At the International Olympic Academy, science met the field

Three-day HEYDAY Unity Symposium 2026 and 2nd Race of Unity in Ancient Olympia

Ancient Olympia, 15 September 2026

A scientific symposium on personalised nutrition for children and athletes, and a road race with Ancient Olympia as their shared finish, were completed as a single event over the three days of 4-6 September 2026. The HEYDAY Unity Symposium 2026 was hosted at the facilities of the International Olympic Academy, and the 2nd Race of Unity - Unity Race 2 was held on Sunday along the routes Andritsaina - Ancient Olympia and Linaria - Ancient Olympia. The organiser was EPIGONOS AMKE, within the framework of the Heyday Road initiative.

The event serves a direction that EPIGONOS AMKE summarises in the phrase "From Knowledge to the Field - Από τη γνώση στο πεδίο": scientific knowledge is not produced in order to remain in lecture halls, but in order to reach people's everyday lives - and for the experience of the field to return to research as material for study. For this reason, the three-day event was not designed as a conference with a parallel race, but as a single cycle: two days in the hall and one day on the road, with the same people in both.

Friday, 4 September - The opening ceremony

The official opening took place on Friday, 4 September at the International Olympic Academy, with journalist Nikos Tsonis, Honorary Adviser for Sporting Memory & Public Narrative of EPIGONOS AMKE, serving as presenter.

The president of the Organising Committee, Professor of Molecular Oncology Stavros P. Derdas, set the central scientific boundary of the event: the need for personalised nutrition to be based on evidence, and not on commercial promises that precede scientific proof.

Christos Gogos, President of the Regional Council of Attica, referred to the connection between science, local government and society, and welcomed the Symposium's guest, Professor of Cardiac Surgery at the University of Turin Mauro Rinaldi.

A greeting on behalf of the Region of Crete was delivered by Georgios Z. Papadakis, nuclear medicine physician and researcher at the Foundation for Research and Technology, who also participated in the scientific programme the following day. Pavlos Vourtsis, representative of the Chamber of Ilia, focused on the possibilities of connecting research with agrifood, entrepreneurship and the prospects of young people in the region - a theme that directly connects the scientific content of the Symposium with the local economy of Ilia.

On behalf of EPIGONOS AMKE, Athanasios Kalamaras spoke, presenting the Symposium as the scientific continuation of Heyday Road: the effort for the experience of a 165.96-kilometre route between Sparta and Ancient Olympia to be recorded, studied and returned to society as knowledge.

This was followed by the remarks of two clinicians: Professor of Surgery Konstantinos M. Konstantinidis, Director of General, Oncological, Laparoscopic and Robotic Surgery, who emphasised the evaluation of

medical technology with patient benefit as the sole criterion; and cardiac surgeon Konstantinos Triantafyllou, who focused on the Mediterranean diet, prevention and the need for valid public information.

The circle was closed by Professor Mauro Rinaldi. He referred to the emotion of returning to Olympia after approximately forty years, to fair competition as a principle in the education of young surgeons, and underlined the importance of investing in prevention, nutrition and physical activity as a long-term choice for health systems.

Nikos Tsonis read the written greeting of the Mayor of Sparta, Michalis Vakalopoulos. A greeting by Dr Styliani Geronikolou, President of the European Society for the History of Oncology, was also read, while a recorded video greeting by Professor of Toxicology Aristidis Tsatsakis was shown.

The evening concluded with a commemorative photograph in the courtyard of the Academy and a shared dinner.

Saturday, 5 September - The scientific programme

On Saturday, 5 September, the main scientific programme unfolded, with more than twenty speakers and session chairs from Greece and abroad. The theme of the Symposium was nutrigenetics and nutrigenomics, with emphasis on personalised nutrition for children and athletes.

Clinical applications. The first session addressed precision nutrition in clinical practice: the postprandial dysmetabolic state as a daily burdening factor for the cardiometabolic system, the relationship between nutrition and genetic predisposition in type 2 diabetes mellitus, the role of bioactive components in regulating gene expression, and the usefulness of cardiovascular biomarkers for prevention in children and athletes.

Olympism and education. The keynote lecture on the cultural dimensions of Olympism highlighted the timeless connection between physical exercise and education, fair competition and the holistic development of the human being, substantially connecting the scientific content with the place that hosted it.

Molecular mechanisms and "omics" technologies. The use of dietary supplements in sport was critically examined, with an explicit distinction between scientifically documented interventions and practices based mainly on commercial promotion. The transition from general recommendations to personalised nutritional support was presented, as was the role of the molecular axis mTOR-AMPK-SIRT1 in the regulation of metabolism.

The athletes' microbiome. A special place was held by the presentations on the differences in the intestinal microbiome between athletes and non-athletes, the effects of systematic exercise on the immune system, the relationship between functional nutrition and microbial ecology, and the available data on the use of probiotics in athletic performance and recovery.

Olympic spirit and modern biomedicine. The afternoon session connected fair competition and the democratic ideal with the challenges of modern medicine: the evolution of surgical excellence from antiquity to robotic surgery, the molecular mechanisms linking cancer with ageing and longevity, and the contribution of the poetry of Pindar to the preservation of Olympic memory.

The athlete's heart and public information. In the final part, approaches were presented for the protection of athletes' cardiovascular health, from prevention to precision surgery, as well as the contribution of positron emission tomography to the detection of "invisible" inflammation. Two presentations were devoted specifically to the responsibility of journalism and the avoidance of misinformation around sports nutrition.

The Scientific Committee was chaired by Emeritus Professor of Clinical Virology Dimitrios A. Spandidos. The Symposium was held under the academic auspices of Aegean College.

Sunday, 6 September - From Andritsaina to Olympia

The final day began in Andritsaina. At 12 noon, professors and runners arrived together at the Folklore Museum of the Foundation of the Heirs of Georgios & Foula Nikolopoulou, where they were welcomed by the Museum's representatives and the Deputy Mayor of Andritsaina and Acting Mayor Miltiadis-Theodoros Georgakopoulos, who opened the event, with the support of the Municipality of Andritsaina - Krestena.

Greetings were delivered by Professors of Medical Microbiology Yavuz Uyar and Murat Hökelek of Istanbul University-Cerrahpasa, who had spoken the previous day in the scientific programme. A guided tour of the Museum's collections followed and, subsequently, a traditional treat was offered in the central square of the village.

It was the moment when the three-day event changed character: from the international scientific discussion of the International Olympic Academy to a mountain community of Ilia that welcomed its visitors a few hours before seeing them off on the road.

The 2nd Race of Unity

At 2:30 in the afternoon, the 48-kilometre race started from Andritsaina. Later, while the race was still in progress, the 6-kilometre route started from Linaria - the final kilometres of the same route. Thus, the two groups met at their common destination: the Town Hall of Ancient Olympia.

A total of fifty athletes participated in the two routes. At the start in Andritsaina, they were joined by three speakers of the Symposium: Professors Dimitrios A. Spandidos, Yavuz Uyar and Murat Hökelek. The Finnish ultramarathon runner Noora Honkala, Guardian of the HEYDAY Unity Race, also participated honorarily in the 48-kilometre route.

The race has a non-competitive character. There are no winners, and priority is given to participation, the shared route and the relationship with the place - for this reason, participants in Heyday Road are called wayfarers.

Along the route, in Kallithea, Amygdalees and other villages, reception and care stations operated, where residents waited for the wayfarers to welcome them. Health coverage in the field was undertaken by the Hellenic Red Cross.

The Association of Young People of Andritsaina "Parrasioi" and APS Olympia Runners supported the organisation of the race.

The continuation

EPIGONOS AMKE is proceeding with the processing of the recorded talks and their gradual publication as standalone videos, so that the scientific content will be accessible also to those who did not attend the event. The next cycle of Heyday Road is planned for 2027.

> *"Heyday Road began as a 165.96-kilometre route between two names known throughout the world, Sparta and Olympia. What we saw this year at the International Olympic Academy is that this road can also connect people who otherwise would not have met: the cardiac surgeon with the producer, the researcher with the parent, the local community with international science. For us, this is the meaning of the word Unity."*
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> **- George Vamvakitis, Founder & President, EPIGONOS AMKE**

Notes to editors

Event identity: HEYDAY Unity Symposium 2026 & 2nd Race of Unity (Unity Race 2) · 4-6 September 2026 · International Olympic Academy, Ancient Olympia · Theme: "Nutrigenetics and Nutrigenomics: Personalised Nutrition for Children and Athletes" · Motto: "From Knowledge to the Field" · Organised by: EPIGONOS AMKE / HEYDAY Road Initiative.

At a glance: 165.96 km the Sparta - Ancient Olympia route · 3 days · 20+ speakers and session chairs · 50 athletes in the Race of Unity · 2 routes, 48 km and 6 km · common finish in Ancient Olympia.

Under the auspices of: Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO) · Ministry of Health · Athens Medical Association · Region of Western Greece · Municipality of Ancient Olympia · Chamber of Ilia

Academic auspices: Aegean College

Venue: International Olympic Academy, Ancient Olympia

Sponsors: Silver Sponsor: ARMATURA Supplements · Bronze Sponsor: BIOIATRIKI Healthcare Group

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Field support and local cooperation: Municipality of Andritsaina - Krestena · Folklore Museum of Andritsaina (Foundation of the Heirs of Georgios & Foula Nikolopoulou) · Association of Young People of Andritsaina "Parrasioi" · APS Olympia Runners · Hellenic Red Cross

About EPIGONOS AMKE: EPIGONOS AMKE, based in Sparta, develops the Heyday Road initiative around the 165.96-kilometre Sparta - Ancient Olympia route. Its aim is to connect sport, cultural memory, scientific knowledge and local participation in a single field of public value.

Photographic material: High-resolution photographs are available upon request. Credit: HEYDAY ROAD / EPIGONOS AMKE.

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