

400 meter final will be fastest of all time if 'big 3' gun it

By PAUL BUKER
Of the Emerald

They're calling it the fastest 400 meter final ever.

Listen to UCLA coach Jim Bush on the colossal John Smith, Lee Evans, Wayne Collett duel:

"If those three run a perfect race, with their ability, 44 flat may not make the team."

Bush, the man who knows more about the 400 than any coach in the country, is the proud tutor of two of the world's fastest—Smith and Collett.

Neither man won his semi-final heat Friday, but then, neither really wanted to. Running four races in three days leaves only the strongest at the finish. The veterans lag behind until it counts. Then the afterburners go on.

Bush says Smith ran a good race in finishing third behind Fred Newhouse and his fleet 44.2. It was enough to cruise into the final—no more. "He came off the turn with everything under control."

Bush gave little credence to Newhouse and his challenging pace in the preliminaries.

"I still say it's one of those three



Smith

(Evans, Smith, Collett) no matter what Newhouse did. I've got a lot of respect for Fred as a runner but I don't think he can do it in the final."

It is expected to come down to a stride-for-stride show of muscle and an incredible time—something in the 43's. And Smith, fastest in the world at 440 yards, is a co-favorite with Evans, gold medalist and world's fastest at 400 meters.

Only Collett, it would seem, could break up that combination.

After his victory in Friday's second semi, the ex-UCLA star was nervous.

"He drew lane eight in the finals," Bush said. "He was upset, but I tried to convince him that lane eight was the best lane on the track."

Collett, the articulate graduate of the Bush quarter-mile program, wasn't talking after his race. The man has run in the shadow of Smith and Evans for a long time.

Anticipation made him edgy.

"I told him the lane doesn't make any difference," continued Bush. "If you're good, you're good. He feels OK, and he's ready."

Smith contrasted sharply. He was confident after drawing the third lane for the final.

"I had lane two last year and got the world record," he said, recalling his 44.5 in the AAU meet on this same track.

"Each lane is 400 meters long. Besides, I'm a good turn runner."

But with Collett on the outside, it does make a difference in strategy.

"In lane eight," pointed out Bush, "Wayne has no choice but to come out fast. He can't see the other guys."

While those two are churning around the final curve, it's a good bet Evans will be somewhere close. He drew lane six and after learning of the final draw said he'd be going out in a hurry, too.

"I know I gotta really run the first 200 meters." So in the end, it comes down to who's got it in the last 200.

And after watching Newhouse and Smith shut down 40 meters from the finish line and still clock 44.2, few doubt a world record finish.

You can only push world record holders so far. Then they explode.

"It's a question of mind over matter," says Bush.

Goodbye, 43.8.



Evans

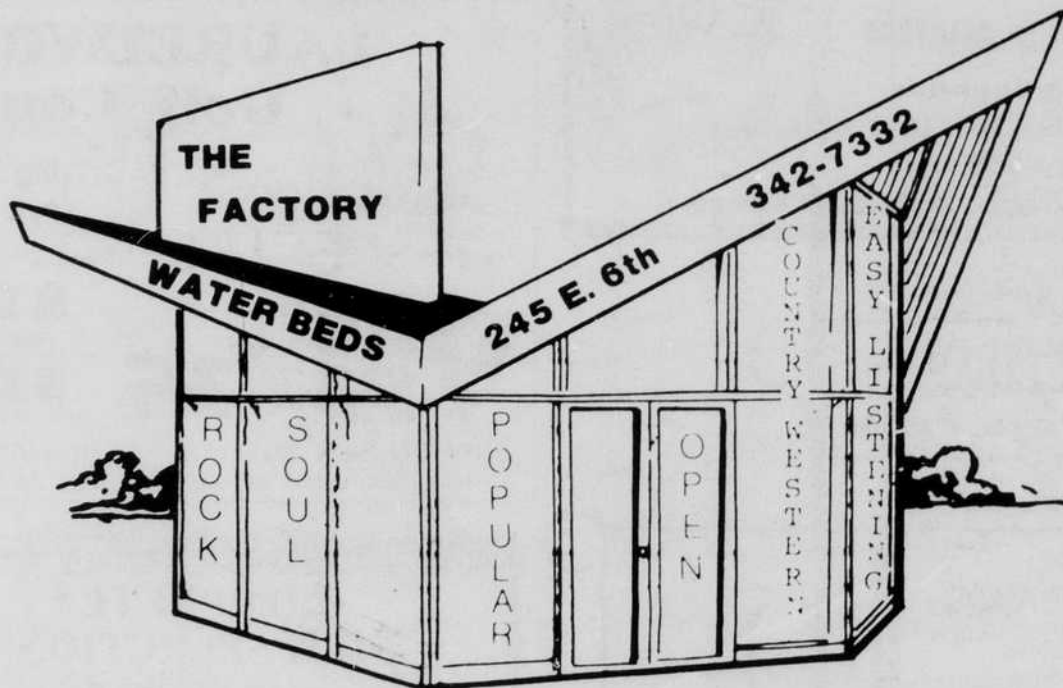
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