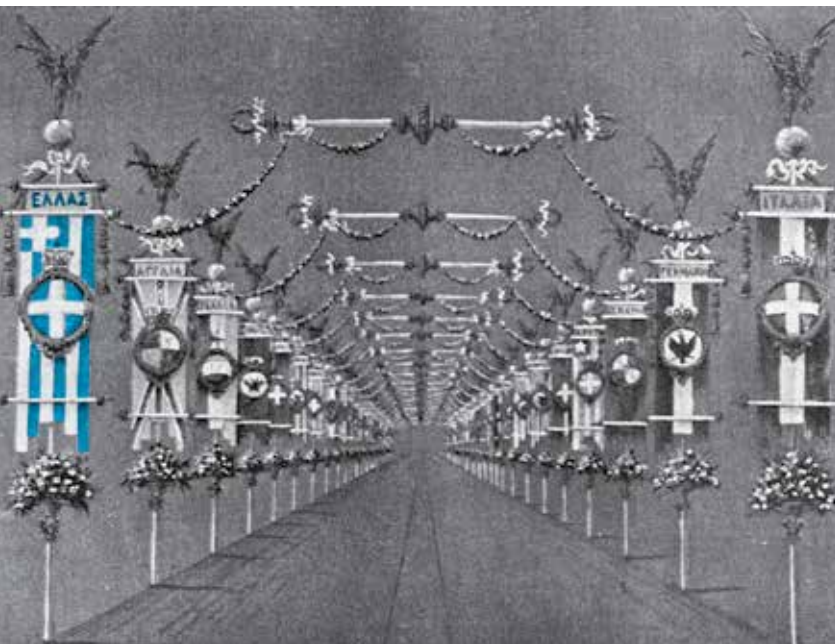


The Athens 1896 and Athens 1906 Olympic Pins

Historical Photos as Undeniable Proof

By Ioannis Thomakos



Special banners emblazoned with the flags and emblems of the participating nations decorated the main streets of Athens and the Panathenaic Stadium in 1896 and 1906. The first banner on the left depicts the flag and national emblem of Greece (blue with white cross).

In October 2018, I was able to publish a book related to the Athens Games, with the title *Athens 2004 Olympic NOC Pins & Related Memorabilia*. During the course of the preparation for this book, I did extensive research on the history of pins produced by National Olympic Committees from 1896 till today. This article draws on this research.

During preparations for the Athens 1896 Games, the Greek Olympic Organising Committee decided, among other things, to decorate the main streets of Athens and the entrance of the Panathenaic Stadium with big banners carrying the flags and emblems of the participating nations. The Greek banner depicted the flag and national emblem of Greece (blue with white cross). These banners greatly enhanced the celebratory atmosphere in the city of Athens.

In February 1895 a very important meeting took place at the Zappeion Megaron in Athens. It was chaired by Crown Prince Konstantin and attended by all members of the Olympic Organising Committee. In that meeting they decided to create nine sub-committees. Each was assigned specific organising duties. They also elected their members.

Spyridon P. Lambros was appointed Secretary for the Olympic Preparation of the Greek Athletes, and he also



Spyridon P. Lambros held a key position in the Greek Olympic Organising Committee as Secretary of the Commission for the Olympic Preparation of Greek Athletes during the 1896 Olympic Games. He was also co-author of the *Athens 1896 Official Report*.

Photos: Ioannis Thomakos Archive

co-authored the *Athens 1896 Official Report*. Lambros was a professor of history and rector at the University of Athens. In 1906, he was the General Secretary of the Second International Olympic Games in Athens, and in 1916 he became Prime Minister of Greece. He was a key contributor to the organisation and implementation of two different Games and as such holds a unique record.

Lambros is also one of only two members of an Olympic Organising Committee to serve as Prime Minister of his country.¹ Lambros was a wise, highly-educated man and his colleagues at the University of Athens called him "a walking encyclopaedia". He was a giant and his



Ioannis Thomakos | author, historian, explorer, inventor, lecturer and dedicated Olympic Collector. He is the co-founder and President of the Olympia Club, a non-profit cultural organisation based in Athens. His book, *Athens 2004 Olympic NOC Pins & Related Memorabilia*, was published in 2018 (see p. 79).



Harvard students Thomas Curtis (far left) and Ellery Clark wore T-shirts with the Greek national emblem, which they supplemented with a small US flag. Curtis was Olympic champion of the 110 metres hurdles; Clark won the long jump and high jump.

Photo: Albert Meyer

great contribution to Olympic history and legacy has not yet received its due attention.

According to a report in a local newspaper, when the American team arrived in Athens for the 1896 Games, Lambros presented them with gifts on behalf of the Organising Committee. These were a number of white T-shirts with the Greek national emblem. As seen in photos of these Games, some Americans, proven to be students of Harvard University wore these shirts. They attached a small American flag to them. This was in addition to the Greek colours, with which they wanted to express their attachment to the host country of the Olympics.

The first winner in marathon history was Charilaos Vasilakos

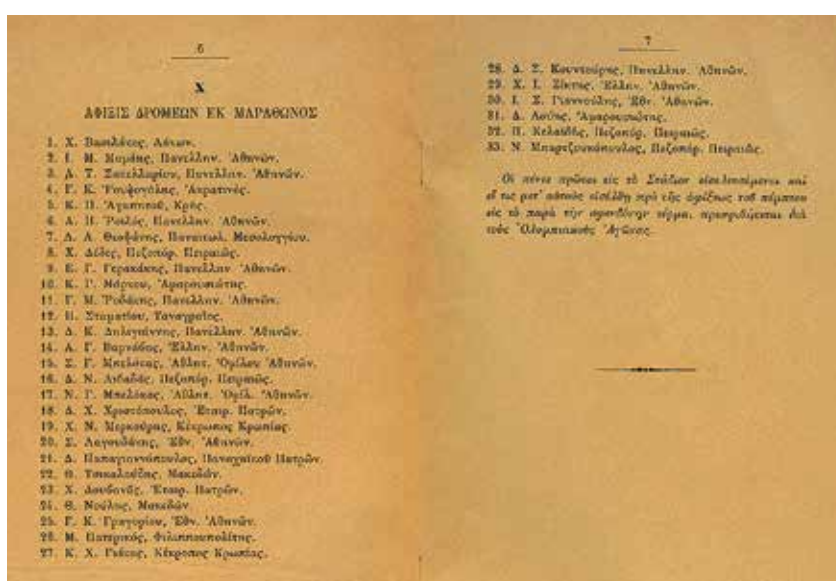
The marathon was introduced to the Olympic programme as a result of a suggestion made by German-French philologist Michel Bréal to IOC founder Pierre de Coubertin. On 22nd March 1896, the Greek Olympic Committee organised a race for the first time. The occasion was the Panhellenic Preliminary Trial to select the best Greek athletes for the Olympic team.

The winner of this first marathon in history was 20-year-old Charilaos Vasilakos, who recorded a time of three hours and 18 minutes for a distance of about 40 kilometres. Among those who were beaten that day, Spyridon Louis, later to become Olympic champion.

On the opening day of the Olympic Games (6th April) a second competition took place, which also included foreign runners to test the course. This time Demitrios Deligiannis won in 3:03:05 hours. Vasilakos was 7th, Louis placed 17th. All three had qualified for the Greek team.

According to their positions, the start numbers for the Olympic race were assigned. On the day of the decision Vasilakos wore 7, Louis 17. The result is well known. Louis won the race in 2:58:50 ahead of Vasilakos, who reached the finish at the Panathenaic Stadium more than seven minutes later.

The start list of the first marathon race in which took place on 22nd March 1896 at the Panhellenic Games in Athens. Vasilakos finished first with a time of 3 hours and 18 minutes.





Charilaos Vasilakos, the first athlete to win a marathon race. He won the Greek Preliminary Trial and was second in the 1896 Olympic event behind Spyridon Louis.



Charalampos Vasilakos, posing in front an exhibit with photos and personal items of his grandfather.



Hand made cloth pin for Greece in 1896 – the first National Olympic Committee Pin in the history of the Olympic Games. The diameter of the pin is 23 mm.

What is the news? In 2018, the grandson of Charilaos Vasilakos sent me the following note:

According to first-hand knowledge and information that was conveyed to me by my grandfather, Mr. Charilaos Vasilakos, following the initiative and proposal of professor Spyridon Lambros, Secretary of the Commission for the Olympic Preparation of Greek Athletes and co-author of the Athens 1896 Official Report, shortly before the Athens 1896 Olympiad, the Greek Organising Committee (EOA – Epitropi Olympiakon Agonon) created a limited number of pins depicting the Greek national emblem (blue with white cross).

These pins were made by hand from cloth and they were given a few days before the Opening Ceremony to a select number of Greek athletes who finished first in



Reception in Kifisia, given by the mayor of Athens to honour the Olympic winners and the foreign athletes. In the photo, Charilaos Vasilakos is seated third from the front, on the right-hand side of the table, facing the camera. On his coat, the cloth pin with the national emblem. Photo: Ioannis Lampakis

*the Athens 1896 Preliminary Trials.
My grandfather finished first in the preliminary trials
of the Athens 1896 marathon race and thus he was
among the recipients of this historical pin.*

Charalampos Vasilakos
Grandson of the first man
to win a Marathon race

On 16th April 1896, one day after the Closing Ceremony of the Games and the distribution of prizes to the Olympic winners, the mayor of Athens held a farewell lunch reception in honour of the foreign Olympic participants, in the Athens suburb of Kifissia.

Marathon runner-up Charilaos Vasilakos was also invited to that event. He can be seen in a picture taken by the Greek photographer Ioannis Lampakis. Vasilakos is seated at the table, wearing the handmade Greece cloth pin on his coat.

To the best of my knowledge this is the first NOC pin in the history of the Olympic Games.



Swedish Olympic team pin from the Second International Olympic Games in Athens 1906. Right: Handmade participation badge given by the Greek Olympic Organising Committee to all athletes, coaches and delegation members who participated in the 1906 Olympic Games. The gold inscription OA (Olympiaki Agones) and the year 1906 is clearly visible on this historic badge.

On Thursday, 12th April 1956, a great reunion in Swedish sport took place. Twenty-three grey-haired men gathered at the Sports Palace in Stockholm. They had all been members of the glorious Swedish team and came together to celebrate the 50th anniversary of their participation in the Athens 1906 Olympic Games. The newspaper *Svenska Dagbladets* published two photos of that meeting.

I was truly moved when I discovered these in 2017. For thirty years, I had been trying to find concrete evidence, to identify and document historically, the Swedish Olympic team pin of Athens 1906. And all of sudden, these photos solved the mystery for me. It was an Olympic historian's dream come true. I will never forget that moment.

Anyone who doubted the truth of the common Latin saying *Mens sana in corpore sano* (a healthy mind in a healthy body) would have been better advised had they come into contact with these sprightly men.

Those who study the documents of that time can still experience a memorable excursion into the history of sports. They will come across legendary athletes such as Knut 'Knatten' Lindberg (1882–1961/silver – javelin), Carl 'Calle-Sven' Svensson (1879–1956/bronze – tug-of-war), Hjalmar Johansson (1874–1857/ 1908 gold – diving), Robert 'Robban' Andersson (1886–1972/fifth place in the swimming relay), Harald 'Julle' Julin (1890–1967/bronze and silver medal in swimming and water polo 1908–1920) and Axel Norling (1884–1964/bronze – tug-of-war and gold in gymnastics in 1908–1912).

The average age of these athletes was about 80. The former IOC President J. Sigfrid Edström, who was a member of the Swedish Olympic Committee in 1906 and responsible for the athletics department, was the oldest of all at the age of 85.

As an Olympic collector, the photos are of particular interest, as it was possible to see the badge worn by the Swedish Olympians at those 1906 Games in Athens. They had honoured it for half a century. Now it is my hope that the present article will be a valuable guide and a precious tool to anybody who wants to learn more about the hitherto unreported history of the NOC pins. ■

¹ The other was the Italian Giulio Andreotti, who led the Organising Committee for the 1960 Games in Rome. Between 1972 and 1979 he served as Italy's Prime Minister on no fewer than five occasions, although sometimes his term of office was only a few months.



Three Swedish athletes at the reunion 50 years after their participation at the Athens 1906 Games. From left to right: 'Robban' Andersson, Axel Norling and Erik Granfelt. Andersson proudly wears the team pin on his coat. Photos: Svenska Dagbladets



50th reunion at the Sports Palace in Stockholm in 1956. From left to right: the diver Hjalmar Johansson and the athletes 'Calle' Svensson and 'Knatten' Lindberg. Svensson and Lindberg wear the Swedish pin, the latter also wears the Greek participant badge.