

The poor village boy who became a world champion

STELIOS Kyriakides, the veteran athlete recently honoured by the Limassol Municipality along with two other Limassolians, Domnitsa Lanitou Kayounidou and Renos Frangoudis, is one of the finest examples of what will, patience and perseverance can achieve.

A poor village boy without means, or support, who started working at a tender age, he had only the determination to go ahead. And he succeeded.

In athletics, particularly long distance races of 5,000 m. and 10,000m. and the marathon, Kyriakides knew triumphant days for years on end through his successive victories in Panhellenic and international games.

These brought honour to him and his country, secured a firm position for him and his family, and the unequivocal esteem of his fellow countrymen, originally in Cyprus and later in Greece where he settled for good.

Born at Statos, a Paphos village near Panayia Chrysoroyatissa Monastery in 1910 Kyriakides came to Limassol after he finished the elementary school, and was employed by the leading grocery of J. G. Contopoulos in St. Andrew Street, owned by brothers Christodoulos and Stelios Contopoulos.

He was engaged as a 'home-deliverer' boy, the usual practice in Limassol, in the mid 20's when the town had extended beyond Gladst Street in the north, the Municipal Gardens to the west and the 'Four Lantern Bridge' in the west.

He worked for five years at the grocery, and was prompt and active. 'He was very good and very kind,' said Mr Christodoulos Contopoulos. 'And he is still so,

coming to see us every time he is in Cyprus,' he added.

Here, in the grocery, Kyriakides was given the first

by John
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idea of engaging in athletics. Bicycles were the usual means of transport of food-stuffs from the groceries. 'But Kyriakides,' said Mr Stelios Contopoulos, 'seldom used them. He preferred to carry them on foot, and came back untired and fresh, ready for another errand.'

His endurance astounded Mr Stelios Contopoulos who often said to him. 'You must be good for the Marathon,' and this remark was heeded by Kyriakides.

But the real spur to devote himself to athletics was given to Kyriakides by a late employer, Dr Cheverton, a famous surgeon, then District Medical Officer at the Limassol Hospital (now the District Office), himself a runner and javelin thrower.

He trained hard daily and won his first victory in the 10,000 metres at the Pancyprian Games held at Famagusta in 1933. In the following year he was the winner of the Marathon in Zagreb, beating the record of Spyros Louis, the Greek winner of the race at the 1896 games in the United States.

To his admirers at the time, Kyriakides always gave his recipe of success: 'Work, work and still more work.'

For two years, from 1934 to 1936, Kyriakides was given a job at the Limassol Municipality by the then Mayor, the late Christodoulos Hadjipavlou and then went to Greece where he was employed by the semi-state electricity supply company, 'Power'. He took part in all Panhellenic, Balkan and in-

ternational Games until 1948, including the Olympic Games in Berlin, and won successive victories.

'I can't remember all my records,' he said, 'but have some thirty medals in my possession.'

The climax of his successes was in the International Game at Boston 1946 when he won the Marathon, reviving the success of Spyros Louis, fifty years earlier. He was awarded the '50th anniversary' gold medal, endowed with diamonds.

But Kyriakides had an odyssey to get to Boston. Means of communication were few and he had to travel via Paris. But worst of all he had no money. And Kyriakides remembers with gratitude the generous gesture of the then Director of Power, Mr Leslie Kem, who handed him a cheque of £1,000, out of his own pocket, to pay for his expenses. Kyriakides proved worthy of the gesture, with the glorious victory he brought back.

Kyriakides also speaks with emotion of the many manifestations of goodwill

and affection towards him by the Greek people. He was granted a building site by the National Bank of Greece Employees Union at Philothei Athens, and later was helped to build his own house by a Greece-wide collection undertaken on his behalf. He is open-heartedly received everywhere, with discount and gifts from shops, or prompt service by Government and other offices.

Today, in retirement, Kyriakides, with the same spare physique as in the past, but grey hair at the temples, and as modest as from the start is still active, his advice and experience being sought by athletic circles.

Kyriakides married in Greece and has three children, a son, who is a ship-builder and two daughters both married. His sister still lives at Statos and two of his brothers are in Messinia of the Peloponnese.

His life-story will be shortly on the screen in a full-length film prepared by the Austin Company of New York, under the title 'S. K. Sunday'.



STELIOS Kyriakides (left) with correspondent John Vryonides.