



RUNNING THE IMPERIAL MILE

THERE should be every chance of a four-minute mile or better at the Empire Games, according to Arthur Lydiard, coach of the Auckland miler Murray Halberg. And Halberg's chances of winning the event are by no means slight. "There are three things to consider," Mr. Lydiard told *The Listener*, "the possibilities of a troublesome wind, a slow track, and a trying temperature. I don't think heat will slow the runners—it is certainly not likely to trouble Murray, who has performed well on Auckland's hottest and muggiest days—and cinder tracks are not greatly affected by rain. Only a strong head wind could remove all chance of a record time. Incidentally, windy conditions favour the man capable of sprinting hard while the going is good, and put the man who relies on stamina at a disadvantage."

"This will be a really big occasion for all the competitors, and a champion will always respond to such a stimulus; the greater the day the better will be his performance. This should tend towards better times, though it won't confer an advantage on any individual. Every runner is likely to be affected in the same way."

The Listener asked if Mr. Lydiard knew of any likely milers about whom the public had not been informed. Were there any dark horses?

"I don't know of any, and I have made a careful study of results in the world's press. So far as I can see the mile will be between Bannister, Landy and Halberg. Brasher is a fast early runner, while Bannister always turns on his best speed in the last quarter-mile. I think these two will work together, and the pace will be cracked on from the start. Halberg's best time for the mile—4 minutes 4.4 seconds—would put him 40 yards behind the 3.58 of Landy, but since then Murray has de-

IF the competitors are at peak form, and if the track and weather are good—conditions quite likely to be fulfilled—the mile race at the Vancouver Empire Games may be the most exciting ever run. Here, Arthur Lydiard, who is coaching Murray Halberg, discusses with *"The Listener"* the task that faces the brilliant young Auckland runner.

finitely improved, and is a far stronger runner. Now consider the fact that Landy has stated that his record run cost him no more effort than he had been putting out in Australia for slower times. He had been exerting himself to the limit, anyhow, and had been averaging 4.2. The improvement to 3.58 he attributed to the better track and better conditions in Finland. Conditions will be much better for Murray, too, at Vancouver, so if conditions meant so much to Landy and profit Halberg similarly, the latter's chances would appear to be excellent.

"Landy seems to weaken gradually as he runs. His last quarter mile is markedly his slowest. That is the sort of chink in competitors' armour that a trainer looks for in considering his own man's chances, and in planning training schedules. It is certainly very hard to find a weakness in such men as Landy and Bannister, but I believe it is there. It is in their stamina. On his own admission Bannister was defeated in the Olympic Games by a man with superior stamina—Barthell. Any athlete can run a quarter of a mile in under a minute, but the test comes in doing four such quarter miles one after the other. So far as Halberg is concerned, it will be a stayer's race, and if he can get a ten-yard lead in the last half mile he will take a lot of catching. Bannister and Landy will be watching each other hard—but we, of course, will be watching Halberg."

"What do you think of Halberg's chances of reaching 3.58?"

"Well, if he doesn't do it at Vancouver, he is pretty well certain to do so later in his career. That boy astounds

me at times. He is nowhere near his best yet, and he has got the indomitable spirit of a champion. He'll keep at it until he gets there. Murray is just approaching 21, and middle distance runners seldom reach a peak until they're 27 or 28. When he reaches maturity he is certain to improve on 3.58. I believe the record will go to 3.55.

"Halberg and Bannister train on similar lines. That is, towards a peak. There is no guesswork about their performance on the great day; both know they will be at their best. This controlled peak performance is the real secret of training, and, of course, it makes Bannister the most likely winner, apart from Halberg. Halberg's times, by the way, are faster than were those of Landy and Bannister at the same age. Landy was nearly 23 when he did 4.2; prior to that his best was 4.10, while Bannister at 24 only recently bettered 4.4—his record-breaking run, and one other occasion when he was paced to 4.2. At 20 Halberg recorded 4 minutes 4.4 seconds in his first attempt at a mile time. Usually he runs a tactical race to win, without watching times."

"In the half mile Bannister and Landy have both recorded better times than Halberg, but Halberg has not really been tested over this distance. He has, however, broken the N.Z. 1000 yards record with 2.12—only three seconds off the world record of 2.9, held by an American. Then, too, he has had only one season in serious track running as a senior."

"Have you any special strategy worked out for Vancouver—or is that not a fair question?"

"Perhaps not. I'm not going to give away any secrets, but it is fair to say that Halberg will step on to the track with a carefully thought-out plan to carry out, and carry it out he will. Only a strong head wind could cause an alteration. Judging by performances reported so far Landy seems likely to level off. He will not be at peak, but Bannister will be, so Bannister will be the threat."

"Murray has been trained to judge pace very well, and he has trained under every variety of conditions Auckland can provide, from the coldest and wettest days of winter to the hottest and muggiest summer afternoons, always building up stamina. At times I've felt sorry for him, but we've considered it necessary."

"We know that some athletes have a slower heart action than normal. Is this the case with Halberg?"

"Halberg has a pulse rate of about 55 beats to the minute, Bannister's is 40, Landy about 45, and normal people are somewhere around 70. Many outstanding middle distance runners do appear to have a slow heart beat, but one shouldn't place too much emphasis on that. My own is 50, and I can't beat Halberg. You couldn't forecast a result on pulse and respiration charts."

"Does a runner need any special psychological training?"

"If you mean 'Does he have to overcome anxiety?' I would say yes. Nerves, or worry, with the possible loss of a night's sleep just before the event could ruin a man's chances. Every man has a different make-up, and a trainer must study every individual with a view to building and maintaining confidence. Halberg, for example, will go to Vancouver knowing that he has faithfully carried out his training to the best of his ability, and that he is in the best possible physical condition. He will do his utmost, and if he is beaten—well, that's that. The other man was a better runner."