

The Foxboro Reporter

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Marathon Race Proves Truth Stranger Than Fiction

The statement that truth is stranger than fiction is heard so much it is almost a cliché, but we doubt if many believe the statement. Yet truth is stranger than fiction at times, and one of the times was last Saturday, at the 50th running of the B. A. A. marathon in Boston, when Stylianos Kyriakides, of Athens, Greece, ran over the finish line in first place after a gruelling contest, and shouted "For Greece" in mingled joy and tears of extreme emotion. Despite the improbable plots of dramatists for the screen, the story of Kyriakides would be dismissed as outside the bounds of credulity.

This man, a worker for a public utilities company in Athens, has been a runner for many years. He participated in the marathon at the Olympics in Berlin in 1936. This fact, as evidenced by his trophies and picture, saved him from slavery or death twice during the German invasion of Greece, for the Nazis regarded marathoners as super-men. With Greece trying to recover from the devastation visited upon her by the invading armies, and in dire need of food for her starving and of clothing for her ragged, Kyriakides was chosen as an emissary to come to America and enter the 50th anniversary of the B. A. A. marathon, the most famous race of its kind in the world, in the hope that the publicity he might obtain by making a good showing would help in his endeavor to secure supplies for his beloved country and its people. Intensely patriotic, he came here a week before the race, practically unknown and disregarded entirely by the experts who were choosing the probable winner of the contest and those who would finish in the first group of runners to cross the tape. In a radio interview before the race, Kyriakides was asked to speak, not because of his prowess, but because he and an Englishman had crossed the Atlantic to participate in the contest. Those who heard him broadcast were impressed with his patriotic fervor, and his determination to run his heart out for the glory of his native land. They hoped, because of the drama of the situation, that he would win, but dismissed the hope as wishful thinking. But win he did, after running the race faster than he had run any other, and after facing the stiffest kind of opposition to within the last mile of the long journey. The news of his victory was flashed all over the world, and the fondest hopes of his backers were realized.

For the origin of the Marathon, we must go back into recorded history before the birth of Christ. In 490 B. C., news reached the Athenians that Darius the Mede was crossing the Aegean Sea to conquer the Greek States. Pheidippides, an Olympic champion runner, was despatched to enlist the aid of the Spartans. For two days and two nights he travelled, swimming rivers and climbing mountains in his path. Then he returned with the news that the Spartan Army would start at the full moon. Meanwhile the Persians had landed, and the Athenians, accompanied by Pheidippides, bearing his long spear and heavy shield, set out to meet the invaders in battle at Marathon. That encounter resulted in a victory for the Greeks and, forthwith, Pheidippides set out to bear the news to the capital. Unencumbered by his weapons he ran the twenty-two miles from Marathon to Athens, only to fall dead from exhaustion as he gasped: "Rejoice, we conquer!"

When Olympic games were reinstated at Athens in 1896, a road race was included as a crowning feature, and was named Marathon in honor of the historic run.

The drama of the situation of the original marathon with the dying runner gasping out the words, "Rejoice, we conquer", and the scene nearly twenty-five hundred years later when a man from Athens journeys to the Athens of the new world to win the golden anniversary of a race named for the original, with the words "For Greece" coming from his lips as he grasps victory, is apparent to all. It is appealing to all Americans, because from the dawn of history Greece has been the cradle of freedom and democratic ideas. In this year of the one hundredth anniversary of Greek Independence it is well to reflect that deeply rooted in the soul of every Greek is a devotion to the cause of freedom, proved at Thermopylae, at Marathon and at Salamis, and proved anew against invading German hordes in unequal struggles at Argyrocastro, Corytsa, Klisoura and Tepeleni, when they saw their country destroyed but so upset the Nazi timetable that the destruction of Greece contributed greatly to victory of the United Nations. All glory and honor to the patriotic Kyriakides, and may his exploit do everything for his country's aid that he could wish. May they conquer their present troubles, with the same zeal with which they have conquered all others, "For Greece!" — E. D. S.