THE LANDY ERA

FROM NOWHERE TO THE TOP OF THE WORLD

By LEN JOHNSON
with Introduction by RON CLARKE

World-class athletics was something that happened overseas, not in Australia. And then, on 13 December 1952, **John Landy** ran a mile at Melbourne's Olympic Park in four minutes 2.1 seconds. In those few minutes he re-ignited the race for the sub-four minute mile and inspired a generation of Australian athletes to challenge the world at distances from 880 yards to the marathon.

Others, notably the charismatic coach **Percy Cerutty**, and **Landy**'s Helsinki Olympics teammates **Don Macmillan** and **Les Perry**, played significant roles in this flowering of talent.

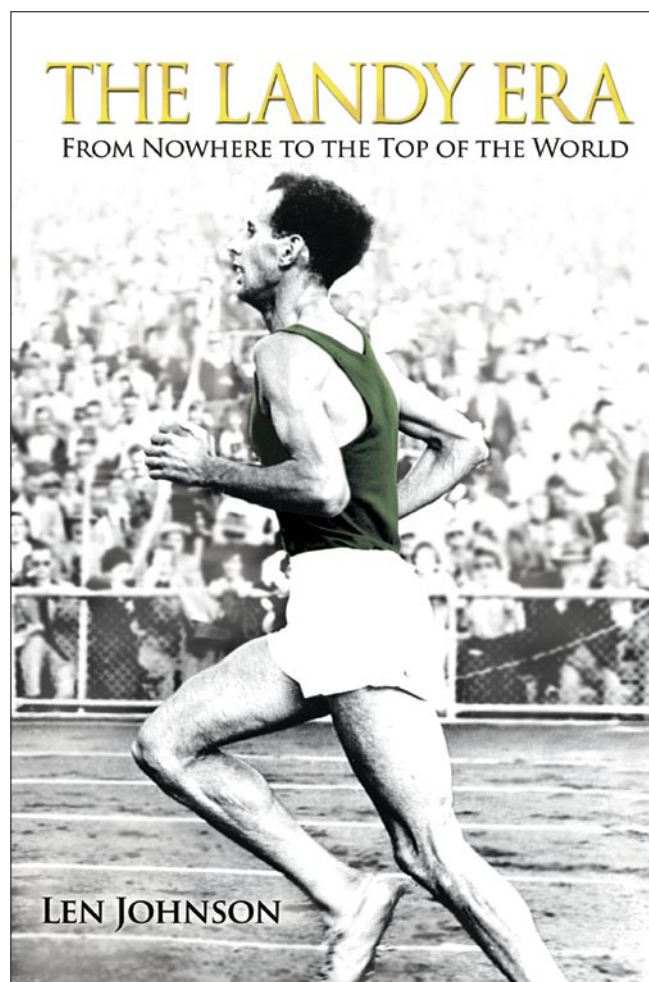Following Landy, **Herb Elliott** rose to the top, winning the 1500 metres at the 1960 Rome Olympics, smashing the world record.

From 1954 to 1968, **Landy**, **Dave Stephens**, **Elliott**, **Albie Thomas**, **Ron Clarke** and **Ralph Doubell** broke world records. **Elliott** and **Doubell** became Olympic champions; **Landy**, **Al Lawrence**, **Dave Power** and **Clarke** took Olympic medals. **Derek Clayton** set world records in the marathon.

Pat Clohessy, on whom **Landy** was a formative influence, coached **Robert de Castella** to a world championships gold medal in the marathon.

John Landy was not the only influence, but it was undeniably his era; he was its first, and greatest, star and he directly inspired and advised many of the subsequent athletes and coaches.

He led Australia form nowhere to the top of the world.

Author

Len Johnson has been *The Melbourne Age* athletics writer for over 20 years, covering five Olympics, 10 world championships and five Commonwealth Games.

He is also a former national class distance runner (2.19.32 marathon), and trained with **Chris Wardlaw** and **Robert de Castella**.