

Athens Classic Marathon

Following in the footsteps



MP and Greek anti-fascist resistance icon Grigoris Lambrakis marching alone in the banned Marathon-Athens Peace Rally on Sunday April 21 1963, one month before his assassination



of legend

By Kostas Pangopoulos

The Athens Classic Marathon (ACM) has been organized every year since 1983 by the Hellenic Athletics Federation (SEGAS). It is dedicated to the memory of the Balkan athletics champion and pacifist, Grigoris Lambrakis. It is a hugely popular race and tourist event, held every year on the second Sunday of November.

But the roots of the race go back well before 1983. The story which brought the Marathon to life was enacted here in 490 BC, when the ancient Athenian soldier and message bearer Pheidippides ran from the battlefield at Marathon to deliver news of victory to the waiting Athenians. This was the legend used by Michel Bréal as a springboard to deliver a long distance running event to the programme of the inaugural modern

Olympic Games held in Athens in 1896. Spyros Louis became the first Olympic Marathon Champion in that race, running over the same ground. Lately Marathon champions of the 1969 and 1982 European Athletics Championships, 1997 IAAF World Championships and 2004 Olympic Games have followed in his footsteps, making the Athens Classic Marathon an outstanding race which attracts more than 20,000 runners from Greece and 100 other countries all over the world.



The Athens Classic Marathon has unique status, being held on the authentic Olympic Marathon course. The point-to-point course starts at the Municipality of

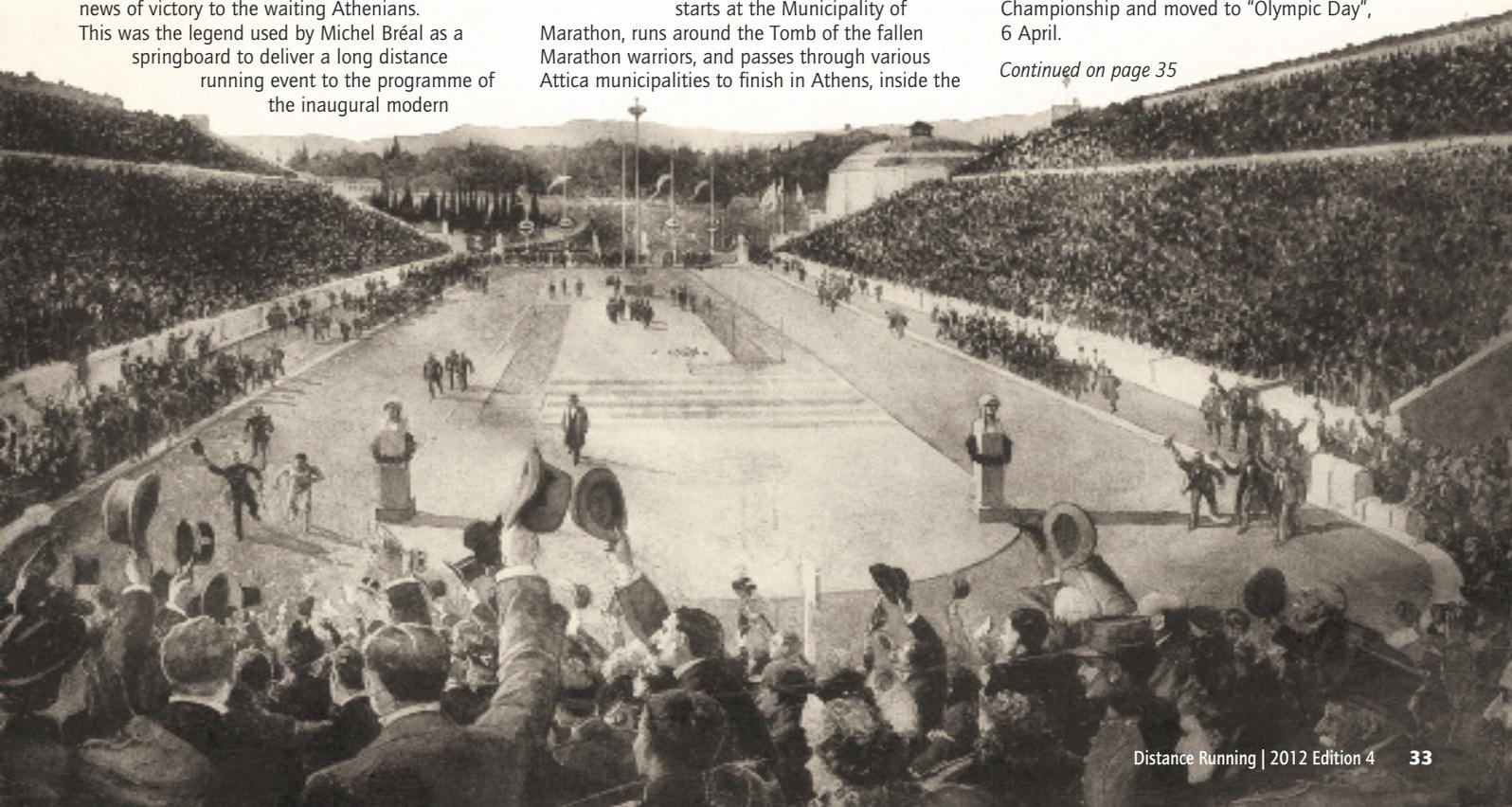
Marathon, runs around the Tomb of the fallen Marathon warriors, and passes through various Attica municipalities to finish in Athens, inside the

beautiful marble stadium in which events of the first Modern Olympic Games were held, the Panathenaikon Stadium. While the ancient history of this race runs back more than 2500 years, its relatively recent history started in 1896.

On 2 October 1955 Stelios Kyriakidis, Greek winner of the 1946 Boston Marathon started the 1st international Marathon Race to be held since 1896 over the authentic course. It was followed by editions in 1957, 1959, 1961, 1963 and 1965. The highlight of this series came in 1961, when the winner of the race was Abebe Bikila, just a year after his iconic barefoot win in the 1960 Olympic Marathon in Rome.

From 1967 to 1980 the race was held annually, recognised also as the Greek Marathon National Championship and moved to "Olympic Day", 6 April.

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From 1973 to 1980 a second international Marathon race was also held on the authentic course, every September. One race from this period stands out, when in 1969 the first five Olympic finishers of the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico took part. The winner was Briton Bill Adcocks in a record time of 2:11:07 which remained unbeaten until the 2004 Olympics. From 1972 the race has been open to all runners, and participation gradually rose to almost a thousand. The first woman participated in the race in 1974. In 1982, the organizer of the "Original Run", George Kourmouzis, represented the Athens Marathon at the Establishing Congress of AIMS held in London (and participated in the first Board meeting).

The 30th anniversary being celebrated dates from this most recent series starting from when SEGAS decided to organize the "1st Popular Marathon Race Grigoris Lambrakis". Since then participation has gradually increased to 5800 in 2004, and more than 18,000 in 2011.

The running clubs of Greece, known as "Health Runners Clubs", played a key role in the development of the race. In 2001, just before the 2004 Athens Olympics, a major Greek bank, Alpha Bank, offered its sponsorship to the race giving a major boost to the promotion of the event and the improvement of services provided to runners.

Since 2006 the Athens Classic Marathon has made progress in all fields and is widely recognized by the Greek State, other international marathon races, IAAF, AIMS and above all participating runners. The efforts of SEGAS regarding the development of the event have been put under the auspices of the President of the Hellenic Republic (since 2006) and UNESCO (since 2011) featuring the historic importance of this race and its contribution to Peace and Friendship among nations. In 2011, OPAP s.a., the leading Gaming Operator in Greece, became the major sponsor of the ACM until 2016.

The ACM record holders are the Moroccan Abdelkerim Boubker (2:11'.40" in 2011) and the Lithuanian Rasa Drazdaukaite (2:31'.06" in 2010), while the record holders over the authentic course are the 2004 Olympic winners Stefano Baldini (ITA) with 2:10:55 and Mizuki Noguchi (JPN) with 2:26:20. The Greek course record holders are Michalis Parmakis (2:20:48 in 2010) and

Konstantina Kefala (2:40:36 in 2010) but Nikos Pollias ran 2:17:56 over the course in the 2004 Olympics. He also won the ACM in 1993, 1995, 1998 and 2000.

IAAF awarded the Athens Classic Marathon a "Gold Label" in 2010, in recognition of the historical and symbolic significance of the race marking the 2500th anniversary of the Battle of Marathon. Fewer than 25 races worldwide held a Gold Label in 2010. Runners also recognised the importance of the occasion and flocked to Athens to take part. Participation and race records were broken as 12,000 Marathon runners trod in the footsteps of ancient and modern legend, in the presence of major Marathon stars like Stefano Baldini, Joan Benoit-Samuelsen, Constantina Dita, Rosa Mota, Ron Hill, Katherine Switzer and Abel Anton.

Today the Athens Classic Marathon is a four-day event, held over the second weekend of November, including an expo running from Thursday to Saturday inside the Zappeion Megaron in the historic city centre. The Athens Classic Marathon opening ceremony is held on Saturday, inside the archaeological site of the Marathon Tomb, and leads on to the Lighting of the Marathon Flame. The Flame is a new symbol of AIMS which annually travels around the world reminding people of the values of the Marathon movement. The Flame has already been hosted in Boston, Chicago, Toronto, Quito, Shanghai, Xiamen, Mumbai, Belgrade,



Genoa, Prague, Omsk, Vienna and Pietermaritzburg. The AIMS Marathon Symposium, held on the Saturday afternoon, is an annual international seminar established in 2007 by AIMS, SEGAS, IAAF and the Municipality of Marathon, which hosts the event at the venue of the historic start of the race, on the eve of the Athens Classic Marathon. The Symposium brings more than 50 representatives of other international marathon races to Athens every year.

The shorter road races of 5K and 10K, 1000m (for Paralympic athletes) and 700m (for kids), take place on Sunday morning in parallel with the Marathon. The average temperature during race week varies from 11-19C, with a 10% chance of rain.

Athens Classic Marathon registration opens in early March every year and closes when the limit is reached. In 2012, in celebration of the 30th anniversary, the Athens Classic Marathon expects more than 30,000 runners in all races.

To register go to: www.athensclassicmarathon.gr



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