

Four Minutes depicts the story of Roger Bannister, the first man on record to run a mile in less than four minutes.

"He was an iconoclastic individual who chose his own path," says James Chressanthis, ASC, who brought a unique perspective to **Four Minutes**. The cinematographer competed as a runner in high school and college track meets.

The telefilm was produced in Toronto for ESPN. The stage is set in an early scene where a young Bannister runs on the English coast. In war-torn London in 1945, Bannister watches a newsreel of an English runner losing a one-mile race. The film then follows Bannister during his days as a pre-med student at Oxford University. The story culminates on May 6, 1954, when Dr. Bannister nonchalantly completes his rounds at a London hospital, takes a train to Oxford, where he competes in a race where he breaks through the four minute barrier on a wet track in bad wind on a cold, dark day.

It was the third consecutive television film that Chressanthis and producer Lynn Raynor chose to produce in Super 16mm format. Their other ventures were **The Reagans** miniseries (Showtime) and

3: The Dale Earnhardt Story, which also aired on ESPN in HD format. Director Charles Beeson embraced the idea of shooting in Super 16mm.

"We needed very mobile cameras and the extreme exposure latitude that you can only get with film," Chressanthis says. "We shot **Four Minutes** in 20 days. About 30 percent of the shots were of characters practising or competing in races. We wanted the audience to feel what it was like inside the pack in those scenes, some with gliding, classic slow-motion imagery and others with the jittery, rough and tumble edge of a stock car race."

Chressanthis covered scenes with as many as four ARRI SR-3 cameras, with Cooke S-4, Angenieux and Clairmont ISCO zooms ranging from ultra-wide 6mm to ultra-long 640mm. He also made frequent use of the Ikonoskop A-Cam SP-16 that he purchased for **3: The Dale Earnhardt Story**. The Swedish camera is four inches high with a fixed 9.5mm lens and operates at six to 36 fps.

Sometimes, Chressanthis mounted the A-Cam on a monopod, which enabled him to shoot from virtually any angle while running with the actors. He also put the mounted camera on a small insert car that tracked in front of and behind the runners.

"We needed very mobile cameras and the extreme exposure latitude that you can only get with film."

Four Minutes: The story of Roger Bannister

"We structured coverage carefully because we wanted every race to have a unique style in the progression of his career. My favorite sequences are the impressionistic night race and Bannister's record-breaking achievement."

Images were framed in 16:9 aspect ratio. Chressanthis recorded the earliest scenes on Kodak VISION2 Expression 500T 7229 film to render a lower contrast, slightly grainier look he felt was appropriate for the period. He used Kodak VISION2 250D 7205 and VISION2 500T 7218 films for the rest of the movie, depending on the situation and time of day.

Newsreel footage

Beeson and Chressanthis used BBC newsreel footage taken on the day Bannister broke the record in 1954 as a visual reference. "In the last shot you see people in the crowd waving him on," Chressanthis says. "They ran across the field when he made his final sprint."

He and Beeson recreated that shot using two cameras, including a 35mm ARRIflex BL-4 with an extremely long lens at the finish line. It was focused on Bannister approaching his dream. After it was announced that he broke the record, Bannister took a victory lap with two friends who had been competing with him since college. Chressanthis ran with them, handholding the A-Cam, recreating newsreel footage and bringing the audience in the scene.

"Many of the cast and crew were weeping with joy while they were watching Jamie Machlachlan, who was flawless as Bannister, break the four-minute mile," Chressanthis testifies.

Front-end lab work was done at Deluxe in Toronto, and after off-line editing the conformed negative was transferred to HD format at LaserPacific in Los Angeles, where Chressanthis timed the film for broadcast in HD format. The colorist was Bruce Pearson. ■



Above: DP James Chressanthis, ASC on location shooting a scene for *Four Minutes*.

