

PERICLES "PERRY" MOUSTAKAS

from rags to riches

The 29 year old Greek Australian returns home after a career in Cyprus, packed to the brim with glory as well as disappointment. But before he left the birthplace of his ancestors, the soccer dynamo with lungs of steel and never-say-die attitude tried to raise awareness about the problems Cypriot football players are facing, through a heartfelt letter sent to the Cypriot press.

WORDS BY SAVVAS LIMNATITIS & GEORGE STAVROULAKIS

In previous editions of the sport section of "O Kosmos" newspaper, our man about town, George Stavroulakis, wrote extensively about the interest shown by Premier and NSW Super League clubs, to acquire the rights to Australian born and raised, Cypriot international footballer Perry Moustakas. For those of you who are not aware, Pericles - as is his Greek name - recently decided to pack up and leave the misery of the football league in Cyprus, for reasons that are perfectly understandable in their simplicity.

Moustakas left Sydney for Cyprus nine years ago. Or to be precise, nine years ago he was pushed to seek a future in the land of his forefathers by some members of the then Sydney Olympic administration. A 20 year old youngster with stars in his eyes, Moustakas rightfully felt disgusted and disappointed for having to stand on the sidelines, while other, less worthy players stole the limelight, thanks to the attitude of those administrators - let's call them "genitsaroi", or "Janissaries", to simplify matters - who never did much to hide the fact they were not keen on players that had the "misfortune" of being born Greek. The fact that these youngsters - and there were many more like Moustakas - grew up in awe of the famed blue and white strip of Sydney Olympic, meant nothing to

those "gentlemen".

For Perry to pack up and go, leaving behind his family, friends and place birth, a certain mustachioed coach, steep in mediocrity as he was, prone to dumping those that supported him - just Pelopidas Keravnos from Stanmore Hawks - to join the elite of the NSL, as coach of Sydney Olympic. Remember: that was a time when Olympic was famous for the ease it changed coaches, with those working behind the scenes excelling in promoting and demoting coaches, passing on little notes where eight of the starting eleven were already picked, leaving the hapless coach scratching his head, trying to figure out the rest of the three that would make up his starting eleven. To write more about the story is not only pointless but also painful. Moving on then.

Upon his arrival in Cyprus, Moustakas was snapped up by Limassol's Apollon team. Soon his performances on the field caught the attention of the then coach of the Cypriot Under 21s National Team, who quickly made the young Greek-Australian an integral part of his squad. Growing stronger with every given opportunity, Moustakas soon won a regular place in his club team, and was soon riding the crest of a wave, winning the Cypriot Championship with Apollon.

But soon things turned sour. What drove him away from Sydney, begun to haunt him in Cyprus. Never one to join cliques, or stoop as low as licking dirty boots, Moustakas found himself at the sideline once again. When I caught up with him in Cyprus he was visually disappointed. "I really can't understand why this is happening" he said. "I have never caused any problems,

I am always punctual and my coaches praise me. Yet, others get the call, while I sit at the bench".

His mistake? Pericles Moustakas always believed that ability, dedication and hard work is enough to get you through the door. When I pointed out that all the players from his current team belonged to well-known - infamous is the more appropriate word - Cypriot agent, it all made sense to him: "Savvas, the guy asked me to sign up with him and I refused. Now I understand why I am not getting an equal opportunity".

Undaunted, Moustakas rallied on. But everywhere he went, the same story unfolded, haunting him like a bad nightmare: thanks to his never-give-up attitude, a favorite amongst fans (even those of other teams rallied to get him signed to their club) Perry never lived up to the glory of his first years on the island, while others less worthy but with the right connections and managers to fight their plight, won fame and fortune.

By now Moustakas was no longer a single man fully dedicated to chasing his dream, but also a husband with a family to feed. To make matters worse, payments from Cypriot clubs are rather sparse to say the least. The decision to leave Cyprus and return back to Australia, with wife Ioanna, six year old son Dimitri and six month daughter Myria in tow, although not easy, must have seen like the only way out from a dire situation. With the dream having turned sour, Pericles Moustakas left the land of his forefathers, with his head held high. But not before he tried to raise awareness for the upward walk many in his position face, hitting the nail on the head with a heartfelt letter sent to the Cypriot press. "I do hope there are better times for Cyprus football" he says...

MOUSTAKAS' WRITTEN STATEMENT

«Dear Friends,
A lot of people have been asking me why I've decided to leave. Many people are also asking if I'm stopping football. My answer to the latter is a no chance! My heart beats for football!

The reason I'm leaving Cyprus however is that I believe we've lost our way. What do I mean by this? It's somehow acceptable for us footballers to be unpaid for weeks and months and somehow be expected to perform to the best of our ability. On top of being unpaid, some teams make 4-5, even up to 16 new signings while we old players wait for salaries we work so hard for. Why is this allowed to happen over and over again? Why isn't someone putting a stop to this?

Most people see me as a footballer but I'm also a father of two, a husband and a provider. I'm trying to make ends meet just like everyone else. So I'm left with no other choice but to support my family, and the only way I can do that is in an environment where I will be treated right and appreciated. I believe that Cypriot players, both at a senior and youth level, should get more

support and be given a chance to prove their abilities and value. Because of this lack of support, I have to leave the country I love and made my home for these reasons.

I also believe we footballers should support PASP more - be more united and help create a stronger union.

These are my own thoughts. I don't mean to disrespect anyone or cause a problem, but the game in this country has some major issues and something has to be done. Some of you may be asking who am I to say these things. I am no one special, but it's important that I share this with you, as just like me, there are many others.

Talking like this puts me in a difficult situation as I hope to return one day, and I don't want to burn any bridges. I know whatever happens after today I will do my best to return to a healthier Cypriot game.

To finish of I'd like to say one BIG thank you to whoever helped and supported me along the way. Most important to any player are the fans - you've been incredible. Thank you for your passion and dedication to our game.

Hopefully I see you all soon, Regards, Perry Moustakas».