

# Track and Field



*Chris Brasher*



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### Who can tell?

A 24-year run of British failures came to an end in 1956. Ever since 1932, no runner had brought home a gold medal in an individual Olympic track event. The man who did so in Melbourne was perhaps the most unlikely candidate for the honour.

Chris Brasher had always, as school-boy and undergraduate, tried hard and perseveringly, but had never really looked like a winner.

At Cambridge, he shouldered the task of President of the University Athletic Club ably and well, but his performances gave little promise of an Olympic future. Nonetheless he qualified for the Helsinki Games in 1952 and reached the final of the 3,000-metre steeplechase. A year later, his international career faltered when he finished last in the Swedish match in Stockholm earning the remark from a commentator that he had moved "with the gait of a sleepwalker". Brasher's friendship with Roger Bannister and Chris Chataway and with their coach, Franz Stampfl, brought about a transformation in 1954. Regular training sessions with the big two and a part in the 'pace pyramid' which enabled Bannister to become the world's first four-minute-

miler lent Brasher a confidence which he might never have gained in lesser company.

As it turned out, he was to capture the prize which eluded both his more gifted contemporaries. In 1956 Bannister had retired, Chataway was one of the favourites for the Olympic 5,000 metres and Brasher was a third-string selection for the 3,000-metre steeplechase. In the final, Brasher was not just successful but utterly dominant, beating the Hungarian Sandor Rozsnyoi by a clear 10 metres. But drama followed action as Brasher was first disqualified for an alleged obstruction but later reinstated to claim his gold medal. He had never won even a national title. But who can tell what qualities may make a champion?

Following his retirement, Brasher played a part in promoting the new sport of orienteering and was prominent as a sports writer and television producer.

#### CHRIS BRASHER

Born Aug. 21, 1928, in Georgetown, GUY

#### AWARDS AND RECORDS

1956 OG: Gold medal 3,000-metre steeplechase, 8:41.2

*Brasher beats Australia's MacMillan in the international mile event at White City, June 5, 1954*