



**Cyprus**

Friday, March 30, 2007



'Take a little wine for thy stomach's sake?'  
St Paul

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**Cyprus trounce Greece in first international rugby match**

By Alexander McCowan  
*(archive article - Tuesday, March 27, 2007)*

SATURDAY witnessed the first Rugby Football International match to take place on Cypriot soil.

Years of hard work and planning by a few dedicated individuals resulted in 15 strapping Cypriot players taking on the much more experienced Greek side who are currently leaders of their regional group. This was officially a 'friendly' but to mark the occasion, the sides were competing for Independence Cup which will now be played on an annual basis.

The teams lined up to be presented to deputy president of DISY Averoff Neophytou by president of the Cyprus Rugby Federation Costas Mastoroudes and the Greek Federation president, Evangelis Stamou.

There followed a blessing by the Reverend Father Pantobios, priest of Yeroskiou.



**Weather**

	MIN	MAX
Nicosia	7	21
Larnaca	8	20
Limassol	10	21
Paphos	8	20
Prodromos	3	12

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It must be stated that the Greek side completely outplayed us in singing the national anthem, but it was the only time they did.

Shortly after the kick-off, a scrum formed in the Greek half and our pack were dumped.

Cypriot captain, Jonathan Pettemerides, soon settled them down and they went to work with a furious enthusiasm that unsettled the Greeks. Cyprus was rewarded with a penalty after five minutes and vice captain Tony Thoma kicked between the uprights into a punishing wind and secured the first three points for Cyprus in an international.

Cyprus camped out in the Greek half and battled on for a try scored by full back, Mike Maratheftis to take the lead by 10 points after Thoma converted.

Following some moments of indecision, the Greeks advanced into Cypriot territory and gained a penalty, which they failed to convert. Shortly before half-time Cyprus was awarded another penalty that deflected from the post, but was gathered by the outside half, Andrew Binikos who went over for a try which went unconverted.

At half-time Cyprus left the field leading by 15 to 0. which was fully justified; they displayed good handling skills, were not overawed in the set

pieces, but most importantly were excellent in defence; the Greeks could not penetrate their line.

The second half started in the most dramatic fashion with a scorching break by the outstanding captain, Pettemerides, who passed outside to Binikos, who went over under the posts. The reliable Thoma converted and Cyprus led by 22-0. As the game progressed Cyprus became more confident and apart from minor indiscretions arising from sheer enthusiasm, dominated the experienced Greek side.

The defence tackling of the two centres, particularly George Agathocleous was outstanding.

Twenty minutes into the half, the Greeks were rewarded for their persistence with a converted penalty by the No. 10, Athanasios Tsatsalos which followed from a series of infringements by Cyprus.

This was soon adjusted by a try by Tony Thoma, who converted and took the score to 32-3; Thoma, a utility forward was part of a back row that was relentless in attack and defence. Almost on full time Chris Thoma crashed over on the wing, and with his brother's conversion, brought the final score to 39-3.

If you think this is flattering, be aware that poor ball handling

in the second half prevented Cyprus running in at least another two tries.

Led by John Stavrou, the officials had an easy game, and apart from a mild case of 'handbags', the event was one of outstanding sportsmanship.

Following the game Omiros Fanariotis, the Greek loosehead prop, said, "Cyprus was tough and well-trained".

He said Greece had not underestimated Cyprus but had not expected them to gel so well in their first international. "The Cypriots capitalised on our mistakes"

He commended the spirit of the game, but predicted that Greece will win the return match next year.

Neophytou described the win as a "great day for Cyprus".

On being awarded the Man Of The Match trophy, Cyprus captain Jonathan Petteimerides paid tribute to his side.

"The boys worked very hard and deserve full credit for their work around the pitch. Greece was very aggressive but it was our intention to move them around and unsettle them, which we did.

"I want to acknowledge the hard work done by the coaching staff and the management."

Petteimerides, who has played

rugby around the world, said that captaining his country was his proudest moment in the game. Tony Thoma, top points scorer, paid tribute to the team's "excellent skipper", adding "it was a top-notch performance after only one full practice, but I thought the Greeks would be stronger".

Niall Docherty, the national coach said he "wasn't surprised by the result".

The whole atmosphere surrounding the game was one of good fellowship; rugby followers from all nationalities domiciled in the island swelled the crowd to over 2,500.

Among the VIPs in the hospitality centre was Irish Ambassador Tom Brady and Garth Hunt, the Australian High Commissioner – diplomatic representatives of two of the world's strongest rugby playing countries. Both expressed their pleasure at being present on such an historic occasion for Cyprus.

President of the Cyprus Rugby Federation, Costas Mastoroudes, paid tribute to his team and officials and to those who had rallied to support the national side; not least the members of Paphos Tigers RFC who ran the food and drink stalls, but most particularly to those stalwarts and principal sponsors of Cyprus rugby, Artio Brasserie, run by Andreas Antoniou and Rona Bloomfield who not only

provided the hospitality marquee, but donated the national team's shirts.

Greece of course, were sponsored by Emboriki Bank, and Cyprus ran out in 'Artio Brasserie'. Well done, Andreas and Rona.

Loukis Pattihis, vice-president of Cyprus Rugby Federation summed it up in saying, "We won before we got on the pitch".

Next up for Cyprus, a friendly in November, perhaps against Bulgaria. In case any cynics out there are wondering about the overseas players; they all paid their own expenses.

Six players from the winning team will be in action on Thursday when the Limassol Crusaders take on Akrotiri in the semi-finals of the Cyprus Cup. The game starts at 7.00pm at Akrotiri. For more information visit [www.limassolcrusaders.com](http://www.limassolcrusaders.com)

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