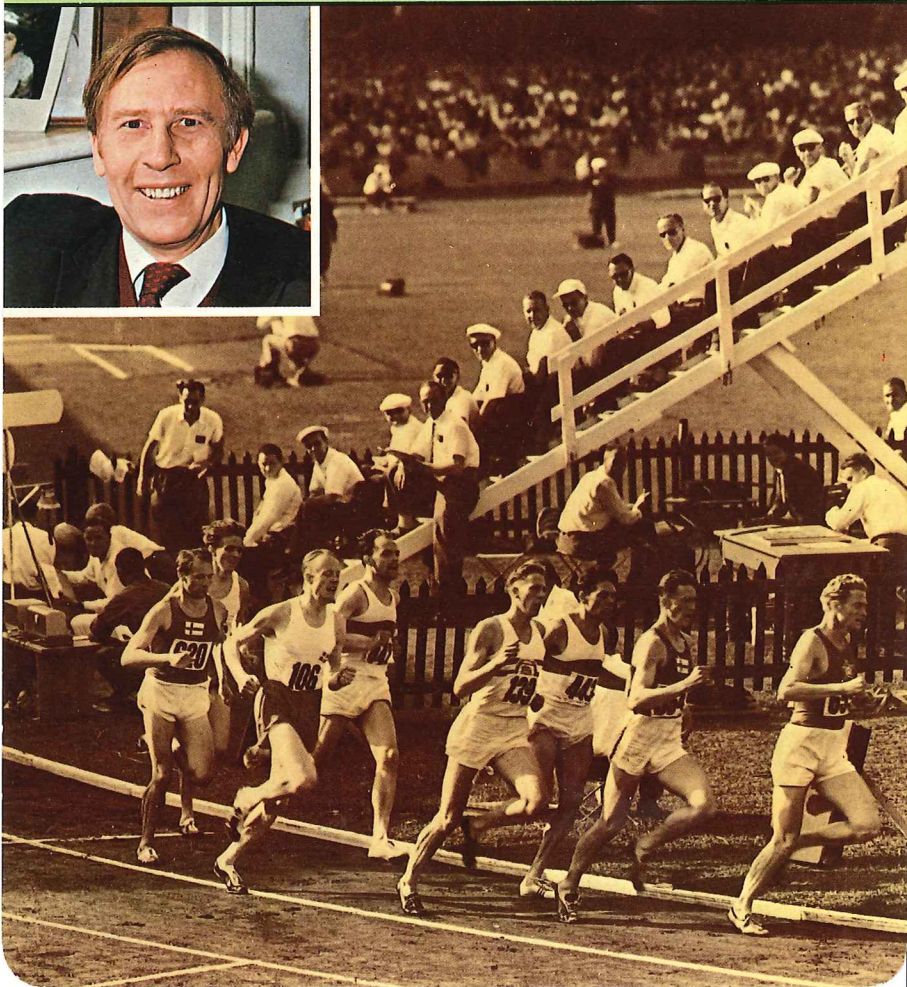


Track and Field



Roger Bannister



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A One-race Man

Even before he went up to Oxford University as a student, Roger Bannister showed his talent for running. In 1947, when he was 17, he ran the mile in 4 min 26.8 sec; even at that age there could be no doubt that England was nursing a future champion.

It took young Bannister three years to overcome the various problems associated with competing, training and recovering, and to reach international standards. After a triumphant tour of the United States, he started winning in earnest: in Brussels in 1950, for the European Championships, he finished 3rd in the 800 m with 1 min 50.7 sec. Two years later, in Helsinki for the Olympics, he found himself up against Josy Barthel and Werner Lueg. The latter started the favorite, despite fierce competition from the young Briton. In fact, Bannister always took a while to recover after a race and the introduction of a semi-final—an extra, unscheduled race about which there had been no advance warning—deprived him of any possibility of winning. He was only able to take 4th place in a race won by Barthel.

1953 and 1954 were his big years: he did not lose once, but his really great

day came on May 6, 1954, when he became the first runner in the world to cover the mile in under four minutes. Two of his Oxford colleagues, Christopher Chataway and Christopher Brasher (the future Olympic 3,000 m steeplechase gold medallist in Melbourne) set the pace for the first few laps before allowing Bannister to achieve his historic performance in a time of 3 min 59.4 sec. In Berne in 1954, the Englishman became European 1,500 m champion in 3 min 43.8 sec. This was his last race, and he won it shortly after taking the mile in the Empire Games, ahead of the Australian John Landy. After retiring from competitive sport, Roger Bannister went back to medicine and is now a distinguished neurologist. This does not stop him from pursuing his study of the behavior of athletes in competition, a subject which has fascinated him for over twenty years.

ROGER BANNISTER

Born March 23, 1929, in London

AWARDS AND RECORDS

World record holder for the mile in 3:59.4 in 1954
1950 WCH: 3rd in 800 m
1952 OG: 4th in 1,500 m
1954 ECH: 1st in 1,500 m
Commonwealth Games: 1st in mile in 3:58.8

Berne 1954: Roger Bannister heading for home in the 1,500 m