

Track and Field



The Mile



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The Everest of Athletics

Nowadays, running the mile in under four minutes is not an exceptional achievement among well-prepared middle-distance runners. But in 1954, to run four times 440 yards in 4 minutes was the dream of all the world's best runners.

Eventually it was the British Roger Bannister who was to succeed where such famous runners as the Swedes Gunder Haegg and Arne Andersson had failed. On 6 May 1954, at Oxford's Iffley Road Stadium, Bannister ran the mile (1609.35 m) in 3:59.4, with lap times of 57.7, 60.6, 62.4 and 58.7. What was known in Britain as the "Everest of athletics" had finally been conquered.

Roger Bannister, now an eminent neurologist, made his attempt on the record during the annual match between Oxford University and a team selected by the Amateur Athletics Association. Two teammates who lent him moral support during this race, which was run under poor conditions—it was both wet and windy—later broke four minutes themselves. One was Chris Brasher, the television sports commentator, and the other was Chris Chataway

who in 1970 became one of the youngest members of the British Parliament.

Before this feat on 6 May 1954, Roger Bannister (born 23 Mar. 1929 in London) had taken third place in the European championships 800 m in 1950 and came fourth in the 1,500 m of the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. At the time of his attempt on the mile, Roger Bannister had not been beaten for a year. He was to remain unbeaten.

Three months later, on 7 Aug. 1954, in Vancouver, he won the mile in the Commonwealth Games in 3:58.8. His great rival, the Australian John Landy finished second with 3:59.6, having beaten Bannister's mile record some weeks previously with a time of 3:58—but he was only the second man to break four minutes.

On 29 Aug. 1954, in Berne, Bannister became European 1,500 m champion in 3:43.8 in front of the Dane Gunnar Nielsen (3:44.4). This was to be his last important race. At the end of the 1954 season, he left international athletics for good in order to concentrate on his studies.

On 6 May 1954, at Oxford's Iffley Road Stadium, Roger Bannister broke the mile record in 3:59.4