



■ In the footsteps of Pheidippides

Australia honours marathon champion Maria Polyzou

Amazing. Simply amazing. It is difficult to describe any other way the achievement of Maria Polyzou, who wrote her own slice of history on August 2, 2010, by becoming the first woman to recreate the feat of the legendary messenger Pheidippides.

The 42-year-old, who 12 years ago set the record for the fastest marathon by a Greek woman, left the Acropolis in Athens on July 26 and completed the gruelling 540km route from Athens to Sparta and then to the town of Marathon in seven days.

Despite enduring a host of problems such as blisters, sun

stroke, fever and knee troubles, Polyzou finished her incredible effort at the Tomb of Marathon at 8.10pm, entering the burial site with both knees heavily bandaged.

“There isn’t a bone or muscle in my body that doesn’t hurt”, she told the audience afterwards, visibly exhausted but still managing a beaming smile. Polyzou’s incredible effort entailed running a double marathon every day for a week with minimal rest in between.

“I was in a lot of pain at various points, but the one thing that remained steady was my mind and my soul, and it is this that helped me to complete the run,” she said.

A symbol of sacrifice

Having arrived back at the

Acropolis on the night of August 8, Polyzou “only” needed to run a standard marathon distance of 42km the following day to realise her dream, something which actually brought a touch of complacency towards the end of an astonishing journey.

“Yes, to be honest, I didn’t respect that last marathon,” she revealed. “I thought the hard work had been done and I paid for it. I was really struggling, but I managed to finish in the end. It is such a relief.”

Polyzou was greeted by a large crowd on arrival at the tomb, where the 192 Athenians killed 2,500 years ago in the Battle of Marathon were buried, and was honoured at a special ceremony, organised by the municipality of Marathon and in the presence of general secretary for sports, Panos Bitsaxis.

“This is a symbol of sacrifice coming from antiquity and signifies the effort towards victory,” Bitsaxis said. “This is the deeper value served today by Maria Polyzou, who has become synonymous with athletic effort and is a member of the athletic community with the best gold medal that she could ever win.”

Lone battle

Polyzou’s astonishing achievement marks the start of Greek celebrations for the 2,500-year anniversary of the battle in which a Greek victory is widely acknowledged to have ensured the democratic legacy of western culture.

Initially, Polyzou was to embark on her attempt with Panayiotis Skoulis, the first man to have completed the feat, in 1992. But he had to pull out a few days beforehand, leaving Polyzou to go it alone.

The marathon celebrates the run of a soldier, Pheidippides,

from the battlefield near Marathon to Athens in 490 BC. Pheidippides was carrying the news of a Greek victory over the Persians and is said to have collapsed and died at the end of his effort. Out of that legend, the marathon race was born.

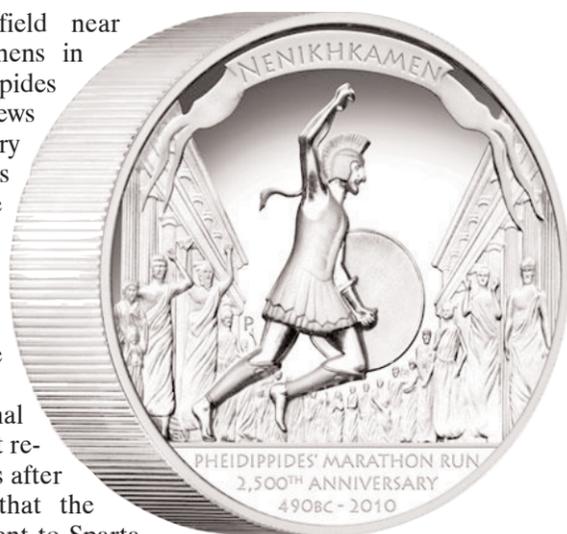
But the original legend, whose first report was 600 years after the battle, was that the messenger first went to Sparta to ask for help, was rebuffed, and ran back to Marathon, before going to Athens to announce victory.

Commemorative Event - Greek Australian Sports Hall of Fame, 1 December, 2010

Celebrations of the Battle of Marathon’s 2,500-year anniversary will culminate in Sydney with a commemorative event at the, Greek Australian Sports Hall of Fame, Brighton-Le-Sands, on 1 December, 2010.

In recognition of Maria Polyzou’s historic marathon run a commemorative Pheidippides coin from the, Australian Perth Mint, was presented to her on her arrival back to Marathon, by the Greek Australian Professionals’ Association and the Australian Hellenic Educators’ Association. She was also the recipient of a commemorative coin produced by the, Royal Australian Mint, honouring Edwin Flack, Australia’s first Olympic champion and marathon runner at the 1896 Athens Olympic Games.

The specially assembled collection of Australian marathon



donations to Maria Polyzou, the Marathon Run Museum and the Municipality of Marathon, Greece, will be discussed in detail on the night.

A major highlight includes an exclusive visual presentation of Maria Polyzou’s recreation of Pheidippides’ legendary run from Athens to Sparta and Marathon.



THE GREEK AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONALS' ASSOCIATION
 in cooperation with the
AUSTRALIAN HELLENIC EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION NSW-ACT
 under the auspices of
THE GREEK AUSTRALIAN SPORTS HALL OF FAME
 & THE GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA
 invite you to celebrate the

2500TH ANNIVERSARY BATTLE OF MARATHON
 HISTORY & LEGACY

WEDNESDAY 1 DECEMBER 2010
 FROM 7 PM

Keynote Speaker
DR ALASTAIR BLANSHARD
 Department of Classics and Ancient History, The University of Sydney

Speaker
MS KATHY KOUVAS
 President, Greek-Australian Professionals' Association

Audio-visual presentations
 HELLENIC NATIONAL WOMEN'S MARATHON RECORD HOLDER MARIA POLYZOU,
 RECREATING THE LEGENDARY RUN OF PHEIDIPPIDES

Donation of specially assembled collection of Australian marathon memorabilia presented to the Museum of the Marathon Run and the Municipality of Marathon

THE MILLENNIUM CENTRE - GREEK AUSTRALIAN SPORTS HALL OF FAME
 96 THE GRAND PARADE, BRIGHTON-LE-SANDS
 Entrance via The Grand Parade, (next to Signature Brasserie)