



The Perfect Mile: Three Athletes, One Goal, and Less Than Four Minutes to Achieve It

Neal Bascomb

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

The Perfect Mile: Three Athletes, One Goal, and Less Than Four Minutes to Achieve It

Neal Bascomb

The Perfect Mile: Three Athletes, One Goal, and Less Than Four Minutes to Achieve It Neal Bascomb

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.

The Perfect Mile: Three Athletes, One Goal, and Less Than Four Minutes to Achieve It Details

Date : Published April 6th 2005 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (first published April 2004)

ISBN :

Author : Neal Bascomb

Format : Kindle Edition 348 pages

Genre : Sports and Games, Sports, Nonfiction, History, Biography

 [Download The Perfect Mile: Three Athletes, One Goal, and Less Th ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Perfect Mile: Three Athletes, One Goal, and Less ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Perfect Mile: Three Athletes, One Goal, and Less Than Four Minutes to Achieve It Neal Bascomb

From Reader Review The Perfect Mile: Three Athletes, One Goal, and Less Than Four Minutes to Achieve It for online ebook

Heather says

(At the end I'll give a list of places to go for race footage and other info relating to the subject for those who have already read the book and are interested in knowing more) I have no interest in sports, and of all the sports, I would vote for running as the least interesting, but I absolutely LOVED this book. The author does a wonderful job of building suspense even if normally it is something you couldn't care less about. How many times I have been on the edge of my seat waiting to hear who was going to win or what their time was going to be (I listened to the audio version which was very well done). There were times when I arrived at my destination but didn't want to turn off the car because I had to find out what was going to happen. A very compelling, gripping book. There were times I cried and there were times I laughed, but it was the suspense that I remember the most. Part of the appeal of the book is the three men it is about. They were interesting and, for the most part, admirable men. I will say at first it was a bit confusing trying to remember who was who but after a few chapters I had them nailed down and it was much easier to follow. It probably would've been easier if I had been reading the book version and could have glanced back and reminded myself. I also appreciated the lack of anything vulgar in the book. The epilogue may be my favorite part of the book or at least it included my favorite story of the book. That was one of the times I cried, not because of something sad, but because of something very sweet and truly heroic.

As a Christian I often found myself challenged to run my race the way they ran their races. I often thought of Paul's words about laying aside anything that would encumber us in our race when I read about them being so careful about the smallest things, the dirt on the spikes of their shoes, the weight of the shoes themselves, etc. It seems silly to us but these little things made a difference in their speed. I suspect that little things make a difference in our spiritual lives as well and want to be more like them in forgoing "innocent" things in order to run faster. But on the other hand I was made thankful that God isn't a harsh taskmaster and doesn't demand of me the things that their sport demanded of them- the little sleep, the brutal workouts, the sacrifice of relationships. Above all I'm thankful for the assurance that I will win my race, something they never could know. I may not run a perfect mile but I have a perfect Savior who ran it for me and through Him and His grace I will be victorious!

Additional info:

Footage of the barrier being broken:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWqwi6...>

Bannister in 2012 carrying Olympic torch

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/olymp...-2012-Olympic-torch.html>

Interview with Bannister

<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/pa...>

Bannister and Landy's race:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jP_NzZ...

Landy helps teammate and still wins:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wQLEK...>

2005 Movie by ESPN

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0457350/>

1988 movie:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0095171/>

Nicole says

I am a runner and I love it. (Though that hasn't always been the case. You can read more about my conversion to running here: <https://thereaderssalon.wordpress.com...>) So I was naturally interested in this book since it's all about running. 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 1950's, 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."

Rober 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.

Pjackson says

What a delightful read. This book has it all--drama, action, suspense. One can not help but be inspired by the story of Bannister, Santee, and Landy as they struggle to achieve the first sub-4 minute mile. Bannister's story is perhaps the most engaging of all, as he achieved the distinction of breaking the mark first, while he was going to medical school and pursuing a life outside of athletics. In an age when records are regularly broken by professional athletes who train hours a day and frequently misuse an assortment of performance enhancing agents, the story of the men chronicled here is most remarkable. Yes, today sub 4-minute miles

are typical among elite athletes, but I doubt that many of today's stars would be where they are if they had to work full time jobs, etc. Bannister and company did what they did out of love for the sport and without concern for money. Neal Bascomb should be commended for bringing this wonderful story to light. It is carefully researched and eloquently written. Even those with zero interest in track and field will find this book of interest. I especially recommend this to youngsters in hopes that it will inspire them to achieve their goals even if their conditions for success are not optimal. Do yourself a favor and pick up this book--you will not be disappointed.

Brian Sweany says

As Usain Bolt captivated the world in London just as he had done in Beijing, my mind wandered to some of my favorite Olympic- and running-themed books. It is a genre that takes up nearly an entire shelf in my library and is perfectly book-ended by David Halberstam's *AMATEURS* and Christopher McDougal's *BORN TO RUN*. But one of the most underrated books on this shelf has to be Neil Bascomb's *THE PERFECT MILE*. Written before *THE NEW COOL* put Bascomb on the map, this book is to running what Laura Hillenbrand's *SEABISCUIT* is to horse racing.

Bascomb has a novelistic narrative voice not unlike Hillenbrand's as he weaves together the biographies of three amazing and strikingly different athletes. There's Roger Bannister, the Oxford-educated amateur sports-for-sports-sake archetype with his come-from-behind running style. There's his fiercest rival John Landy, the Aussie with the unorthodox training methods and a relentless wire-to-wire front runner. And lastly there's Wes Santee, the American, a tough Kansas-born farmer's son who history forgot. On May 6, 1954 one of them did what scientists had actually dismissed as beyond the scope of human endurance: running a mile in four minutes or less. Even as the 20th century wound down, this penultimate event was treated with a hallowed reverence; *Sports Illustrated* chose the four-minute mile--"the perfect mile"--as *The Greatest Sporting Achievement of the Century*.

As I watched Bolt strut and pose for the cameras--another gold medal around his neck, another world record shattered--a part of me imagined the trio of runners from *THE PERFECT MILE* rising from the grave, tapping the towering Jamaican on the shoulder, and saying, "Four laps, Mr. Bolt, let's see who's the better man." Bascomb's earnest story will make you believe nothing is impossible.

JK says

starts perhaps a bit slow, but the writing of the record-breaking Bannister run and the Vancouver Empire games is brilliant and made my heart beat like I was watching it live and had something at stake

Nita says

I'm a running geek and a writer and I loved *THE PERFECT MILE*. I listened to it on CD.

from Kansas, USA, each of whom wanted to be the first to break the four-minute mile barrier, a feat many thought beyond the capability of any man. Author Neal Bascomb weaved the three men's backgrounds and race histories into a tale with enough tension to keep me listening despite the fact that I knew many of the outcomes beforehand. Without creating cliffhangers that might annoy readers, he left one story and moved onto another at such a place where it left the reader wondering what happened next. He also answered all the reader's questions generated by the story at the place where the question was raised. This helped create smooth transitions among the stories of the three men.

In addition to the skillful storytelling, I was also impressed with the tremendous amount of research that went into this book. Newspaper headlines from each race (and there were many) as well as quotations from individuals pepper the book with authenticity. This is creative nonfiction at its best.

Juuso Nisula says

Heavy on race reports, light on training regimens, the book is suitable for the running aficionado with a soft spot for history (and lap-times), but probably not many others. The reader's (yes, I listened to the audio book) matter-of-factly voice fit the 1950s setting, but took away from the emotional side of the story.

David says

If you enjoy reading about running then this book is one you are likely to enjoy. Neal Bascomb recounts the story of three men vying to become the first person to run a sub four minute mile. Anyone familiar with running knows Roger Bannister was the first man to break this mark (not much of a spoiler as that's him on the cover setting the record); even with that being the case this book is still somewhat suspenseful as you follow each man in his attempts to get below the four minute mark.

Being an American I was pulling for Wes Santee, even though I wasn't familiar with him prior to reading the book and the fact I knew Bannister would get there first. Santee was a college athlete, running track for the University of Kansas, the same school where legendary miler Jim Ryan went to school after becoming the first high school athlete to run a sub four minute mile in 1964. My favorite memory of Santee in this book was him running against his fraternity brothers, where he ran against them in like a 10 mile run and they basically did a relay to try and compete with him for the full distance. He smoked them.

The other miler is John Landy, who would go on to race Bannister in what was called "the Dream Race". Amateur collegiate politics prevented Santee from competing against his two rivals which was a loss for anyone who truly appreciates competition. The Dream Race was followed on the radio by 100 million people and, coming on the heels of the four minute mile finally being conquered, the mile was considered one of sport's greatest competitions.

Bridget says

Oh my holy fudge, I LOVED this book. I savored every page and looked forward to reading it at every opportunity. At the same time, this wasn't one of those books where I could toss off a few pages while cooking dinner. I had to make sure I could really give myself to the reading of it, so I often had to wait until all other obligations were taken care of (see also: why it took me more than two weeks to get through it).

That said, there is a litmus test for predicting one's potential interest in *The Perfect Mile*, and it is this: take a look at the front cover. If you know who that is, and what he's doing, then I think you're going to love this book.

Even if you don't know just from looking at the picture, if you've ever run competitively, or taken any interest in track, or if you have a good sense of running times vs. distances (in meters and yards/miles), or really, if you think you could enjoy the suspense of lots of footrace descriptions, *The Perfect Mile* is going to be a fun book for you to read.

John says

I started my running career in high school about 2 years after Bannister broke the 4-minute mile. He was, of course, a great inspiration to all us middle-distance runners, but my real hero was Landy. The sportsmanship he demonstrated in the 1500 meters final at the 1956 Australian National Championships when he stopped to help the fallen Ron Clarke was an example I have never forgotten. Then for him to leap back into the race and win decisively after losing several seconds was one of the greatest things I've ever seen. Bascomb's book covers these events in a very compelling way that brought back all the great memories and feelings of those days for me. I highly recommend this book to every one, but especially to those who have themselves run a mile race...at any speed.

Isis says

You might think fourteen hours of narration about a race lasting around four minutes is a bit ridiculous, but this is a fabulous and fascinating account of not just the three athletes who individually strove to run the sub-four-minute mile, but of the history of the sport of racing, the ideal (and reality) of amateur athletics, the tension between Great Britain and its former colonies in the mid-20th century, and the psychology of people faced with what appears to be an insurmountable barrier. I'm a runner, but in no way a miler (which, it amuses me, is considered "middle distance"); still, this history enthralled me, and I recommend it to runners and non-runners alike. (I suppose if I weren't a runner I would have given it four stars.) Even though I already knew who "won" the race to be first under four minutes (although none of the subsequent events - the breaking of that record or the "Mile of the Century" race) I loved the structure, which alternates among the contenders as each makes progress toward the goal, with diversions of history, philosophy, and medicine.

Incidentally, the film of this first sub-4 mile is on Youtube, and I appreciated being able to watch it with an understanding of what was really happening - knowing, for example, that the man leading at the beginning was deliberately pacing his friend, rather than trying to win the race. A link from that video clip led me to a clip of the most recent world record mile, in 1999 (mentioned in the book's epilogue), which was run in an

astonishing 3:43.13 - more than 16 seconds faster than the mark they were striving for, in a race where winners were determined by fractions of a second.

Letitia Moffitt says

A terrific book, well-written with an edge-of-your-seat exciting storyline. Highly recommended.

Judy says

The subtitle of this book is "Three Athletes, One Goal, and Less Than Four Minutes to Achieve It." This is the story of the race to break the four-minute mile barrier in 1954, but also the story of the three men who were all poised to do it first: Englishman Roger Bannister, Australian John Landy, and American Wes Santee. My husband and son (who was a miler himself in high school) would probably give this book a 5. We found ourselves groaning and cheering in the car as we listened to the audiobook on a recent trip. The sub-four-minute mile has been achieved about 1,000 times since the original breakthrough, including by both Bannister and Landy three months later in a head-to-head race, but a sentence from the epilogue of the book really summed up the reason Bannister's 3 minute 59.6 run was so astounding: "On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister, an amateur who trained little more than an hour a day, and for whom running was little more than a passionate hobby, achieved greatness on a cinder track he had helped to build in front of a small crowd, a handful of journalists, and a lone camera crew that had to be persuaded to attend." The same year he broke the 4 minute barrier, Bannister passed his medical boards and began practicing medicine. The book really highlighted for me the glory of amateur sports, something we don't really have any more in this day of high tech training. In addition, each of the three men was admirable and honorable in his own right, and we found ourselves rooting for each of them individually.

David says

This is a well-researched account of the dramatic race to be the first man to run a mile in less than 4 minutes - a barrier once thought to be unbreakable. The author has created a very readable story, reconstructing conversations and documenting the feelings and emotions of those involved. The three main competitors - Roger Bannister of the UK, Landy of Australia, and Santee of the US - are all included in great detail. The book rambles a bit and occasionally uses pretty unimaginative prose. But the descriptions of the races are detailed and gripping.

I was surprised that "the perfect mile" of the book's title was not Bannister's run that first broke the barrier in 1954, but a later showdown between Bannister and Landy - also a fascinating account.

Thanks to the wonders of Google, you can now search for "roger bannister video" and watch Bannister's first 4-minute mile, as well as the showdown with Landy. Also fascinating is the Wikipedia article on "World record progression for the mile run"

Tung says

Disclaimer: I run three times a week, and have been running for years. At the same time, I absolutely detest almost every single minute of running. I run for self-discipline and health reasons, but hate the physical exertion and the sweating. That's kind of a mixed disclaimer, but whatever. Whether you are a serious runner, a recreational runner, or a non-runner, I think you will find *The Perfect Mile* to be a great nonfiction read. The book describes the pursuit of the four-minute mile in the middle of the 20th century by focusing on the three men during that time period that were considered the likely candidates to break a time goal that many thought was beyond the limits of human physical possibility. Bascomb gives us brief bios of Roger Bannister, the British amateur sportsman; John Landy, an Australian middle distance runner, and Wes Santee, a US collegiate track and field star. In addition to detailing these men's training habits and personalities, Bascomb provides us a glimpse of the pressure and scrutiny these men faced. The mile was THE sporting obsession of the time, and the fact that these men were from different countries made it a global obsession. The book doesn't end with the breaking of the four-minute mile either. The record-breaking only served to set up a showdown at the Empire Games of 1954. Throughout, Bascomb does what every good nonfiction writer does: develops strong characterizations, provides context, and builds tension. And he absolutely nails the excitement of the breaking of the four-minute barrier and the subsequent race considered by many to be one of the greatest races of all time. When Bascomb details the failures these men faced along their journeys, we see the little things that caused their failures – from poor weather to bad field conditions to personal mistakes – and yet, the way Bascomb details these things, we see them not as excuses for their failures, but as examples of how thin the line between success and failure really is, and how any one of these men with different luck and timing could have ended up in the annals of sporting history. Overall, this was one of the best sports nonfiction books I've read. Highly recommended.
