

## black room



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ΣΥΝΕΧΕΙΑ ΑΠΟ  
ΤΗ ΣΕΛΙΔΑ 29

... Στην σημερινή μας έκδοση δημοσιεύουμε την ιστορική συνέντευξη, που παραχώρησε ο Γιάννης Καραγιάννης πριν από δεκαπέντε χρόνια στον Βασίλη Βασιλά συγγραφέα, γνωστό για το βιβλίο που κυκλοφόρησε πριν μερικά χρόνια με θέμα τον «Πανελλήνιο», που σήμερα συνεχίζει ως «Σιδνεϊ Ολύμπικ» και που έχει τροφοδοτήσει με αρκετούς παίκτες και το ελληνικό ποδόσφαιρο



With the sad passing of, Giannis Karayiannis (1939-2013), last week, Sydney school teacher and historian, Vasilis

Vasilas, pays tribute to Pan-Hellenic's charismatic striker by publishing an old interview with him- in full- for the first time.



Growing up in Athens during the Occupation immensely impacted and shaped my family and childhood. Desperation and survival were our daily lives; as a child, I may have been only an observer of what goes on but I quickly learnt to read and understand the pain and anguish on people's faces. When my stomach began to rumble from hunger and I was told that there was nothing to eat, I quickly learnt of daily hardship. There is no other greater tragedy in a young family than to lose a parent; in all his desperation, my father, Panayiotis, jumped onto a truck- which was carrying bread- and began throwing out loaves to other hungry people. The Germans arrested him and he was later executed at Goudi. My memories of my father are dream-like- of him returning home and playing with me on rug or handing me a piece of bread. They are almost unreal. My mother, Maria, was left to rear four sons; luckily, my two brothers, Nikolaos and Dimitrios, were much older than Spyros and me, and they worked odd jobs to help us survive.

In Kesariani, our home was less than fifty metres away from the German guardhouse where executions- of captured Greek resistance fighters, petty criminals or 'troublemakers'- frequently occurred. On May 1, 1944, the Germans executed a few hundred Greeks; I remember the hearing these men singing the Greek national anthem before being shot. The exploding gunshots echoed throughout our minds, leaving a deep sorrow in us. When the council rubbish trucks- carrying all the corpses- drove out of the guardhouse and passed us in the street, there was blood dripping from the trucks and onto the road. Adults and children, we all tried to cover the blood with dirt. These were horrors one cannot forget, even though I was so young. Later that year, the fear of the Germans was replaced by the fear of the Greek Civil War. All the children were told not to openly speak about anything, as it could easily be misconstrued by the authorities and land our families into trouble. These were traumatic years to grow up in; our childhood innocence was taken away from us and we developed this notion that things cannot get better. Even when these wars were over, and the reconstruction of Greece began, we looked for ways to suppress these horrific memories- I played sport.

Despite not being a dedicated student, I still did reasonably well at school. I put all my energy in track and field, basketball and football. At Pagrati High School, I was always first in high jump and was captain of the basketball team. As Ethnikos Asteras' home ground was close to our house, it was only natural for me to play for them. As a teenager, you dream of playing football for one of the big Athenian football clubs; the skills and techniques I learnt in athletics and basketball would prove invaluable when I did pursue a football career. One afternoon, as we were playing neighbourhood football, George Gasparis- a former A.E.K. Athens

player, was passing and stopped to observe us. He invited a group of us to trial with Ethnikos Asteras on the following Tuesday. Gasparis was a scout and coach who took young players and dedicated a lot of time to successfully develop them. This was the beginning of my dream.

From 1953, I spent eight seasons at Ethnikos Asteras, which was one of the better teams in the Athenian A2 competition. For three years, 1958- 61, I had been one of the best centre-backs in the competition. When I was selected to play in the Under 18's mixed Athens team, I realised the 'unreachable' childhood aspirations becoming a reality; in our annual match against the



1st Division Champions- that season, it had been Panathinaikos- we defeated them 2-0 at Near East Stadium. Such matches gave me the exposure for interested 1st Division teams to possibly signing me. A.E.K. approached Gasparis; they saw my abilities on the field but needed to find out more about my character. As Panathinaikos was also interested in me, I was sent to the island of Andros where Club President, Nikos Goumas, hosted me while my contract was being finalised and to be signed. From as young as I can remember, I was always an A.E.K. supporter. My father was from Aivali, a town on the Asia Minor coast, and came to Greece as a refugee after the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey (1923). A.E.K. represents these lost homelands, and there was nothing more sacred than playing for that shirt. While A.E.K. was well into their pre-season training, I began mine alone on Andros. A.E.K. came to the island for a friendly against Andros where I made my debut in our 0-9 thrashing. I was playing alongside legendary players such as Kostas Nestorides and Andreas Stamatiades; I had made the big league.

Part of the agreement was for A.E.K. to find me work; there was very little money in football and you still needed a good job to survive. Whether it was in Greece's national communications or water companies, it did not bother me; all I wanted was job security. However, nothing had eventuated. Our coach, Trifonas Tzanetis, did not show a liking towards me and he showed this by only selecting me on important matches. It was like being thrown into the 'fire' every time; I was not prepared as my match-time before these matches was extremely limited. My matches include: a loss to Barcelona 2-5, wins against Bolton and L.U.S.K., 4-1 and 2-0 respectively, a win against Olympiakos 2-0 and a draw in our return match against them. I did not mind playing against such great teams and I also desired stability- to build my confidence and fitness for these matches over a few matches.

I did not leave A.E.K. because I could not break into 1st Grade, or I was never playing; it was the issue of work. George Salapatas was visiting Greece on a business trip and approached me with Pan-Hellenic's offer. Former A.E.K. player and Pan-Hellenic winger, Chris Ambos, who was already playing for Pan-Hellenic, probably recommended me to the Club's coaching staff and Committee. When I boarded onto the Sydney-bound plane in September 1962 I looked back and believed it was the last time I was seeing Athens. Despite thousands of Greeks migrating to Australia, it was still an enormous decision to come here- especially for sports stars. What if I did not make it in Sydney and returned to Greece; how difficult would it be to re-establish myself?

Luckily I was still only twenty-two years old when I arrived in Sydney in 1962; although there was so much uncertainty, my young spirit allowed me to adjust and overcome any initial problems. My reunion with my fiancé, Eleutheria, in January 1963 also made it easier for me. My initial experiences at Pan-Hellenic were not favourable; I cannot say the Club looked after me. It was only after a couple seasons, when I was moved to striker and began scoring goals, that suddenly Pan-Hellenic changed their attitude and looked after me. However, those first years at the Club were difficult. Once I began to overcome the language barrier, I began to get onto my feet. If the Club was not going to look after me, I had to do things for myself. Thankfully there were people like Comino Omeros who lived nearby and we became family friends and even worked together. Others such as Paul and Kay Peters looked after us as if we were family. We were fortunate to establish a caring support network that helped us adjust to Sydney.

Although the team made the semi-finals in 1963, the Committee had a change of direction towards who they would sign to play for the team; suddenly, Greek players- including myself- were out of favour. I was so disappointed when my dear friend, Ambos,