

Colac's Field of Dreams
20th Cliff Young Australian Six Day
Race
20-26 November 2005
by Phil Essam

If ever a race committee were going to adopt a motto from a film for their particular race, the motto for the 2005 Cliff Young Australian Six Day Race would have to be taken from the immortal American Classic, "Field of Dreams" - "If you build it they will come". This line was to become increasingly poignant as the drama of the race unfolded.

In the months and weeks leading up to this year's race, the interest from prospective entrants was phenomenal with up to 39 runners indicating that they wanted to start the race. It was about three weeks prior that the great Greek-Australian Ultra runner, Yiannis Kouros indicated that he could attend and start the race. Yiannis is the Greatest Ultra runner to have ever lived and this changed the prospect of the race being a good event to being one of the greatest of all time. He was not to disappoint.

Race eve saw a majority of the runners in Colac and attending the reception that was put on by the Colac Otway Shire. Guest Speaker on the night was Tony Rafferty who enthralled the audience with some great and funny stories about previous races at Colac and around the world. Peter Gray, John Timms, George Audley, Shaun Scanlon and Tony Rafferty all received certificates for their special contribution over the years in competing in ten or more Colac races. As this year's Commentator/ Publicity Officer, it was good to have a personal chat with Tony, who related to me some of the previous publicity attracting occurrences that had occurred over the years.

Race day dawned and the track was ready to go. The race is held at Memorial Square in the township of Colac. It has to be one of the most picturesque venues in Australia with elm trees surrounding the track and a War Memorial in the middle. It was a beautiful blue skied day with slight cloud cover and southerly breeze, ideal for ultra running in every way possible. Thirty four runners started with Robyn Davies pulling out on the morning with a reoccurrence of heart/nerve problems and Carlos Machado from Brazil, missing in action!

It wasn't long before Kouros, Hardel (France) and Okiyama (Japan) were racing together. Hardel had completed 900 plus kms (559.8 miles) earlier this year and Okiyama had recently run 400 plus kms (248.5 miles) over 48 hours. It appeared that the three form runners were testing and probing each other in the early stages. After four hours, it was still very close and Kouros only had a two lap lead on Hardel and Okiyama. Kouros had covered 48km (29.8 miles) in that time.

The first casualty was Deb DeWilliams having to withdraw when her crew's father took seriously ill. Her crew, Alistair had helped Deb during her history making Round Australia Walk and it's understandable that Alistair had become part of the family in that time.

All of the runners kept going through the Sunday night without much of a break. At 21 hours, Kouros had run 224km (139.18 miles) for an incredible 46km (28.5 miles) lead over Hardel and Dvoracek who were in the high 170's (105.6 miles). Garry Wise was the leading Australian with 149.2km (92.7 miles) and Dawn Parris was leading the women's race

with 118km.(73.32 miles) Jewan McPhee had become the second scratching of the race having completed over 100km (62.13 miles) before deciding that multi-day racing wasn't for him. At the end of the first day there was no doubt in anyone's mind who was going to win, it was just a question of how far would he run and the winning margin. The person I am talking about is Yiannis Kouros. He had covered 254.4km (158.07 miles), which was 9km (5.5 miles) further than he had done on the same track twenty one years ago when he set the World track record for six days. I believe this was the first indicator that a great event was unfolding. Dvoracek had moved into second place with over 200km (124.27 miles) on the first day and Hardel wasn't much further back having also covered 200km. Kouros had done his job and broken any potential challengers.

The ever popular crowd favourite, Elvira Janosi from Hungary was the next withdrawal suffering a stomach upset in a reoccurrence of a complaint a few months earlier. It was a shame to see Elvira forced to stop.

Don McKechnie withdrew next with a shoulder injury. Don had developed a rather extreme lean after about 18 hours and it was sad to see him withdraw. Don came along to the race two years ago on a Saturday shopping trip from Camperdown. He stayed at the Square and helped crew for some runners. He was back the following year crewing for George Audley. Don decided that in 2005 he would have a go himself. He showed pure courage in the short time he was on the track and there were certainly a few wet eyes when he retired.

Late Monday evening saw another retirement. George Audley decided to call it a day realising that he had had enough and had nothing to prove any more. Is this George's last Ultra race? He has certainly had a great career and we salute you for your contribution to the sport.

At 34 hours, Kouros had covered 323.6km (201.07 miles) and was on course to beat his own World 48hr age record of approximately 444km (275.8 miles). Garry Wise had completed over 200km.(124.27 miles) The first indigenous Australian to compete in a six day race was also running an excellent race and pacing himself very well.

Tuesday morning dawned and it was certainly an eventful morning. Kouros at 42 hours had covered 384.8km (239.10 miles). Second was Vlastimil Dvoracek with 289.2km (179.70 miles). Vlastimil, from the Czech Republic, was having the race of his life. He doesn't speak any English and three years earlier had struggled to get any help or assistance when he covered 630km (391 miles). We were delighted when Ian McNamara ('ABC Australia All Over' fame) paid us a visit and showed interest in the race and it's history.

Peter Gray was to become the first person to run 10,000km and was immediately bestowed with the unofficial title of "Mayor of Memorial Square". This is a fantastic achievement for anyone.

The 48th hour saw World and Australian Records tumble like flies. Ken Matchett beat the previous World/Australian M80 record. He was also to demolish the 100 mile and 200km (124.27 miles) records held by the late Drew Kettle. Vlastik Skavril set a new World Record for the M65 48hrs when he added 7 kilometres to George Audley's previous best. Dawn Parris set an Australian record in the W50 48hrs. Yiannis Kouros had a 48 hour total of 432.4km.(268.68 miles) Anything is possible!

Tuesday evening saw more records fall. Kouros beat Bryan Smith's Australian M45 record for 500km (310.68 miles). Bryan is the only other person to run 1000km (621.37 miles) here at Colac! Another omen, Kouros also exceeded his existing 500km (310.68 miles) World record by approximately two and a half hours. At half way Yiannis Kouros had covered 590.8km.(367.10 miles) The world record was definitely up for grabs.

David Jones retired on the Wednesday afternoon with a reoccurrence of shin soreness. Although disappointed, David was pleased with his performance during the week.

At 78hr, Kouros was leading with 630.4km (391.71 miles) with Dvoracek second on 511.6km (317.89 miles) Katsuhiro Tanaka was 48 kilometres further back third with 463.6km.(288.06 miles) Dawn Parris was the leading woman with 376.4km (233.88 miles). This stage of the race saw the "Battle of the Tasmanians". Peter Hoskinson had 399.2km (248.05 miles) to Vlastik Skavril's 393.2km.(244.32 miles)

One of the requirements is to complete a minimum distance for each 24 hour period. The two runners aged over 80 had to do a marathon each day, the 70 year olds had to do 50km (31.06 miles) and the remainder of the field, 65km.(40.38 miles) This alleviates people detracting from the races standard by entering and just doing 20kms (12.4 miles) a day. This makes for some interesting running in the hours before midday as some runners have to make an effort to reach their daily requirements. The closest runner was John Reidy on day four who made it with eight minutes to spare.

Just before midday on Thursday, Kouros had completed 732.4km with Dvoracek on 604.4km.

At approximately 2.30pm, the race stopped for seven minutes after a gas bottle caught fire in one of the tents. Quick thinking by a crew member prevented a major disaster as the bottle was kicked out onto the track. Committee members were soon on hand and runners were halted. The local Fire Brigade were soon on hand and the gas bottle was taken care of. Three runners became impatient and took a route off the track and then double backed. All in all the race suffered a seven minute delay. The three runners were later penalised a lap for disobeying the referee's orders. Tempers frayed briefly before the matter was soon resolved.

Things were soon back in full swing and the committee had to consider what to do with the lost seven minutes. A check of the AURA and IAU rule books was undertaken and it was ascertained that there were no rules to cover such a contingency. Emails and phone calls were sent to all parts of Australia and the globe. Emailing IAU members in Europe during the day proved troublesome as it was, the middle of the night in Europe. We had to wait several hours for the responses to start coming in.

Kouros brought up 800km close to the 104th hour. His last 100km was two hours faster than the previous 100km. This is

quite unusual.

The second last day dawned and it looked like being a warm one. During the day, Kouros started to look as though he was suffering, but was soon being helped by Tasmanian runner, Vlastik Skavril. Vlastik had suffered during the week with bronchitis but battled on relentlessly. Vlastik could see that Yiannis was having problems with the heat and soon gave up his ice vest for Yiannis to use. He was also running with Yiannis in a bid to keep him on track. It is sporting performances like these that makes our sport truly GREAT. Vlastik's excellent sportsmanship, along with others such as Lindsay Phillips, was regularly witnessed over the next 36 hours.

We had several replies about the "seven minute" issue. The first two were from members of the IAU Arbitration Panel saying that we could extend the race by seven minutes. We went ahead and announced that the race would be extended. About two/three hours later we received another email from the IAU Chairman saying the race could not be extended under any circumstances. This email was sat on for a few hours as the Committee and myself all hoped that the seven minutes would not be crucial!

The battle of the Oldies was continuing with only 6km separating Stan Miskin from Ken Matchett in the M80 age group. Who would be on top at the end?

One runner who gave tirelessly to his fellow competitors was American, Andy Lovy. Andy is a qualified Osteopathic Surgeon and will always help any runners who need his assistance. This generous spirit helped quite a few get back onto the track.

Two areas that continue to shine through at each multi-day race that I am able to witness, is the importance of crewing and prior preparation before getting to the track. There are still quite a few runners that turn up at without any crew. Some of them seem to get by ok, whilst I'm sure others would be able to maximise their performance if they had a crew with them.. There was also a team of runners from overseas that only brought shoes with them that were half a size too big for the race. This was a correct strategy for when the feet swelled after a couple of days, but was to present all sorts of problems with the feet early on.

Three crew people that were able to help were "Mr Motivator" Mark Griffiths, 'The Blister Gal', Sandra Howorth and "The Stat's Man"; Rudi Skrucany. They were crewing for Heather Kick, Andrew Lovy and Yiannis Kouros respectively but were to help many others during the course of the week.

The cool change arrived about 6.00pm on the Friday and it was appreciated by all the runners. Drama was to once again hit at 7.30pm that when a massive storm arrived. It started with the wind and rain taking out some of the available power and lifting the carpeted section on the main straight clear off the track. I stood on the carpet trying to keep it from blowing away and trying hard to prevent the barriers from falling on the runners and guiding the runners through. without hurting themselves. Thanks to the

people visiting that came and helped me out!

The rain and wind continued for a few minutes and then I heard a crack. I looked down and saw one of the huge Elm trees fall and land on the track. At the same time, I saw one of the tents go sailing into the middle of the Square. I couldn't see anyone at that part of the course, but raced down and shouted to see if there was anyone there. At the same time the remaining power seemed to go off. I established that no one was hurt before a runner came around, I guided him to the outside and then back onto the track. For the next few minutes I kept on guiding the runners around the fallen tree.

I was joined by some others who proceeded to start clearing the tree off the track. These helpers weren't just Committee members. Crew people turned up to help along with members of the public. After an hour's hard work the track was open again and runners were back doing the 400m course. We were just so lucky that no one had been injured. It was then I remembered the famous 1985 New York race when Yiannis kept running during the tornado and set the six day road race record. This race was certainly going

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There was one injury during the storm. Peter Gray's Mum, Norma was hit by some flying debris during the storm and required three stitches in the leg. She was found by Garry Wise who then bandaged her up before Peter appeared and helped. Norma was taken to hospital but was back at the

The next few hours saw Yiannis continue his race towards perfection. Several runners were helping him, all sportsman of the highest calibre.

Kouros's distances during the night:

Hour 130-954.8km

Hour 133-966.8km (12 km)

Hour 134-974km (8 km)

Hour 135-980.4km (6 km)

Hour 136-988.8km (8 km)

Hour 137-995.2km (7 km)

It was about 6:20am when Yiannis brought up 1000km (621.37 miles) establishing a new World Age Record for M45 with a time of 5D 17:41:57. I was unsure whether he would have the fire to go for the overall World Six Day Record or be happy with the World Track Record. (I was also debating how to try and entice the Melbourne media as well - but as it turned out there aren't many Melbourne journalists awake at six in the morning - Their Loss!) By nine o'clock that morning, Yiannis had covered 1,016.0km.(631.31 miles)

The other runners were trying anything possible and legal to pick Kouros up. Andy Lovy was given a bright red and orange flame hat to wear around the track. Kouros went past him and Andy was believed to have said in a rather cheeky voice "Come on Yiannis, light my fire" Yiannis appreciated the moment greatly and picked up his pace even more. It was about this time that I was starting to worry about the lack of support at the Square. Was Yiannis going to create history in front of an empty Stadium? We weren't to be disappointed!

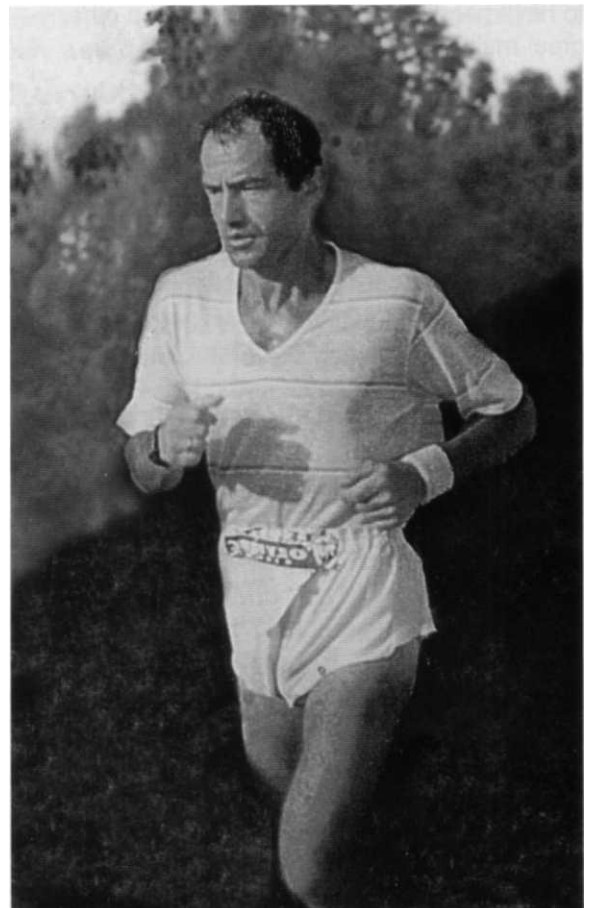
It was shortly after 10am when two or three bus loads of the Greek community arrived and we knew that history was to be made. The atmosphere became electric as Yiannis first beat his World six day track record and pushed even more to the overall World Record. The other runners starting pushing their pace as well, especially Peter Hoskinson, Garry Wise, David Billett and Lindsay Phillips who were running with Yiannis. Hoskinson went through 700km (434.95 miles) and then Billett and Wise went through 600km.(372.88 miles)

At 5D 23:43, Yiannis broke the existing six day overall record. He didn't stop though, but kept on going. A huge crowd had built up and TV cameras from WinNews had turned up to film this historic moment. The crowd were chanting "Kouros, Kouros, Kouros" each time the Legend came past.

Then before we knew it the count down to the end of was happening. It was 144 hours and history had been made at Memorial Square, Colac. 1,036.8km (644.24 miles) of pure history! Kouros was mobbed by some onlookers but order was soon restored. The crowd was to stay for the presentations which added to the atmosphere. Two hours later, the Square resembled a ghost town as runners and crews packed up to leave. I think everyone was in a state of shock. I still am and it's six days since the race finished! I had been fortunate enough to witness two world record performances by the Greatest Ultra runner of our time.

Stan Miskin was to set a New World M80 six day record and may even take Ken Matchett's 48hr/ 100 mile records set during the first two days (This will depend on a ruling from the IAU) Other national records were also broken during. Kjell-Ove Skogland set a new Swedish six day and 500km (310.68 miles) records along with Arun Bhardwaj with a new Indian six day mark. A full list of records will be calculated later and published once they have been ratified by AURA and the IAU.

All runners and walkers performed magnificently during the week and many achieved personal bests at various distances. They should all be congratulated. Australian Ultrarunning is alive and well. It's going to go from strength to strength over the coming years



Yiannis Kouros

OVERALL PROVISIONAL RESULTS

Place	Name			Kilometres	Miles
1	KOUROS Yiannis			1036.80	644.24
2	DVORACEK Vlastimil			822.80	511.26
3	TANAKA Katsuhiro			814.40	506.05
4	OKIYAMA Kenji	-		708.00	439.93
5	HOSKINSON Peter			704.00	437.45
6	SKVARIL Vlastik	67		678.00	421.29
7	SKOGLUND Kjell-Ove			653.60	406.13
8	PARRIS Dawn		F	640.00	397.68
9	BILLET David			602.40	374.31
10	WISE Garry			600.40	372.82
11	KURODA Muneharu			589.20	366.11
12	BARNETT Sarah		F	572.40	355.67
13	WRIGHT Eric			572.40	355.67
14	BHARDWAIJ Arun			556.40	345.73
15	PHILLIPS Lindsay			509.60	316.65
16	McKINLAY Brock			481.20	299.00
17	BEST Graeme			474.80	295.03
18	REIDY John			469.60	291.79
19	KICK Heather		F	458.80	285.08
20	BLOOMER Brian			456.80	283.84
21	HARDEL Claude			454.80	282.60
22	GRAY Peter			444.80	276.38
23	MISKIN Stan	80		429.60	266.94
24	MATCHETT Ken	83		422.80	262.71
25	LOVY Andy	70		370.40	230.15
26	CLARKE Albert	70		344.80	214.25
27	JONES David	64		325.20	202.07
28	SCANLON Shaun			324.40	201.57
29	MCGREGOR Ron			306.00	190.14
30	AUDLEY George	70		150.80	93.70
31	McPHEE Jewan			104.00	64.62
32	JANOSI Elvira		F	100.80	62.63
33	MACKECHNIE Don	70		90.40	56.17
34	DeWILLIAMS Deborah		F	24.00	14.91
"People will come Ray, People will definitely come"			- Field of Dreams.	Kouros average per day	107.37 miles