

# Readings for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

## The Prayer for today

**We behold your glory, O God,  
in the love shown by your Son,  
lifted up on the cross and exalted on high.  
Be glorified anew in the love we have for one another  
as disciples of the risen Lord Jesus,  
who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.**

## Acts 11.1-18

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, they criticized him, saying, "Why did you go to Gentile men and eat with them?"

Peter explained everything to them precisely as it had happened:

"I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'

"I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' "The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven.

"Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.' And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.' If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?"

When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

Hear the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## Psalm 148

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights above.

**Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts.**

Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars.

**Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for he commanded and they were created.**

Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,

**you mountains and hills, wild animals and all cattle,  
small creatures and flying birds,**

kings of the nations, you princes and all rulers on earth,  
young men and maidens, old men and children.

**Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted;**

his splendour is above the earth and the heavens. Praise the Lord.

**Glory to God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit:**

**as in the beginning, so now and for ever. Amen.**

### **Revelation 21.1-7**

*St John tells of his vision of heaven.* Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them;

he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away."

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

Hear the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **John 13.31-35**

### **Glory to you Lord Jesus Christ**

Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

For the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

## Sermon

In May 1954 the sporting focus was not on world cup cricket, nor on the AFL, nor the NRL but who would be the first athlete to run a mile in under four minutes? The time for the distance was continually being lowered, but it seemed to be a psychological barrier as much as a physical one. It was spoken of as the "magical four-minute barrier". Since the mid-forties the record had stood at 1.4 seconds over the 4 minutes.

The Australian John Landy was the runner most widely tipped to be the first to break the barrier. But then, just 53 years ago today 6<sup>th</sup> May, on a cold, drizzly day, in Oxford, Roger Bannister ran the mile and kicked across the line in 3 minutes, 59 point 4 seconds [3.59.4].

Australians were disappointed but within 46 days, on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1954, John Landy racing against Chris Chataway in Finland took the lead in the last 2 ½ laps broke Bannister's record in a staggering 3 minutes and 58 seconds.

It seemed that as soon as one runner had broken the spell, it became easier for others to repeat the performance. Only four years later, Herb Elliott had brought the record down to 3 minutes 54.5 seconds.

Our readings today tell us of another barrier being broken. It was the barrier that cut across the Biblical, Roman world – like an apartheid. It was the barrier between the Jewish people and the non-Jewish people – they were

called Gentiles. But the Romans mostly hated the Jews, and the Jewish people called Gentiles “dogs”.

Peter, had been preaching the Gospel to Gentile people – to a Roman soldier, his family and friends. When the other apostles and believers heard about this they called him to account for his action.

The thought of allowing Gentiles to be Christians was a big barrier, a psychological barrier, a spiritual barrier, and emotional barrier. It needed God to intervene to make Peter leap the divide and welcome Gentiles in. Then it needed another act of God to let the Church welcome this move.

Let me say this again. Here we see three conversions; three barriers are broken with one result – the advance of the Gospel, the triumph of love. Three dramatic changes:

**The first conversion was Peter.** Peter had been ministering to Jewish believers and many Jewish people had come to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and they had joined the way of Christ. Two things: Peter had plenty enough work to do. He didn't need any more. But God had other ideas. But Peter also needed his horizons expanding. Through this vision, where Peter is invited to eat non-kosher meat, God is telling him that he needs to be converted – a barrier needs to be broken. Peter allows God to direct him in a new task that will take the church in a fresh direction. Are we open to God to take such a step? Yes, I think that some people have led the way in this.

**The second conversion was Cornelius** [he is the man referred to who had sent three servants from Caesarea to bring Peter to him.] As Peter is proclaiming the grace and forgiveness of God, the Holy Spirit does a great act of conversion and these Gentiles – these Romans – become Christians. The conversion here is that a Roman – a man who was taught to believe that all Jews were scum – would listen to Peter and more than that, he received the message of Christ. The conversion of Cornelius validates the conversion of Peter and the message that he brings.

**But the third conversion was the church.** They were critical of Peter [v1] for taking the message to the Gentiles. They called him to account for his actions. But Peter's testimony to the work of God changed them and convinced them. The church was converted and took on the mission to the Gentiles – thus transforming the world.

Just as Roger Bannister and then John Landy, 53 years ago, broke through that four-minute barrier, so the Bible tells us that Peter and then the early church broke through that barrier that divided the known world in order to make one new people – God's own people – his body the church – people of all nationalities, races and languages.

We know that it was victory of God's love. "We love", writes St John, "because God loved us first of all".

It is this love that makes possible that vision of the redeemed people as the New Jerusalem. In the vision there is no sea – no division between peoples, all the peoples are

together and God is with them. All that separates including the last enemy of death has been taken away.

Running the four-minute mile was not John Landy's greatest achievement. He went on to become an agricultural scientist, businessman, environmentalist and author. Then in 2001 he became the Governor of Victoria and in 2006 opened the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

Many people would say that his greatest moment was in 1956 when he ran in the National Championships for the mile in Melbourne. It was the third lap and everything was on for a world record. Then Ron Clarke, the junior world champion fell and two others with him. As Landy jumped the fallen Clarke he spiked him with his shoes on his shoulder.

The Reverend Gordon Moyes who was in the crowd tells the next part of the story like this: 'Landy then did the most incredibly stupid, beautiful, foolish, gentlemanly act I have ever seen. He stopped, ran back to the fallen young Ron Clarke and helped him up to his feet, brushed cinders from knees and checking his bloodied shoulder said "Sorry". ... Clarke got to his feet and together he and Landy set off after the other runners. They were 60 yards behind... and the crowd did not expect them to continue but they sprinted that last half mile. The crowd was shouting as with every stride as Landy hauled in the front-runners. Then in an amazingly powerful finish he stormed down the track to win the Australian Championship in 4 minutes, 4 seconds.'

Harry Gordon wrote in the Melbourne "Sun" newspaper that it was a senseless piece of chivalry, but it will be remembered as one of the finest actions in the history of sport. In a nutshell, Landy sacrificed his chance of a world record to go to the aid of a fallen rival.

When Jesus says, as he does in our Gospel reading, "Love one another as I have loved you..." he is asking for us to be converted – changed dramatically and constantly. The Bible describes the love that Jesus showed in this way: he put aside his equality with God and emptied himself and became a man, and then he as a man became the servant of others and obedient to God – even to death on a cross. This love reaches out to all across time, across nationalities across the world.

Two questions for us to take away this morning:

1. **How have you been converted recently?** Long before this story in Acts, Peter knew our Lord's challenge to go and make disciples of all nations – that included going to the Gentiles. But how did he cross those barriers: barriers of tradition and upbringing; religious, personal and social barriers? It would have seemed too difficult. God brought about the change by conversion. "Love" is a word we often use quite glibly to describe a powerful feeling of attraction to someone. But the act of love is often hard and painful. To love is to be prepared to change – to go through those barriers that separate us off

from people. To love is to push yourself so that you or others can grow emotionally and spiritually, An act of love is a "gentlemanly act", an "act of chivalry" to show love always involves making a "sacrifice" for the good of someone else. John Landy simply says about the incident "I was very embarrassed and upset about the whole thing ... and I think it unfortunate that such a lot is made of it." His modesty is appropriate. His was an action of compassion, but there are harder things to sacrifice than not breaking a world record. The hardest breakthrough will be to love those who have hurt us, love those whom we exclude, to go into our pain and allow God to heal and convert us. Yet that is the call of love – "Love one another as I have loved you." What barriers in your life is Christ challenging you about?

2. **How are we being converted as a church?** Last Sunday at an afternoon tea some people spoke of their welcome into our church family. Yesterday afternoon we had a very helpful meeting of the wardens of Christ Church and we were asking not just about welcoming people but about being converted as a church. We were asking, "How can we go **out** and attract people to know God's love and grace and bring God's healing love through Jesus to a wider community?" We've been blessed by several people coming in to join the church, but

how do we deliberately go out? The early church was called to go beyond its boundaries and comfort zone and to share God's forgiveness and hope with unexpected people. Each generation is challenged in this way as well.

So, like barriers of time and distance are broken in sport; like more important barriers are broken when winning at all costs is not the goal, but rather how we treat our fellow sisters and brothers is counted as more important; we too are being called to conversion. It's a conversion by love and for love. A conversion to make a decision, a decision to push beyond our boundaries and go out – go out so that we can grow in compassion and forgiveness; go out so that we extend that to others. It's not simply a good feeling – to love always means hard work and it always entails sacrifice.

Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

## JOHN LANDY - GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP.

*Scripture Reference: 1 Cor 9:26-27, Heb 12:1-2.*

When I was a young athlete, the greatest Australian athlete was John Landy. Every second week during the summers 1952 and 1953 I watched Landy attempt to break the four minute mile. Incidentally, on Thursday night I met with Sir Christopher Chatterway, who with Roger Banister was in the first four minute mile in 1953. There were powerful runners in those days. But there was no one in those days of the stature of John Landy.



Roger Banister

He became the world champion miler in 1954, None was faster week after week in the world over the mile and three miles than John Landy. Ron Clarke already held the Australian and World Junior Mile record. As we came close to the Olympic Games everybody was looking to John Landy to set a new world record. The greatest race I've ever seen in my life was at the 1956 National Championships in Melbourne. I was along the side fence inside a crowd of 22,000 people when the entrants lined up for the start of the 1956 National Mile Championship. Everyone knew part in the early part of the race he would set a new world record. We were all wanting Landy to run and win.

When the gun went off the young men each representing their states sped to the first turn and at the end of the first lap Robbie Morgan-Morris had completed the first quarter mile in 59

<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/photo/credit/achievers/ban0-016>

seconds, followed by Ron Clarke, Alec Henderson, John Plummer and then John Landy. The time was right on target for a world record. At the half mile Robbie Morgan-Morris was still leading and the time was two minutes two seconds. At the start of the third lap young Ron Clarke and Landy moved forward at a cracking pace. The world record was on!



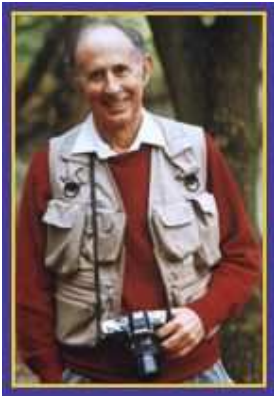
Landy jumps over Clarke

Landy had only to go with him and a new world record would be in his grasp. Then occurred an event which is etched into my mind so clearly that I can see it being replayed as if in slow motion. I can never think of the event without my eyes filling with tears. Clarke was moving to the lead as they came into the corner on the third lap. John Landy was on his shoulder. Alec Henderson tried to squeeze between the two runners and the inside edge of the curb. In doing so Clarke, with his spikes, clipped his heel. Clarke sprawled forward onto the cinder track while Henderson was knocked onto the inside arena. Landy leaped over the falling body of Clarke in front of him and as he did his sharp spikes tore into the flesh of Clarke's shoulder. The whole field either jumped over Clarke or ran round him. The crowd which had been chanting "Landy, Landy, Landy, Landy" with every stride suddenly responded with an enormous gasp.

Landy then did the most incredibly stupid, beautiful, foolish, gentlemanly act I have ever seen. He stopped, ran back to the fallen young Ron Clarke and helped him up to his feet, brushed cinders from knees and checking his bloodied shoulder said "Sorry". Clarke was all right. He said to Landy "Keep going, I'm all right. Run! Run!". Landy had forgotten everything. The Australian mile title, his bid for a world record, even the approaching Olympic Games in a spontaneous gesture of sportsmanship.

Clarke got to his feet and together Landy and Clarke set off after the other runners. They were 60 yards behind the rest of the field which had kept on running and the crowd did not expect them to continue. John Plummer, Merv Lincoln and Alec Henderson were leading the pack. Clarke and Landy sprinted off on that last half mile.

The crowd was shouting as with every stride Landy hauled in the front runners.



He quickly ran round the rest of the field, came into the home straight leaving Clarke behind with the most powerful finish I have ever seen in my life. He stormed down the track and in the last ten yards passed Henderson and Lincoln to win the Australian Championship in four minutes, four



seconds.

I doubt if there has ever been a reception given an athlete in all of history as those 22,000 people gave Gentlemen John Landy that day. The cheers and the applause would not die down. It continued minute after minute as Landy completed a victory lap. There was no question he could have set a new world record that day. Stopping and going back, picking up Clarke and then running back over his tracks had cost him eight or ten seconds. But it also unleashed in him a finish that was beyond anything that we had ever seen before. We had seen the greatest mile race in history.



Landy was to go on and set new world records and become a hero at the 1956 Olympic Games but nothing compares with the race that summer night in the Melbourne Olympic Park in 1956 when he stopped, picked up young Ron Clarke and forgot himself into athletic immortality.

I have occasionally met that quiet gentleman, John Landy, and reminded him of that day when we saw one of the great moments of Australian sporting history. I have witnessed many sporting competitions since, both Olympic and Commonwealth Games and other world championships but I have never witnessed a moment like that which belongs to Gentleman John Landy. His was the act of a great sportsman and fine gentleman who was also the world champion.

For two years, 50 and 51 AD, the Apostle Paul lived and worked in Corinth on the Greek Peloponnese. Corinth was the home of the Isthmian Games, the Greek Games that came second only to the Olympic Games. Paul worked in the tentmakers shop owned by Priscilla and Aquilla. It was on the wide Lechaem Road, which linked the port to the agora, or market place. The marketplace was bounded by a long portico, and in the southern stoa, was the office of the Isthmian Games. Nearby was the bema, or judgement seat where Paul was brought to trial. Not far away was the Temple of Apollo, seven of whose 38 columns still stand today. To the north lies the great theatre and to the south the ruins of the stadium where the Games were held. The 180 metre long straight track, was the length of a stade, which gave its name to the sprint, and to the hairpin shaped stadium in which the games were held. The stadium did not hold large numbers of spectators, like the Roman amphitheatres because the Greek sports were designed primarily for the competitors while the Roman Games were designed primarily for the spectators.



There were many temples as the sporting contest was part of a religious and cultural festival. Everyone was involved. That is why Paul made so many allusions to the sports.

The Apostle Paul wrote to those Corinthians 1 Cor. 9:24 "You know that many runners take part in a race, but only one of them wins the prize. Run then in such a way as to win the prize."  
(GNB) Here in a few words was Paul's philosophy in life. Other Christians avoided similes with the sporting world which they knew, because it was so closely tied to the pagan religious festivals and the immorality that went with them. But Paul was unafraid to use an allusion to what the public knew.

### **1. RUN!**

Obviously to be successful requires effort, discipline, training. Every athlete knows that. He says: 1 Cor 9:25-6 "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever". Paul's teaching was that Christians had to participate in life, not withdraw to monasteries with walls for contemplation or to a life-style bounded by regulations that prevented Christians from doing this or that. Life was a race to be run! Christians should also run to win.

### **2. WIN!**

The Apostle Paul wanted his readers to understand that Christians have a responsibility under God to be the best they can. God had a purpose for each life, and we must get ourselves ready to fulfill that purpose. So he wrote: 1 Cor 9:26 "Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly." Paul had purpose. His life was to be effective for the sake of Jesus Christ. He would fulfill his mission in proclaiming the Gospel. Nothing would stop him. Neither rejection, beatings, shipwreck, riots, imprisonment, threat of death and execution could stop him. These things may have delayed him, made him turn back to help his fellow who was in need like John Landy - but then it was back into the race. You could hear him say: Hebrews 12:1 "Let us run with perseverance

the race marked out for us."

Landy did not win at any cost. No one could find adequate words to describe John's performance. But in a fine piece of journalism Harry Gordon wrote (as an open letter to John) in the Melbourne "Sun" newspaper his understanding of what he had witnessed that day:

' Dear John, ... "Yours was the classic sporting gesture. It was a senseless piece of chivalry, but it will be remembered as one of the finest actions in the history of sport. In a nutshell, you sacrificed your chance of a world record to go to the aid of a fallen rival. And in pulling up, trotting back to Ron Clarke, muttering "Sorry" and deciding to chase the field you achieved much more than any world record. Your action cost you six or seven seconds. And you sprinted round that last lap like a 220 runner to overhaul the field and win in 4:04.2. You, the fellow who used to be called a mechanical runner without a finish! A lot of people are wondering why you pulled up. The truth is, of course, that you didn't think about it. It was the instinctive action of a man whose mate is in trouble.'

John Landy, has spent his life since as a quiet naturalist, agricultural scientist, photographer, author and environmentalist. During this past month he was named as the new Governor of Victoria. He knew how to run, and how to win. So many people want to win by cutting corners, cheating, causing others to fall on the way. Paul insisted that we act like true gentlemen, sports heroes who would help another. How do we run to win, but also have this Christian character in our action? Listen to these words inspired by Paul: Hebrews 12:2 "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." That is the secret: to run with perseverance the race before us, trying hard to win, but with our eyes fixed on Jesus who is ahead of us. We can run to win, but we do best when we are following the lead of the Master, with our eyes firmly fixed on Him.

[Rev Dr Gordon Moyes](#)

## John Landy

- Born 12 April 1930
- Australia/Victoria
- Height - 5'11
- Weight - 152 lbs

John Landy was the first great Australian distance runner and the second man in the world to break four minutes for the Mile.

Though he never won an Olympic or Commonwealth Games Gold Medal, he remains a legendary figure in the sport of athletics.

In early 1952, 21 year-old John Landy began to attract attention in Australia with a number of promising performances in middle distance events.

Coached by Percy Cerutti since 1950, Landy had improved significantly on his previous bests and it was hoped he and a small group of other improving distance runners - Don MacMillan and Les Perry - might help raise Australian standards in these events.

On 12 January, 1952, at Melbourne's Olympic Park, Landy posted a Mile run of 4-11.0 and also ran 3000m in 8-35.0 - just two seconds behind Don MacMillan's national record. He was beaten by MacMillan in the 1952 Australian Mile Championship however, and was only selected in the Helsinki Olympic team on the condition that he pay his own way.

On tour, he clocked a 4-10 Mile and a 8-54 Two-Mile run, but failed to impress at the Olympics, being run out of his 1500m heat after a very ordinary run of 4-14. The main benefit of his overseas tour was to introduce him to the training ideologies of international athletes and coaches and, on his return to Australia,

he split from Percy Cerutti and began to develop his own training routines.

He showed the benefit of these new routines in December 1952 when he sliced nearly five seconds off the Australian Record for the Mile with a run of 4-02.1 - just 0.7 behind the World Record. Three days after this race, he broke national records for 1000m and 1500m in the one race.

He continued to perform at a high level throughout 1953 - running at distances from 880y to Three Miles (5000m) but began to feel the pressure of the media to break his record - particularly in the Mile Event, where the race to break the four-minute barrier was beginning to capture the attention of the world.

On 12 December, 1953, in Melbourne, Landy set a new PB and Australian Mile Record of 4-02.0 in December, equalling Roger Bannister's Empire Record, set earlier in the year. After the race, it was reported he would not compete for Australia in the 1954 Empire Games and he predicted he would never clock a four-minute mile.

'If I do so before I retire from serious competition, it will be only luck' said Landy. He said he was tired of all the training and had only had two months rest in the last three years, running around fifty miles a week. Landy said he would compete seriously until the 1954 Nationals and then he would run 'only for fun'.

At the 1954 Nationals, Landy won the Mile easily in 4-05.6, but was unplaced in the 880y. Fortunately, he had changed his mind about retiring and had planned an overseas tour to challenge the four-minute mile. He arrived in Europe in early May, but on the 6th day of the month, Roger Bannister ran 3-59.4 at Oxford University, to become the first man in the world under four minutes for the Mile.

Landy could not approach that time in his first few races but, with the added impetus of competition from England's Chris Chataway

in a race at Turky on 21 June, Landy smashed Bannister's World Record with a phenomenal time of 3-57.9.

The Empire Games Mile was now described as the 'Race of the Century'. The two barrier-breakers going head-to-head instead of just against the clock. The race was a classic with Landy leading all the way until he looked left in the last few hundred yards of the race, when Bannister shot past him on the right to steal the race.

Landy accepted his defeat gracefully, saying 'the better man won', but it was later revealed he had run with four stitches in his foot; the result of stepping on a flash bulb in bare feet.

On his return to Australia, Landy lost motivation and slipped into retirement when he began teaching at his old school, Geelong Grammar. In 1955, he gradually began to run again, in the local bush, and regained his zest for training and competition. In early 1956, he had his first race for ten months and was only beaten by inches, over 880y, by the American World Record Holder, Lon Spurrier. He then ran two sub four-minute miles - the first time the barrier had been beaten inside Australia.

At the 1956 Australian Championships, Landy's phenomenal talent and admirable sportsmanship were both on display. During the Mile Championship, a number of athletes fell in the third lap - junior world record-holder Ron Clarke amongst them. Landy stopped to check if Clarke was alright and then, after some delay, decided to chase down the leaders. It is a testament to his athletic ability that he managed to catch them all and win the race in a time of 4-04.2. Surely one of the most amazing races of all time.

In great form at the Championships, he also won the Three Mile title in a national record of 13-42.2 and, soon after the titles, sliced nearly fifteen seconds off this time to claim another national record.

Landy was then persuaded to tour the United States in order to publicise the Melbourne Olympics. He ran a series of fine races,

including two sub four-minute miles, but suffered injuries and muscle soreness because of the hard American tracks. These injuries prevented him from competing in the final Australian Olympic trials, but he was selected in the Australian Team despite doubts about his fitness. It was no surprise to see him named to read the Olympic Oath at the Opening Ceremony.

He considered himself lucky to qualify for the final of the 1500m, even though all of Australia was hoping he would win the Gold Medal. Sitting back for most of the race, Landy saved his energy for one final challenge into the final straight. Though he pushed himself into the bronze medal position, he could not catch the winner Ron Delaney of Ireland.

Landy ran in some club events over the next year but finally retired from the track in 1957. He is currently State Governor of Victoria.

## **Landy the nearly man**

**By Sebastian Coe**

(Filed: 26/01/2004)

There are moments in sport that are etched deep in the psyche of a nation. Some of these are glorious victories, some noble defeats, but some are rarer moments than both. Moments when the human spirit soars and sport rises above the often mundane nature of just grinding out a win.

It was such a moment when Australian miler John Landy stopped mid-race in his national track and field championships in 1956, only weeks before the Melbourne Olympic Games, to pick up the legendary Ron Clarke who at the time was the world junior champion and who had just fallen after a melee on the third lap.

Not only did Landy help Clarke to his feet, he then ate up lost ground and won the race in a little over four minutes and four seconds.

At a breakfast before the Grand Prix final in Melbourne a couple of years ago Landy, now the Governor of his native Victoria, was introduced to the great and good of international athletics. It was the reminder of his act of decency in that third lap that got the audience out of their seats.

Sitting at my table that morning was the sublimely talented Herb Elliott, winner of the Olympic 1,500 metres title in Rome which he ran in a new world record and who retired undefeated at the age of 21. While the applause thundered, Elliott leaned over to me and said: "I'd have left the bastard right where he was."

Landy, an agricultural scientist, is a very sprightly 73 and although in the pantheon of Australia's greats, is more at home describing the flora and fauna that frame his residence than his mile world record or the six occasions he dipped under the famous four minutes.

Roger Bannister, who beat Landy in [the race to break the barrier 50 years ago this May](#), knew his Australian rival as "a modest and unassuming man but who had the crucial ability to drive himself on his own." Bannister also recognised "a man of steel which was not easily realised on first acquaintance. I think his upbringing and the English-style grammar school at Geelong he attended was an environment that hid something of his will."

Landy may have masked his past resolve but left enough uncovered for Bannister and his co-conspirators, Chris Chattaway and Chris Brasher, to know that the race to break four minutes was hotting up when Landy headed for Europe after the Australian season in March of 1954 in search of some "faster and paced races."

"When we heard John was on his way to Finland we knew things at our end would have to be done quickly. I didn't talk much to either Chris about it - it was just an assumption we needed to advance our training and our thinking," Bannister said. Bannister is a student of his sport: "real improvements in an event occur when good athletes come along at the same time like Haegg ,

Anderson, Bryan, Keino, Bayi, Walker. With John around there was an impetus".

The Helsinki Olympic Games of 1952 were the launch-pad and ignition for one of the most intense middle distance rivalries that athletics has thrown up. "I under-performed in Helsinki," Bannister said, "and he [Landy] didn't do well either. I think we both came away and were forced to re-assess our careers."

Landy started running relatively late at the age of 21 and had spent most of his time playing Aussie Rules football, a Melbourne religion. "I was quite useful at the game and although I'd won a public school mile championship I didn't take running too seriously. I only started competing a couple of years before Helsinki and was the last pick for the Olympic team," he said.

Landy was now being guided by the maverick coach, Percy Cerutti, whose training ideas were a throw-back to ancient Greece and overlain with a layer of his own "crackpot" ideas, as Landy described them.

Sandhill training at Portsea became part of the regime where the athletes often lived for days on end in a shack that Cerutti built. There was a training exercise in which athletes carrying bamboo spears in each hand and stripped to the waist ran down St Kilda Road, one of Melbourne's busiest thoroughfares.

Bannister relied on the more analytical skills of the Austrian coach Franz Stampfl: "There is no doubt after Helsinki Landy got his injection of interest from Cerutti, but it was inevitable that the partnership would break down as it did with most of his athletes. They were such just different people," Bannister said.

Landy is gentler in his assessment of Cerutti. "Look, you've got to understand what we thought passed for all-round physical fitness at the time. We were only training two or three times a week. Percy was not an analyst, more a generalist. He could inspire but he couldn't come up with a carefully crafted training programme, but I also know that I couldn't have done what I did without his fanaticism for fitness.

"Athletes were not fit to train properly and he knew that, so in that sense his influence on me was broad. Australian athletics would not have reached the levels it did had Percy not been there, but it did irritate me when he claimed a lot about my career which was not true," Landy said.

At an inter-club meeting in Melbourne in Dec 1952, Landy ran the mile in 4-02.10, only a second slower than the then record held by Norway's Gundar Haegg. "It was the most important race of my career and I think it triggered the race to the four minutes," Landy said.

So shocked were the officials that they delayed announcing the official time until they had their watches checked independently. They also had the track re-measured a few days later. The New York Times was equally sceptical. "Please pass the salt, this is not to be believed of an unknown runner," bellowed their athletics correspondent.

Over the course of the next 18 months Landy ran a series of miles all around the 4-02 mark, "but in that time I only managed to improve my best by about a tenth of a second. The more I tried the more frustrating it became," Landy said.

"I guess Roger must have been watching closely waiting for the record to go. It didn't happen." Bannister thought that Landy's efforts "would probably land him the crown." Bannister made an unsuccessful record attempt in Coronation year, but "the time drifted after a promising three-quarter mile," he said.

"I always thought Roger was the more likely of all the contenders around to do it. If I'm being honest I didn't think I could run quickly enough to break the record, but Roger was a free-flowing runner and had a good tactical brain. He didn't compete much, but, when he did, it mattered to him. I always thought of him as my main rival."

Landy was sitting in a restaurant in Helsinki when the news was broken to him that his British rival had nicked under four minutes at Oxford's Iffley Road. "I wasn't disappointed but I was amazed. I

thought Roger might run a season's best, even get near the existing record, but not run under four minutes," he said.

Bannister's primary target entering the 1954 season was - like Landy - to win the Empire Games in Vancouver. "I knew I would have to run four minutes or quicker in Canada to beat John. It was lovely to break four minutes in Oxford but it was not the main aim that season," Bannister said.

"I wanted a world record and an Empire title for Australia by the end of the year," said Landy.

Within three weeks of Bannister's record Landy realised the first of his twin aims. In Turku, in Finland, and being chased all the way by Chris Chattaway, Landy ruptured Bannister's mark and set a new world record of 3-57.9. "I wanted to beat Chris that night. As soon as the race started and with Chris pushing so hard I forgot all about the record. It was the cream on the cake, but it was not the cake," Landy said.

The cake itself was in Vancouver. "There was a beautiful symmetry about our race in Vancouver; it was a classic promoter's dream," Landy said. "Just think about it - here's this Brit - he's just run under four minutes for the first time then this Australian comes along three weeks later and breaks it - and we both had to be there. You couldn't have dreamt up anything better."

"I knew he would run from the front," Bannister said. "Yes, I knew he knew that but even so there was a little gamesmanship about, but Roger was right, I had no option but to run out hard and I knew he knew," Landy said.

And Landy did just that. "I wanted to run him off his feet but with 300 metres to go there was just too much lactic acid. I knew he was still with me on the back straight in the last lap. I could see his shadow, but on the last bend I looked over my left shoulder in the vain hope that I might have dropped him," Landy added.

At that precise moment Bannister made his move and pounced. In 10 strides he had opened a gap of nearly five metres on the Australian. "I had nothing left - the better man won. Looking back it was the closest we'd come to a heavyweight title fight in athletics," Landy said.