

It was a run for his life in '46

KYRIAKIDES

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spirit of many runners.

Kyriakides carried only 125 pounds on a 6-foot-8-inch frame, and he looked thinner. He was not far from starvation, it seemed. He said, "I have seen athletes die for want of proper food and medicine," including some of his country's greatest Olympic competitors.

Kyriakides said he'd been driven

by the fate of his countrymen, who were depending on him to bring the world's attention to Greece, and to come back with food, milk, medicine, clothing and other needed supplies, and to help the Greek relief effort in the United States gain support.

"Many times, they have only peas - a few peas - to eat!" he said in despair, feeling the pressure to win. He had to win his family he would win or die trying.

The weight of his country was on his shoulders, and before he left, he had been handed a note by his trainer, the Hungarian Otto Simitzek. It said, "Ε Ταν Ε Επι Τας," the ancient Spartan adage of mothers to sons before a battle as they handed them their shields and told them to come home "With It Or On It." Victorious or dead.

Kyriakides told the doctors that he would run - and why. "Last week, before I left, all the people - the poor and hungry people - say to me, 'Tell them in America, say to every American: 'Thanks!' You see, we haven't much in Greece today. We haven't enough food or clothing or any of the necessities of living, but what we have we owe to the Americans."

"In Greece today, there is nothing, nothing! There are no roads, no bridges, no trams, no harbors. There is nothing, nothing except the soil of Greece and a people determined to survive and be great again."

In Boston, Kyriakides was befriended by Tom Pappas, who years later would become the US ambassador to Greece.

George Demeter, whose family owned the Hotel Minerva and who put the laurel wreath from Greece on the heads of the Boston Marathon winners, supplied steaks for Kyriakides.

To prove he was fit, Kyriakides won a pre-race 10-kilometer run and was cleared to participate. But what drove him, he said, were the thoughts of his family and the starving faces he had left behind. His own eyes, tired and dark, reflected his pain and anxiety.

"I think I have the strength for it," he said. "If not in my legs, then maybe here, in my heart!"

"He felt the great burden of having to win," said his son Dimitri, now 53. "But he felt sure of himself, and there were a lot of emotions. Anything that could go through the mind of a human was going through his mind. It was something superhuman driving him to win that race."

A tough road:

It would have to be. Kyriakides was a great runner, but the Boston field included defending champion and two-time winner Johnny Kelley, a local who was a crowd favorite, and 1943 and '44 winner Gerard Cote, a Canadian who had fought in his country's army during the war.

Kyriakides would have to run the race of his life. He was now 36, had suffered through the war and occupation, and his best time had been back in Berlin. In 1945, Kelley had run 15 minutes faster in Boston.

Kyriakides was wearing a thin shirt with his number, 77, and a flag with a blue cross and the Greek initials of his home club under the word "GREECE."

Before the race, Demeter walked up to Kyriakides and put a piece of paper in his hand. There were messages on both sides. The first said, in Greek, "Νικε Ε Θανατασ" or "Win Or Die." The other was "Ειναστε Νικητες": "We Are Victorious." But that



'I was in the race to win, too. He beat me fair and square and we were good sports about it.'

JOHNNY KELLEY (above)
On his race with Stylianou
Kyriakides in 1946

was for the finish line.

There was a brisk and cold tailwind awaiting 102 runners and a lot of Greek-Americans along the route, including a 10-year-old boy named Michael Dukakis, whose family lived in Brookline, and teen-ager Pan Theodore, who was stationed by Demeter at Cleveland Circle to hand orange juice or water to Kyriakides and urge him on.

The field started slowly, and nearly 10 miles into the race, Kyriakides was in a pack that included Kelley and Cote. But more than halfway into the run, he was still behind John Kernason, a New York City stenographer who was skinny and wore thick glasses and had a reputation for fast starts.

There were cars all over the route, too close to the runners, but Kyriakides would hear frequent shouts of "Yia Teen Ellatha," from the Greek-Americans, exhorting him with "For Greece!" His Hellenic face had a tight mask of determination, and by Heartbreak Hill, Kelley and Kyriakides had moved to the front of the pack.

With 4 miles to go, the two were apart from the field and started brief battles, taking turns grabbing the lead and relinquishing it, trying to finish each other off with bursts.

Kelley was getting impatient. "I spurted ahead for about a quarter of a mile and I got another big lead on [Kyriakides] and then I died," he said. "He went by me just as nice and easy as could be. I've always been very impatient, and it cost me dearly."

For more than 20 miles, the two had run virtually stride for stride, trying to break each other's will. At Lake Street in Newton, Kelley moved ahead by about 20 yards, but said he was worried about Kyriakides, who seemed fresh.

Without radios, people in the crowd had to depend on the moving word of mouth. Dukak excited to hear the words of the front - "It's Kelley and the Gre as the two vied for the lead. At more Square, Kyriakides had i ahead by 100 yards.

Inspirational finish

Kelley couldn't know th Kyriakides run, he thinking of Iphigeni children Eleni and Dimitri, a few peas people had to eat, of es burning on the Acropolis, ar he had to win - or die.

The Greek-Americans i crowd jumped for joy when the Kyriakides, alone, coming t the finish line, where Demeter ed with a laurel wreath from C

Kyriakides looked at the r his hand, the side that said, "Y Victorious," and, as he cross-finish line and was swarm Greek-Americans, he gasped phantly as he raised his hand Greece!"

He had won in 2:29:47, ne minutes faster than his best i lin, and the best time in the w 1946. Kelley came in exact minutes later, the world's s best time that year.

Kelley knew why Kyriakid running and came over to h ciously. He was kissed by th and happy Greek. "It was gre you won, Stanley. It's great fo country," Kelley said. But i disappointed he had lost. "I the race to win, too. He beat i and square and we were good about it."

The victory caught the at of Americans, including Pr Truman. That night, the Satu week before Easter, Kyriakid feted at a reception by Greek-cans and stayed to make s ances to raise money and do of medical equipment, clothing stuffs and other supplies for t "I will speak whenever I can, night, it does not matter. I v sleep, if I can do more go said.

Boston sportswriter Bil ningham wrote that if not fo kides and those he'd helped United States to bring "Greece might literally hav ished." It was not hyperbole.

Kyriakides refused endo- and advertisement offers b he said, he had come to t Greece and not for hims Greece, a national holiday v clared for his arrival home, nearly 1 million people fill streets of Athens to cheer hi

He came back to Boston later and finished 10th, ne minutes slower than the tin run the year before. But fr 1946 win until he died in 198 lianos Kyriakides couldn't wa far in Greece without being s and thanked for winning a re helped save a country.

The 1988 Boston Marathon saw the beginning of African dominance here and featured the closest finish in the race's history. Ibrahim Hussein of Kenya sprinted away from Juma Jkangaa of Tanzania less than 100 yds from the finish to win by one second, in 2:08:43. It was a much easier win for Ros Mota, who had almost five minutes on her closest rival in a 2:24:30 victory, her second straight.

In nine days, the Boston Marathon will run for the 100th time. For daily updates, visit the World Wide Web's Boston.com. Enter keyword "Marathon" or surf directly to <http://www.boston.com/sports/marathon>.