

## STYLIANOS KYRIAKIDES

Stylianos Kyriakides, is with out doubt the most successful Greek marathon runner ever.

His 16 year athletic career, from 1933 to 1948, was unfortunately interrupted by WW II and the German occupation.

He won the BOSTON marathon in 1946, in the worlds best time and a European record, although he had not trained or run for 6 year, emancipated and starved from the years of the occupation and the Greek civil war.

He was 10 times champion of the Balkans in the Marathon and the 10,000 meters, he was twice silver medalist in the marathon in the British championships in London, in 1935 and 1937, he was 9<sup>th</sup> in the Olympic games in Berlin in 1936 and 11<sup>th</sup> in the Olympic games in London in 1948, and won other national marathons in Europe, before the war.

In 1933, in two consecutive days he won the 1500 m, the 5000 m, the 10000 m and the half marathon, in the national championships of his home country Cyprus, and his athletic talent was discovered.

In the Guinness book of records, he is mentioned as the marathon runner who has held more than anyone else, the national record of marathon. The time span is 33 years and 216days.

He was the first long distance runner in the world, to use a hand stopwatch to pace himself during the race and was not following the tactics of the other runners during the race.

What makes however Stylianos Kyriakides to be different from all other great athletes, was his true patriotism, his compassion for those in need, his dedication to serve young people, his total selfishness, and his honesty characteristics that were demonstrated many times throughout his life.

Although the youngest in the Greek athletic “dream team” before the war, because of his character and personality, he was chosen to be its leader in all the trips outside Greece.

In the years from 1933 to 1940 he showed his talent by winning many 5000 m, 10000 m and marathon races, breaking many records.

In 1938 having trained well and in good shape, he goes to America to run the Boston marathon, but he drops out of the race 3 km before the finish, being in the leading pack of runners, because the new pair of “unbroken shoes” given to him by the local Greeks as a gift, caused the soles of his feet to crack and severely bleed in the unusual hard cement surface, that were the Boston roads made off at the time.

The start of the war of interrupts his very promising athletic career.

Newly married in 1941, he went through the difficult years of the German occupation, having to protect and raise his young family.

During the occupation he saw some of his best friends and fellow athletes perish from starvation or die from the occupying forces.

Himself came very close to death twice.

Then, when the nightmare of the war was over at the end of 1944, he was witness to the horrors of the start of the Greek civil war, where relative killed relative and people were dying in Greece everyday and the country was being destroyed.

Being a sensitive and peaceful man he could not understand the sense of all that.

He starts thinking of what he can do to help his country and his people.

He takes the big decision, to start training to go to America again and to run and to win the most famous marathon race of the time. BOSTON.

He thinks that if he can do that, he can raise the awareness of the Americans of the situation in Greece and the plight of the Greek people and to ask The American people and the Greek American community to help save Greece.

He sales half of his house hold furniture to raise the money to buy his ticket, and with the help of his employers, the British Electricity Company of Athens and Piraeus, he buys a one way ticket to New York.

His wife Ifigenia thinks that he is crazy, his friends and fellow athletes laugh at his dream.

Kyriakides is not listening to anybody. He looks ahead believing totally in him self and his goal, confident that he can achieve it.

He arrives in Boston one month before the race to train.

He is received in Boston by George Demeter, a wealthy Greek American judge and business man, who knows him well from his last trip in 1938,

He trains hard and Demeter makes sure that he is fed well with good American beef steaks and pasta, at his restaurant, in the then famous MINERVA hotel.

With his good friend Jerry Nayson, the sports editor of the BOSTON GLOBE, he starts telling the American people as soon as he arrives, that he is there to run for his country and that he needs help for the starving, dying Greeks.

On the day of the race, he fails to pass his medical examination, because he is too thin and too weak. The doctor that he examined him, claimed that “Kyriakides will not be able to finish the race”.

George Demeter intervenes and together they sign a paper, taking full responsibility for his health, in order to be allowed to take part in the race.

The organizers of the race the BAA, decide that in honor of being Greek he must be given to wear bib no 1. Kyriakides refuses and asks for bib no 77, saying that 7 is his lucky number, therefore 77 will be double lucky.

The race is described by all Boston marathon experts as one of the most dramatic races in the history of the race. It was an epic battle between 5 very good runners.

The emancipated, starving Greek is fighting with the giant marathoners and in the end he beats the best marathon runner of the time the famous Irish American Jonny Kelly, winner of 4 previous Boston races, by 2 minutes, in 2h 29m and 27sec. which was then the world's best time and a European record.

When he crosses the finish line he shouts with all his remaining strength.  
FOR GREECE.

The story is front page in all the big American and Greek newspapers. LIFE magazine puts a full page picture showing the crowned winner of Boston. Children's comic books run two pages with the story.

After the race he is offered many contracts to become professional. Being a handsome fellow, Hollywood does not miss the opportunity and MGM offers him big money for a 10 year contract to make movies.

Kyriakides declines all.

He asks permission from his employers and the Greek government to remain in America for a while and starts touring the big cities of the north east of the US, asking people to help Greece.

Americans are fascinated by the Greek who asks nothing for himself, and respond.

Donations start pouring in from ordinary people. School children offer their pocket money.

The president of the United States hears the story and invites Kyriakides to the White House.

He has an audience of 1 ½ hours with the Chief of Staff, who hears his emotional story.

The US President authorizes a special assistance for Greece that he names “the Kyriakides aid package”

The aid package contained, large amounts of grain, dry and tinned food, live stock, medicine, blankets, tents, second hand cloths and shoes and other needed items, and together with 250,000 dollars, that he managed to collect from the peoples donations, they are sent to Greece.

The aid is sent onboard two liberty ships that were given by the Greek shipping family of Livanos.

Kyriakides returns to Greece one month after his victory as a national hero. Near 1 million Greeks wait for him and line the streets from the airport to the house of Parliament.

Petros Linardos, the respected newspaper reporter and historian, said once, that in the dark, bleak years of the war, the achievement of Kyriakides was the only news of hope for Greece at the time. He said that in 1946 “Kyriakides was Greece”

In 1947, with the civil war still raging and Greece's economy in ruins, he returns to Boston to ask for more help but this time for another cause.

He collects 50,000 dollars and athletic cloths and equipment, and brings them back to Greece, so that the Greek national team can train and participate in the 1948 Olympic games in London.

He runs also in the Boston marathon that year at the age of 37 and finishes 8<sup>th</sup> in more than 1000 participants.

He retires after the London Olympics in 1948 where he finishes 11<sup>th</sup>.

After he retires he is elected as a member of the Greek Amateur Athletic Association where he remained active until he died, serving with passion Greek amateur sports and sports for the young people.

In 1956 he builds with donations from his many admirers, an athletic stadium and the forms the athletic club of Filothei, in the north suburb of Athens. He is the first man in Greece to start organized training programs for the young people of the area. The stadium today is named after him.

Kyriakides dedicate all his life in serving amateur athletics and people in need.

He died in 1987 at the age of 77, the same number that we wore when he won in Boston.

In 2002 with the publication of the book about his life in the US, named "RUNNING WITH PHIDIPIDES", a permanent exhibit was opened at the New England sports museum, in Boston, with the very powerful title "STYLIANOS KYRIAKIDES RUNNING FOR THE HUMAN RACE".

His statue, named THE SPIRIT OF MARATHON was unveiled in Marathon city in 2004 and a similar statue was unveiled near the start of the Boston marathon in 2006, 60 years after he won the race.

These two marathons happened to be the two oldest and the two most difficult marathon courses today.

In 2004 the American TV channel NBC produced a documentary for the ATHENS OLYMPICS, called “STYLIANOS KYRIAKIDES, THE RUN OF A WORRIER”. It won the EMMY award as the best sports documentary of the year.

A movie is currently being produced in Hollywood about the life and achievements of this great athlete and human being and hopefully you can all see it in the big screen soon.