

**‘RUNNING THE RACE’  
‘ERIC LIDDELL-OLYMPIC CHAMPION/MISSIONARY’  
By John W. Keddie  
A Review**

John Keddie has succeeded in producing a wonderfully interesting and engaging account of the ‘Eric Liddell story’ in this newly updated version of his book which was originally published in 2007.

Although primarily a sporting biography, that aspect is complemented with significant material on his Christian faith and missionary work in China. It therefore reflects the intertwining nature of Liddell’s life while emphasising that his overarching faith underpinned and permeated everything and provides the key to understanding him. The content is presented in eminently readable fashion and will offer much to those already broadly familiar with the Olympic champion’s life as well as to those with merely a passing acquaintanceship.

Keddie as a former athlete, rugby player and churchman who assisted with the screenplay for ‘Chariots of Fire,’ is ideally suited to the task.

The film of course resulted in Liddell’s ‘story’ receiving worldwide attention and with certain licence detailed his Olympic success founded on his adherence to his Christian principle of not competing on a Sunday before thereafter devoting his life to the service of God.

Several factors struck me particularly on reading the book. His sporting success was achieved when he was very young, capped by Scotland at rugby weeks before his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday and Olympic gold medallist at age 22. Comparatively that career was brief, extending to some 15 months as a rugby internationalist while, effectively, his athletics career spanned only four years. To a degree there was a thread of randomness and chance running through his sporting involvement and success. When he began at Edinburgh University, he initially did not play rugby and had to be persuaded by a colleague to enter the University Sports where success led to his later playing for the rugby team. It was only through his refusal to run on a Sunday at the Olympics in the 100ms. that made him aware that the 400ms. was actually his strongest event. When he won Olympic gold he was a novice

over the distance, despite which he won by the huge margin of 4 metres, in an Olympic and world record.

His graciousness and sportsmanship were not sullied through his competitiveness and will to win. An international rugby teammate is quoted on how his speed made him something of a 'marked man' on the pitch but he never reacted maliciously or in unsportsmanlike fashion.

In a short life, he saw little of his China based missionary family when growing up, being educated in a boarding school in England from age 5 onwards and only enjoyed 7 years of marriage together with his family before their safety required their leaving China in 1941.

In pursuing his missionary work in China after his Olympic success, he sacrificed celebrity and in the fulfilment of his duties courted considerable personal danger and physical hardship given the prevalent instability, the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war and then World War II. His final years were spent in difficult conditions in an internment camp where he died from a brain tumour aged only 43.

The book is informed by the author's having met Liddell's widow and a sister as well as having spoken to some of his athletic contemporaries whose reminiscences and anecdotes enliven and enlighten it. There is both a timelessness and timeliness to this new publication, the account of his life gripping, inspiring and rewarding in any era while current pandemic difficulties underline the value of worthy Christian principles as exemplified by Eric.

Doubtless he would heartily endorse the efforts of the Centre carrying his name as a force for good in the community and this book is a fitting and enjoyable reminder of what he stood for and achieved.

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