

TOFFS AND TOUGHS OF THE TRACK

News of the death of Roger Bannister reminded me of one of Britain's greatest athletes, Alf Tupper. A welder by trade Alf would often have to work all night to finish a job. Then he would grab his kit, especially his spikes, and hitch a lift on the back of a lorry to get to a meeting. Before entering the stadium he would buy fish and chips, always wrapped in newspaper, often eating them by the track much to the disgust of some official in neatly pressed trousers, a double-breasted blazer and a panama hat.

The race was then between the tough and the toffs. The 'guttersnipe' had to endure snobbish remarks and attempts to exclude him from membership of his local Harriers but, overcoming all adversity, he would cross the line first exclaiming, "I'VE RUN 'EM! I'VE RUN 'EM ALL".

We can be sure that all of this is true because it was recorded in both the Rover and the Victor.

Back in 1954 when Bannister ran the first official sub four-minute mile we were one year into the New Elizabethan Age. The year before had seen the Stanley Mathews Cup Final, the first ascent of Everest and, of course, the Coronation. The meeting between Oxford University and the Amateur Athletic Association was filmed. The pacemakers were Christopher Brasher (he did the first half mile) and Chris Chataway (he did the next lap). It was a great and well-planned event. Both Bannister and his pacemakers went on to become very famous and established figures. That event became embedded as a national identifier.

Meanwhile, in Sheffield a month earlier a bloke who worked for a firm making paint, training with other blokes, was timed a couple of tenths faster than Bannister. He reported that he and the other blokes thought it 'interesting' that he had achieved that time. His name was Ken Wood. His athletic achievements were phenomenal. Four times he won the Emsley Carr Mile. At one time or another he beat all the greats. So how can we measure his fame?

Do a search. You will be asked if you mean Kenwood mixers.

Cliff Jones

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