



**LARGER** THAN  
**LIFE**  
A CELEBRATION OF GREATNESS

# Roger Bannister

(March, 1929)

Versatile Personality

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## INTRODUCTION

Sir Roger Gilbert Bannister is an **English former athlete best known as the first man to run the mile in less than 4 minutes.**

Everybody thought it was impossible, but **through his athletic ability, Roger Bannister was able to smash the four-minute mile barrier.**

For his efforts Sir Roger Bannister was also made the inaugural recipient of the **Sports Illustrated Sportsman of the Year award in 1955** and is one of the few non-Americans recognized by the American published magazine as such.

Bannister became a distinguished neurologist and Master of Pembroke College, Oxford, before retiring in 2001.

## BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

Roger Gilbert Bannister was born on 23rd March 1929 in Harrow, London. He began school in a suburb of London, where he early showed a talent for running. University education had been beyond the reach of Bannister's working class parents, and he resolved at a young age to win a place in one of England's elite universities and study medicine. At the outbreak of World War II, the family moved to historic Bath, England, where Roger Bannister had daily opportunities to practice his running on the way to and from school. His exceptional speed on the running track soon won him the acceptance he sought, and his scholastic efforts paid off with a scholarship to Oxford University.

## CAREER AS AN ATHLETE

At Oxford, Bannister's speed in the mile and 1500 meter events drew the attention of the British sports press. By 1951 Bannister had captured the British title in the mile and felt ready for Olympic competition. Unfortunately, last minute change in the schedule of the events at the 1952 games in Helsinki forced Bannister to compete without resting between events as he was accustomed to.

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By this time he was undertaking full-time medical studies at St. Mary's Hospital Medical School, and setting aside only 45 minutes a day for training. But he had seen his time in the mile improve year after year, and was **convinced that slow and steady training would enable him to break the record.**

### THE 4-MINUTE MILE

Bannister's opportunity came on May 6, 1954, in a meet at Oxford, with Bannister competing for the British Amateur Athletic Association. He had arranged for his friends Chris Chataway and Chris Brasher to set the pace for the first laps so he completed the first three quarter-mile laps in under three minutes. **Finishing the last lap in less than a minute, Bannister broke the tape and collapsed as the announcer delivered his time to the cheering crowd: 3:59.4. The unbreakable record had been broken. At age 25, Roger Bannister had made history.**

Within a month, the Australian runner John Landy had broken Bannister's record, but Bannister had the satisfaction of besting Landy at that summer's British Empire Games in Vancouver. In a race billed as "**The Mile of the Century**," both runners beat the four minute time, but Bannister came in first at 3:58.8 to Landy's 3:59.6. Later that year, Roger Bannister was awarded the **Silver Pears Trophy, bestowed annually for the outstanding British achievement in any field.** He also secured the European title in the 1500 meter before retiring from competition. **His autobiography, First Four Minutes,** was published in 1955. It has since been reprinted as *Four Minute Mile*.

### MEDICAL CAREER

He completed his medical studies and for the next two decades combined a career in research with clinical practice as a neurologist. After recovering from a serious car accident he withdrew from private practice to devote himself to research. He maintained an interest in athletics, serving as **Chairman of the Sports Council of Great Britain from 1971 to 1974, and as President of the International Council for Sport and Physical Recreation from 1976 to 1983.** Dr. Bannister was knighted in 1975.

## Quotes

**"The man who can drive himself further once the effort gets painful is the man who will win."**

## Quiz

1. In which year was Roger Bannister knighted?
2. Roger Bannister is best known as the first man to run the mile in less than \_\_\_ minutes.
3. Who was Roger Bannister's competitor in the race billed as "The Mile of the Century"?

Send your answers with your name and department to [one2one@clarislifesciences.com](mailto:one2one@clarislifesciences.com)

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