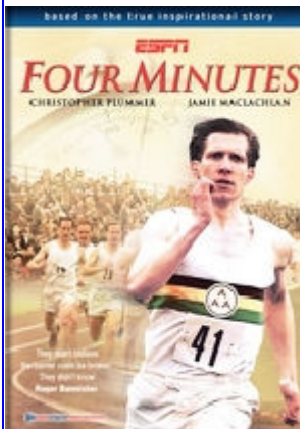


Four Minutes

A movie worth watching



Just think, if Englishman Roger Bannister had been a few tenths seconds slower, he'd just be a footnote in history. And maybe he wouldn't even have Sir in front of his name,

though he probably would have earned that title for his contributions in neurology, if nothing else.

Fortunately, for Bannister, he wasn't slower. He etched his name in history by becoming the first person to run under four minutes for a mile on March 6, 1954 at Iffey Road Track in England. Bannister, with two friends setting the pace, was clocked in 3:59.4 to do what the media had claimed could never be done. (We all know how the media likes to churn up stories...right?). Even though the record stood for only 46 days before Australian John Landy ran a 3:58, Sir Bannister will always be remembered as the first to break the barrier.

The ESPN movie stars James Maclachlan, a near look-a-like for Bannister. The actor not only resembles Bannister, but did a great job of emulating Bannister's running motions during some well-executed running scenes.

This movie alters some facts, I suppose for story-telling purposes.

For one thing, a fictional coach was created, according to a biography of Bannister.

Another is that Bannister didn't meet his to-be wife until a few years after he had set the record. In the movie, he met her before the run.

The climax of Bannister's run was reenacted fairly accurately. When announcer Norris McWhirter told the crowd of about 3,000 that Bannister had set a track record, BAA record, blah, blah, blah with a time of 3.....As soon as he said 3, the crowd drowned out the rest of the time. They had waited anxiously to hear that number. If McWhirter had announced 4, no doubt they would have been mute or groaned as loudly as they cheered.

Besides the movie being enjoyable, with good acting, the extras are worth the price of the DVD. Included is a film clip of Bannister's run, interviews with Bannister and Christopher Chadwick, who took over as rabbit from Chris Brasher.

It also was pointed out that Bannister had made his rounds at St. Mary's Medical School, had eaten a fairly sizeable meal and had ridden a train to

Although this isn't a high-drama story written by acclaimed sportswriter Frank Deford, there was some tension. Bannister was trying to be the first to beat four minutes for a mile, a feat he was certain could be done. He was trying to do it before a couple of other rivals, including Landy. And Landy was getting closer all the time.

Bannister had become especially driven to regain his status among the Brits, who were still digging out from World War II and had made him their poster boy. He let them, and himself, down when he failed to win a medal at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics despite carrying the favorite tag.

Although Bannister's medical practice always came first, he created a training regimen in his big push to beat four minutes. It wasn't exactly a regimen that anyone else followed, but it worked for Bannister. In fact, according to the movie, Bannister often was criticized for not following the approved training practices of the day.

On the historic day, the attempt seemed in jeopardy as gusty winds from 15 to 25 mph had Bannister contemplating opting not to run. However, the wind reportedly dropped just before his race, and he made the decision to go for it.

Well, everyone knows how the run came out, but there was still an element of drama. And who knows? Maybe he wouldn't do it in the movie. You know how movies play with the facts. Well, I guess that would have been TOO much.

the meet. No telling how fast he would have run had he followed modern prescribed pre-race routines.

Though I don't remember this being mentioned in the extras (it probably was and I forgot), but McWhirter went on to publish and edit the Guinness Book of Records.

Other actors include Shaun Smith, Amy Rutherford and Christopher Plummer.

It's the type of story that runners and non-runners can enjoy. It rates an A. -- Charles Clines

