Stelios Kyriakidis

Stelios Kyriakidis (alternatively Stelios Kyriakides or Stylianos Kyriakides) was a Greek marathon runner of the first half of the 20th Century.

Originally from Cyprus, Kyriakidis was born in 1909. He ran the marathon in the 1936 Olympics and entered the Boston marathon two years later but failed to finish.

During World War II, Kyriakidis was rounded up with several other Greeks by German soldiers. When the soldiers came across his Berlin Olympic credentials, they released him. All the other men were shot.

Kyriakidis felt that God had spared him for a reason and after the war was over, decided - at age 36 - to re-enter the Boston marathon that he could not complete as a younger man. Despite warnings from doctors prior to the marathon that he could die if he ran, Kyriakidis entered and won the race on April 20, 1946, in record-breaking time: 2hr 29m 27s. His record would stand until the late 1960s. After finishing the race, Kyriakidis comments to the US media were: "Please, don't forget my country!

After his victory, Kyriakidis campaigned for humanitarian aid for Greece whose economy had been wrecked by war, occupation and civil conflict. He returned to Greece to a hero's welcome bringing with him aid worth $3,000,000.

Kyriakidis also competed in the 1948 London Olympics finishing 18th, however, his mark on history had already been made.

He died on December 10, 1987, at the age of 77, which was the number he wore at the 1946 race that made him famous. He was survived by his second wife Iphigenia and his son Dimitris

runners. [...] ... ... on the leaders and we'd be jockeying back and forth to get in position to get the best photos. Now you gotta picture this whole scene: These guys are trying to run a race and here are twelve cars jockeying all around them. We'd say, 'Hey, the *Record* car is up front on the right. Let's try to get ahead of them.' We kept cutting in and out and back and forth. It was like a race within a race. It was like Indianapolis in slow motion. We'd be yelling at the other cars, 'Get out of the way!' and they'd be yelling back at us. All the while, mind you, nobody is thinking of the poor runners, who were being caught up in the fumes from these cars and all but being asphyxiated.

"Now in 1946 we had Stylianos Kyriakides, the starving Greek, and he comes over here and he's emaciated. The Greeks are starving to death after the war and he wants the world to know about it. He thinks if he can win the Boston Marathon he can bring attention to the plight of his people and something will be done about it. He and old Johnny Kelley have this terrific battle all the way. Terrific. But nobody ever saw it. They were surrounded by these automobiles—and vaguely, in this blue haze of gas fumes, you could see two guys in white uniforms, running. How either one of them finished, I don't know. But they had a tremendous duel right down to Kenmore Square, a mile from the finish. The Greek, from somewhere in his gut, put on a little sprint and beat old John and won the race. It was a very dramatic story. Word of it went all over the world and the Greeks did get some help. I remember being up in a room in the old B.A.A.—this was when they finished in front of the Lenox Hotel—and I'm sitting there with Kyriakides and Kelley and I'm interviewing them. As the Greek is telling me about the poor little children with no eggs and no milk, old Johnny Kelley is sitting there and the tears are streaming down his face. He's bawling like a baby. Here he has just lost one of the greatest Marathon races ever run and he's blubbering all over the place. That's what this race can do to you.

"It was the next year that Walter Brown, who's dead now . . . he used to put on the races . . . he was the race director . . . Walter said, 'Look, this race is getting ridiculous with all those cars out there.' So the next year he eliminated all the autos and put everyone into one bus. Right away the times picked up noticeably. The runners didn't have the cars impeding them and they didn't have to suck up those fumes into their lungs. A good time was 2:30.

A reader points out that the caption on the picture of Stylianos Kyriakides posted earlier undersells "arguably the most significant Boston Marathon victory of all time":

That's the best you can do? I don't think you could have understated Stylianos Kyriakides victory any more. Kyriakides' victory in the Boston Marathon in 1946 changed the world. There's a very, very inspirational story behind the picture. Do you know what it is?

William Lambers summarizes Kyriakides' achievement:

His mission was to bring attention to famine and suffering in his homeland. During World War II the German Army left Greece practically in ruins and short on food. Aid was desperately needed. April 1946 was a pivotal time in world history; hunger then was the World War II enemy that had yet to be defeated. …

For Kyriakides, the Boston Marathon offered an opportunity to shine the spotlight on the hunger in his homeland. He faced a tough challenge. There was the defending champion Johnny Kelley and other great runners to contend with. Kyriakides also had to overcome years of living in the harsh occupation conditions with below-average nutrition. His life had been spared by German troops because he was a marathoner and had competed in the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

Kyriakides overcame the odds, overcame the great Johnny Kelley, and sprinted to victory in the marathon. When he crossed the finish line he shouted "For Greece!" for he knew what this victory would mean in telling the world of his country's plight. His mission was not over even after he crossed the finish line, though. Next was touring the country to raise donations for Greek relief.

For those interested in learning more about Kyriakides, the reader recommends *Running With Pheidippides: Stylianos Kyriakides, the Miracle Marathoner*, by Nick Tsiotos and Andy Dabilis.

At the starting line in 1946, Stylianos Kyriakides, a citizen of Greece who years earlier had barely avoided being executed by the occupying Nazis, carried a hand written note in each hand. He read the first note before the starter's gun was shot: "Do or Die." Upon winning the race, he opened up his other fist and read the second note: "We Are Victorious!"

Rovithi whose time was 5:30:00. Yet there is nothing so vague about the eventual outcome of the first Olympic marathon on 10 April and won by Louis in 2:58:50 (see Games).

The national championship continued to be held but only irregularly until 1955, when it became an annual event. The same year saw the holding of the first Classical Marathon (see Races). Theofanis Tsimigatos has won most titles with five (1974, 1977–8, 1980–1). Stylianos Kyriakidis, four time winner in the Balkan Games, set a European record of 2:29:27 in winning at Boston in 1946 and held the national record for 33 years 216 days, one of the longest ever such reigns. Michail Koussis became the first Greek to better 2:20 in 1978 and holds the current best of 2:14:36 set at Amsterdam in 1982. Twice Balkan champion, he finished 10th in the 1978 European and 20th in the 1980 Olympics.

Turkey

The first marathon, including the national championship, was held at Istanbul on 21 June 1938 and won by Selim Sunal in 3:21:50. Most wins have been by Ismail Akcay (eight) and Huseyin Aktas (six) between 1963 and 1976. The best performance in

1980 Moscow 1 August

The Soviet Union became the first Eastern European nation to stage the Games but it was unfortunate that due to political wrangling Japan and the United States were among the absentees. Their presence was sorely missed in the marathon. Vladimir Kotov, the Soviet champion and new record holder, was responsible for much of the work in the first half of the race. Rodolfo Gomez (Mex) made the first real break at 23 km and stayed in front until just after 35 km when he was overtaken by Cierpinski and the European record holder Gerard Nij-

on the final run-in and in winning by 17 seconds equalled Bikila's feat of the 1960s. The Soviet trio of Dzhumanazarov, Kotov and European champion Leonid Moseyev, one of the favourites, finished in third, fourth and fifth, ahead of the first non-European finisher Gomez, as the first seven finishers all bettered 2:13.

1	Waldemar Cierpinski (GDR)	2:11:03
2	Gerard Nijboer (Hol)	2:11:20
3	Satymkul Dzhumanazarov (Sov)	2:11:35

European Championships 1946. From left: Stylianos Kyriakidis (Gre), Väinö Muinonen (Fin), Henning Larsen (Den), Squire Yarrow (GB) and eventual winner Mikko Hietanen (Fin).

The Boston Marathon has always been more than a marathon. In 1946, Stylianos Kyriakides ran to feed his country.

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