

The Meaning of Kotinos

Synopsis

The olive wreath is known as the kotinos in Greek. In addition to the olive branches connection to the Olympics, the olive branch is also recognized as a universal symbol of peace throughout the world. I felt that running for virtue, peace and wisdom instead of possessions, money or fame was a good ethos for a new running group. Kotinos Runners seemed like a meaningful name for the group on many levels.

History

The Olympic Games began in 776 BC in ancient Olympia (Greece) in honor of the god Zeus.

The olive wreath (kotinos) was introduced by Heracles as a prize for the winners at the ancient Olympic Games to honor his father Zeus. For the ancient Greeks, the olive was a symbol of the Olympic ideals of peace, wisdom and victory.

The judges of the Olympic Games would take olive branches; which came from a wild olive tree that grew at Olympia and intertwine them to form a circle or a horse-shoe to make the olive wreaths (kotinos). No athlete could declare victory at the Olympics until crowned with the kotinos by the "Hellanodikai", who were the judges of Olympic Games.

In the ancient Olympic Games there were no gold, silver, or bronze medals. There was only one winner per event, crowned with an olive wreath (kotinos).

Herodotus describes the following story which is relevant to the olive wreath (kotinos) and highlights the spirit of the athletes who participated in the ancient Olympic games. The Persian King Xerxes invaded Greece in 480 BC. After his victory over the Greeks at the Battle of Thermopylae, Xerxes questioned why there were so few Greek men defending the area which heightened his concern regarding future battles against a larger Greek army. The reply was that all the other Greek men were participating in the Olympic Games, and that the winners would receive an olive wreath. One of Xerxes generals stated, *"Good heavens! What kind of men are these that you have pitted us against? It is not for money they contend, but for virtue and the glory of achievement!"* (Herodotus, *The Histories*, 8.26.3). King Xerxes was defeated at major battles by the Greeks later that year. Xerxes retreated with his army back to Asia and never again returned to Greece.

The Kotinos was also chosen to be the emblem of the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, where the ancient tradition of delivering a kotinos to the winners was revived.

Photo below of the Kotinos (Olive Wreath)

