



Pre leads his heat.

Photo by Matt McCormick

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Young, Pre qualify for 5,000 showdown

By PAUL BUKER
Of the Emerald

George Young says he arrived in town on the Fourth of July.

But a nervous Steve Prefontaine and 12,500 expectant fans at Hayward Field couldn't be certain the veteran distance runner would show until he lined up for his opening race in the 5,000 meters Thursday.

Originally, Pre had been matched against Young in the first heat of the day. Then the heats were scrambled twice, and when it was all over, both had qualified in different races.

Prefontaine jockeyed with the pack for awhile in the first one

then burst by the crowd to qualify in a breeze.

Oregon's American and collegiate record holder at this distance seized the lead for good at the end of nine laps and coasted home in 13:51.2.

Young, the mystery man from Casa Grande, Arizona who is little less than legend among American distance runners, had a much more casual workout.

He ran dead last through nine turns around Stevenson Track while Rick Hitchcock and Leonard Hilton idled through 70-second quarters.

Then he picked it up briefly before jogging home in fifth place, running 14:11.6. The heat overall was so slow that the top eight all finished over 14 minutes.

By comparison, the first race saw the top six run in the 13:50s, with Tracy Smith chasing Pre to the finish in 13:52.8 and Gerry Lindgren running a 13:53.6 for third.

After it was all over, Prefontaine, a senior-to-be at Oregon, gave signs for the first time that the Olympic Trials did indeed bring tremendous pressure.

He appeared relieved to be past the first hurdle.

"When you've rested for four or five days, the thought always comes: are you ready? Are you in shape?"

With that question answered, he could look to the final—the Olympic Trials final event.

Pre has talked all year of finally getting to face Young head-on; the man he has called "America's greatest distance runner ever," the man who has been in the Olympic games no less than three times. In 1968, at Mexico City, Young won a bronze medal in the steeplechase and finished 16th in the marathon.

Obviously walking a mental tightrope in anticipation of Sunday's final, Pre wouldn't talk about the race.

"It's not that I don't like to talk. It's just that I'm very nervous."

While Pre quickly got the post-race chatter over with, some of the other qualifiers were much looser.

Buoyant little Gerry Lindgren,

who tailed Prefontaine and qualified third at the finish, had other things on his mind. Shirts, for one.

"I'm trying to get ahold of a 'Go Pre' T-shirt," he said. "It's just about the neatest thing I've seen here."

Tracy Smith, an Olympian in 1968 in the 10,000 and a Los Angeles police officer ran a strong second in Pre's heat and had some predictions to offer for the final.

"I think it will take 13:20 to make the team" (the world record is 13:16.6, the American record is 13:29.8).

"I'm not ready for a world record, but I think I'm ready for 13:20."

It was Smith, a 1967 graduate of Oregon State, who did most of the spurting in his heat.

"I want the pace to be hard, because my main asset is strength," he said. "I want it to be in the 8:40s or high 8:30s to burn off the kickers."

In the second race, while Young was content to finish fifth, Terry Harrison was winning eventually with a 14:06.2. Other qualifiers were Hilton, of the Houston Spike Club, Jim Johnson, who failed to qualify last week in the steeplechase, and Glen Herold.

Greg Fredericks, the puzzling youth who one week ran a new American record 10,000 meters, then folded here in the same event, was the sixth and last man to make the final.

In the first race it was Smith, Lindgren, Dick Buerkle, Cliff Clark, and Sid Sink joining the finals' field.

Sink, the American record holder in the steeplechase, is another man fighting to make the team after an earlier blowout.

"I'd have rather been in our heat than the second one," he admitted. "It seems it would make you sharper—running faster."

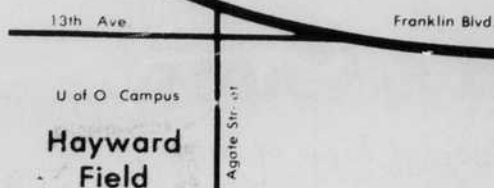
With more than 14,000 expected for the final day, all itching to see the long-awaited moment of truth for Prefontaine, one couldn't ask for a more dramatic finish.

Friday, July 7, 1972

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