

400 favorites coast home

Who would have thought that three of the top four men in the 400 meters wouldn't even win their first-round heats Thursday? It was a surprise to everybody but Lee Evans, Vince Mathews, and Wayne Collett, the men who coasted in to qualify in their respective races without finishing first at the tape.

Only John Smith, the fastest man in the world at 440 yards, won his race.

For the rest, world 400 king Evans, Collett, and Mathews, it meant little to be running in 46.8, 46.1, and 46.4 fashion.

"It's not important to win heats," Evans said after trotting to the finish line third behind Tommie Turner and Southern University freshman James Redd. Evans, gold medalist at Mexico City when he set the world record of 43.8, got a bad start in his race.

"There was two false starts and I almost got a cramp. I could feel it coming."

Collett, a former UCLA teammate of Smith's, had troubles with hay fever and was second behind Army's Fred Newhouse in his heat, running 46.1.

"I was bothered a little by the pollen. But not real bad. I am worried about it."

Before his race, Collett watched Evans drop back dangerously close to non-qualifying territory before putting on a brief spurt 50 meters from the line to make it.

"He played it awfully close," Collett said. "He took a chance—a chance I wouldn't take."

Collett, author of a 44.4 personal best this year, wasn't



Coasting home in 400 heat are James Redd, Tommie Turner and Lee Evans.

surprised at the failure of some of the favorites to win.

"Oh no, I would have been surprised if they had won," he exclaimed.

"I went into today's race saying I did not want to win my heat."

He didn't. Evans didn't, and Mathews wasn't about to. "I might as well save myself and not kill it," he said after running second in the last race of the day, behind surprise winner Tom Ulan of New York.

Mathews' best at this distance is 44.8, he ran 46.4 in his heat.

Smith, two-time NCAA and AAU champ and favorite in some circles, couldn't help it.

His heat was slow and when Arizona's Maurice Peoples

pressed him down the stretch, he put out just enough to win in 45.7.

"I was just going to do what I had to do qualify," he shrugged, relaxing in the trainer's tent after his race.

With the big boys shaking their heads at the thought of actually going out and winning first-round races, there were three men, besides Smith, who did.

Sports International's Tommie Turner won Evans' heat with a 45.6. Aside from a second in the 1970 NCAA 440, Turner's exploits have been a good secret.

He got a sizeable lead out of the blocks and was a good 10 yards in front of Redd coming off the last turn.

"In the last 330 I want to be in front because I know they're

coming after me," said Turner.

"I'm not really muscular and strong, I don't have a strong finish."

The pre-meet publicity surrounding the big four has meant little to Turner. "I don't read the papers. They don't tell me anything. It's won on the track."

Redd, the man who tailed Turner in 46.4, is an unknown quantity. He ranks 10th in the nation with a top time of 45.4 but could be a sleeper.

"He's got the potential to be a star," said Evans of the youngster.

Redd was sitting next to the world-record holder in the interview area, a little embarrassed.

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Running to win may mean record

"If the United States could work it out," confided Vince Mathews appraising the 400 field, "they could probably take 10 of us to Munich."

Mathews was one of 16 who qualified for the second round of the 400 meters which begins this afternoon at 1:20.

The first round saw three of the four top contenders—including Lee Evans, Mathews, and Wayne Collett, all lose their heats.

But in this one they were going just to qualify. Only 440-yard world record holder John Smith won a heat, later he said a new world mark was possible, but he wasn't thinking about it.

"It may be on their minds, but I'm just trying to win," Smith, who was the only pre-race favorite to win his heat (in 45.7) faces Evans in the fourth heat today. Both are going into the race with different game plans.

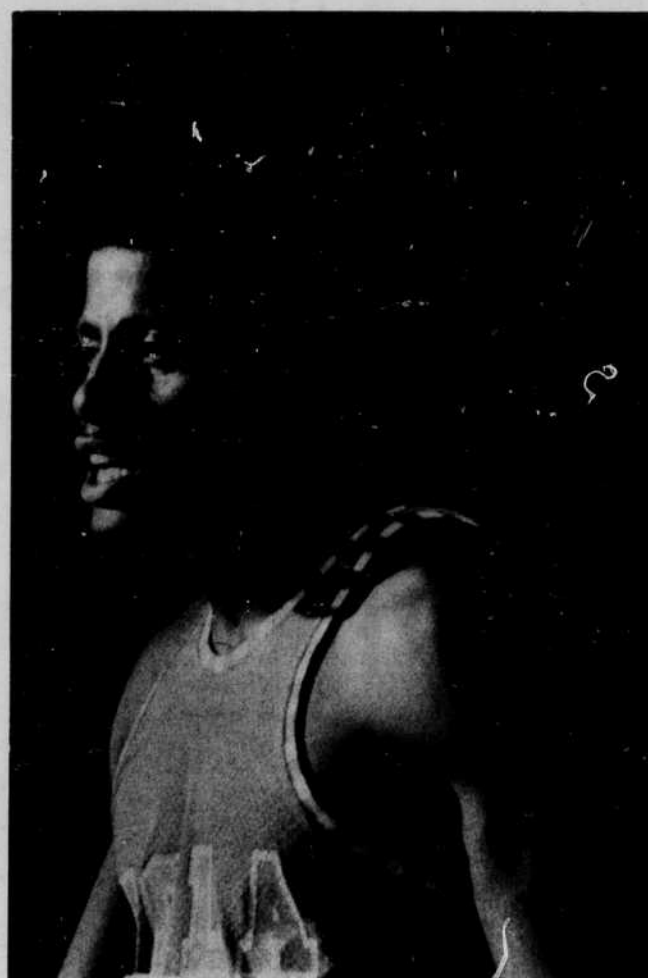
Evans is more likely to go flat out and try and win. Smith, owner of a 44.5 in the quarter, is a good bet to coast into the semi-final round behind him. Evans, who set the world record at 400 meters (43.8) in Mexico City, has something to prove.

"People were saying my 43.8 was because of the altitude," he said. "But if the conditions were the same, I could do it again."

Evans, surprisingly, rated another track faster than Stevenson's urethane. "Tahoe was the fastest track I've run on. In Tahoe (1968 Trials) a 44.6 got fourth, it was so fast."

Wayne Collett for one says Evans could make a pass at his record. "I think it'll take lifetime bests for everybody to qualify," he said. And you know what a lifetime best for Evans means.

Smith, the one facing Evans, was philosophical. "There's always tension when we get together, he says of the duel."



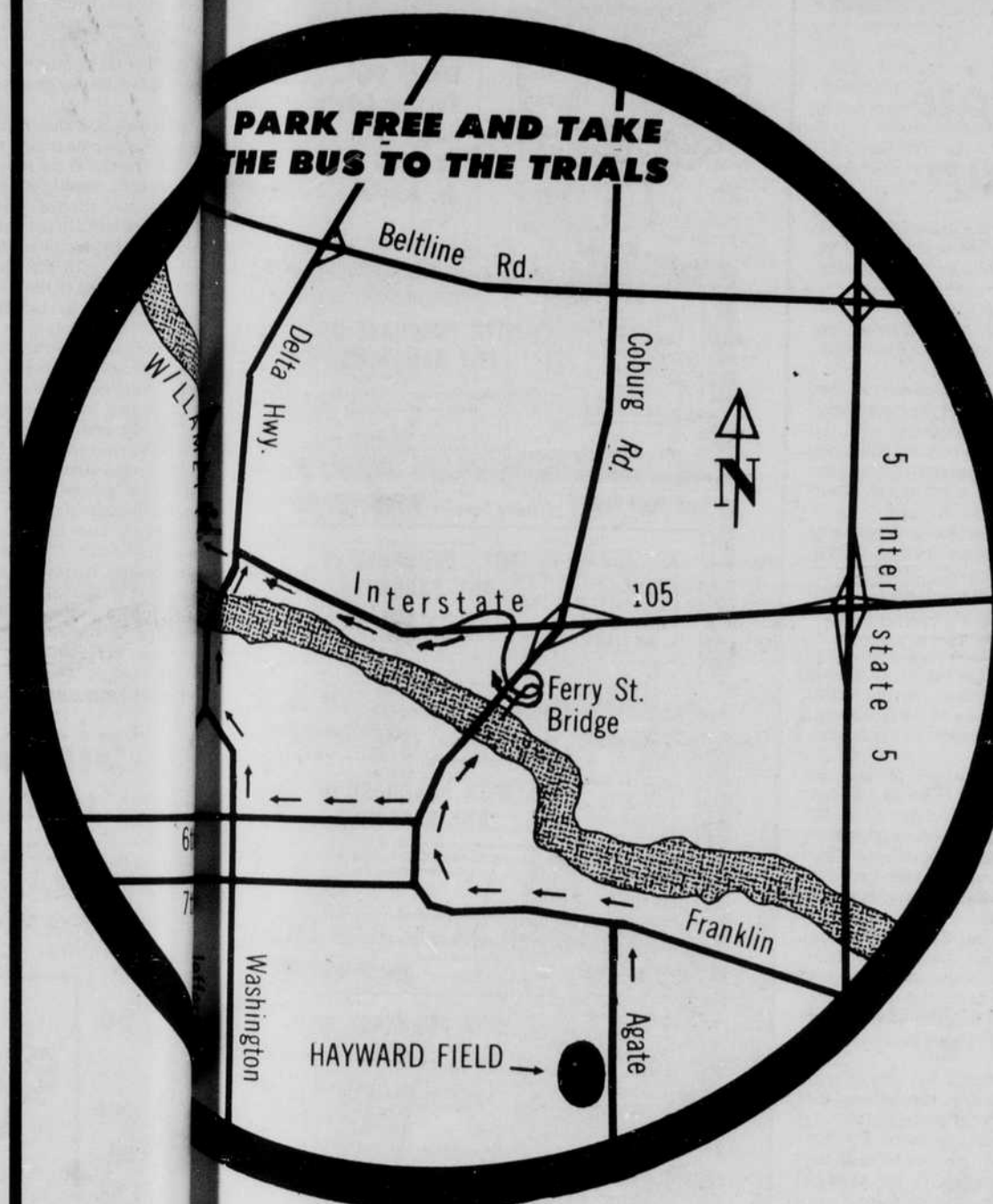
John Smith

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400 . . .

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"I saw him run once before," continued Evans, "he looked good."

Newhouse, who beat Collett to the tape by about seven meters in the third heat, ran 45.4 and is a legitimate contender.

He thought he pushed it too

much in winning the race.

"I didn't want to run that fast, but I was in lane six and couldn't see anybody. I think I could have run faster, though."

When somebody like John Smith runs a 45.7, and Lee Evans jogs around in 46.8, you better believe that some can go faster.

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