody knew it. For the first time in history, a Jap, a little fellow named Kitei Son, won, breaking the Olympic record with a mark of 2h. 29m. 19.2s. Another Jap, Shoryu Nan, finished third, and it looked for a long time as if they were going to finish one-two. A Briton, Ernest Harper, managed with a mighty effort to move in between them in the last mile and the second Jap faded. It was the first time, however, that the Nipponese had ever featured, and it was the tipoff that they were specializing in endurance, and for reasons all too sadly later demonstrated.

Our own representation failed, as the official report said, "dismally." Johnny Kelley, this same one, finished 18th. Tarzon Brown and Bill McMahan, our other hopes, gave up the ghost at about the half way mark. As a matter of fact, most of our annual April stars gleam on the BAA course and nowhere else. They know its tricks and trials, but no two routes are alike and we've never been able to do much in the Olympics.