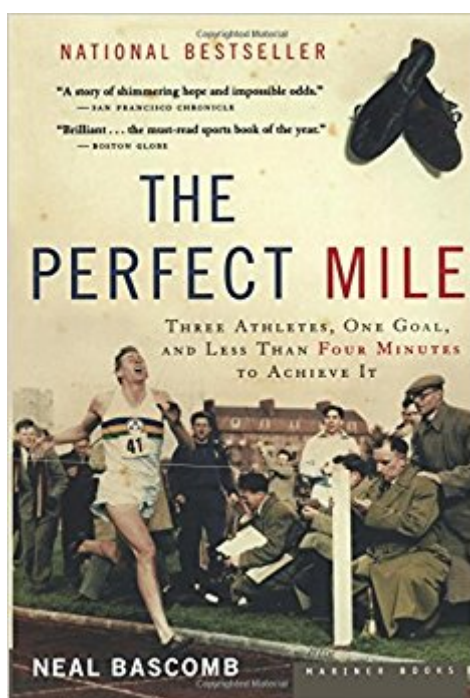


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# The Perfect Mile: Three Athletes, One Goal, And Less Than Four Minutes To Achieve It



## Synopsis

There was a time when running the mile in four minutes was believed to be beyond the limits of human foot speed, and in all of sport it was the elusive holy grail. In 1952, after suffering defeat at the Helsinki Olympics, three world-class runners each set out to break this barrier. Roger Bannister was a young English medical student who epitomized the ideal of the amateur – still driven not just by winning but by the nobility of the pursuit. John Landy was the privileged son of a genteel Australian family, who as a boy preferred butterfly collecting to running but who trained relentlessly in an almost spiritual attempt to shape his body to this singular task. Then there was Wes Santee, the swaggering American, a Kansas farm boy and natural athlete who believed he was just plain better than everybody else. Spanning three continents and defying the odds, their collective quest captivated the world and stole headlines from the Korean War, the atomic race, and such legendary figures as Edmund Hillary, Willie Mays, Native Dancer, and Ben Hogan. In the tradition of *Seabiscuit* and *Chariots of Fire*, Neal Bascomb delivers a breathtaking story of unlikely heroes and leaves us with a lasting portrait of the twilight years of the golden age of sport.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The attempt by three men in the 1950s to become the first to run the mile in less than four minutes is a classic 20th-century sports story. Bascomb's excellent account captures all of the human drama and competitive excitement of this legendary racing event. It helps that the story and its characters are so engaging to begin with. The three rivals span the globe: England's Roger Bannister, who

combines the rigors of athletic training with the "grueling life of a medical student

On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister, a British medical student who squeezed in track workouts between hospital rounds, became the first man to run a mile in less than four minutes. It was a feat that had widely been thought impossible, but within seven weeks an even faster time was posted by the Australian John Landy, setting up a showdown later that year in a race that was billed as the "Mile of the Century." In masterly fashion, Bascomb re-creates the battle of the milers, embellishing his account with fascinating forays into runner's lore. (In the seventeenth century, athletes had their spleens excised to boost speed; in the nineteenth, they were advised to rest in bed at noon naked.) It's a mark of Bascomb's skill that, although the outcome of the race is well known, he keeps us in suspense, rendering in graphic detail the runners' agony down the final stretch. Copyright © 2005 The New Yorker

I am a runner and I love it. (Though that hasn't always been the case.) So I was naturally interested in this book since it's all about runners. But there is also historical significance in learning more about this event along with what was going on in the world at the time it took place. I was fascinated by the view of amateur and professional athletics in the 1950s, and how much athletics have changed since then. This book also introduced me to true heroes and role models of our day, and the writing is superb. The author paints pictures with words of people and events so that they come alive and are so relatable. I was just as nervous and engaged reading about the races in this book as I was while reading the Hunger Games. And when it comes down to it, this book is less about running and more about working hard with what life has given us to make something of ourselves and to contribute to the world in which we live. The 3 main running figures in the book sum it up best: John Landy: "Running gave me discipline and self-expression." It has all the disappointments, frustrations, lack of success, and unexpected success, which all reproduce themselves in the bigger play of life. It teaches you the ability to present under pressure. It teaches you the importance of being enthusiastic, dedicated, focused. All of these are trite statements, but if you actually have to go through these things as a young man, it's very, very important. • Wes Santee: "Hard work pays off. You have to be just as disciplined to run a business as you do to train for an athletic event. You have to eat right, still have to get up early and work more than others." • Roger Bannister: "Sport is about not being wrapped up in cotton wool. Sport is about adapting to the unexpected and being

able to modify plans at the last minute. Sport, like all life, is about taking your chances. All of these factors make this a book that everyone, runner or non-runner, athlete or completely lacking in coordination, should read. View all my reviews at (...) For more discussion material and for some of my favorite quotes and inspirations from the book see (...)

Going into this book I knew very little about the four minute mile except that Bannister accomplished it first. I had never heard of Landy or Santee, and had never heard of this book. recommended it to me and I decided on a whim to give it a shot. Running is, in my opinion, a fairly boring sport to watch. And the stories portrayed here can quite easily be told in a dull manner. But worry not: Bascomb is a brilliant writer and the tale he spins in these pages makes me want to become a track and field fan. I found the build up thrilling, the back stories captivating, and the training details thoroughly interesting. No dull moments whatsoever. This book is well written, well researched, and flawlessly executed. I completely enjoyed it and highly recommend it to anyone interested in running, sport, history, or some combination of the three.

I am not a runner and was talking with a friend who is and mentioned that he was reading this great book about the quest to break the 4 minute mile. I figured I'd give the book a shot after reading some other very positive reviews. Wow, this book was an unbelievable read. This book reminded of the late radio personality, Paul Harvey, and his famous line "and that is the rest of the story". Certainly, I knew Roger Bannister was the first runner to break the 4 minute mile barrier, but that was about it. Bascomb gives us the rest of the story, including the fierce "race" among three men, the American Wes Santee, the Australian John Landy and the Brit Roger Bannister. These three individuals and the rest of their story makes for a fascinating story. Sure, you know how the story ultimately ends (but that didn't stop "Titanic" from being the biggest grossing movie ever), but it is all the backdrop that makes for the compelling story. From the evolving training regimens and techniques of each of these runners, to their experiments and associations with different coaches to the conditions of the track. I am still shocked that I found a book about running the mile such a spectacular read. A great storyteller is someone who can make even the most mundane of things come to life in such a vivid and an immersive way. Read this book. The story about the first 4 minute mile is much more than the answer to the trivia question: Who was the first person to break the 4 minute mile?

We all know the name of the man who first broke the 4-minute mile barrier. Despite this, the author

does a good job of keeping up the suspense, in terms of how it was done, and in the subsequent head-to-head match. Even slow runners like me can be inspired by the hard work and focus these amateur athletes displayed.

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