

Super mile, world high hurdle record serve final rites for packed stands



Photo by Nick Lacy

Dave Wottle

By PAUL BUKER
Of the Emerald

Oregon's Scott Daggatt might have gone under four minutes for the first time in his life Wednesday night, but they didn't have a clock on him.

It was that kind of a mile as Dave Wottle met Steve Prefontaine for the first time in the Hayward Field Restoration Meet. Six runners went under 3:59 in an epic struggle and Wottle became history's third fastest miler after streaking to a world-best 3:53.3—the fourth fastest ever run on American soil. Prefontaine, struggling at the finish, ran 3:54.6, second-best in the world this year.

"Pre said to me right after the race that the next time he'd go out faster," said Wottle. "I think he can. If he steps it up too much, I don't know if I can keep up."

They packed Hayward Field's tottering West grandstand on a muggy June evening to see Pre and Wottle go for the world mile record, but the estimated 12,000 fans got another one. That came when Rod Milburn clicked off a sizzling 13.0 in the high hurdles to equal his two-year-old mark.

The no-shows in this meet included America's best triple jumper, John Craft, and the world's hottest quartermiler, Arizona's Maurice Peoples. So after Milburn's record—and the news that Mac Wilkins had injured himself in practice Tuesday and wouldn't compete—everyone's mouth watered for the mile.

"When I went out on the track, and all those people began screaming, my body began to tingle" said Wottle.

Ray Atchison of Club Northwest was the willing rabbit and carried the field through a 58-second first lap. Atchison pulled out before the end of the second lap and Wottle plunked himself right on Pre's shoulder.

"I was just waiting till I felt the time was right," said Wottle later. "I kinda felt I had him going into the last lap. I was feeling really good." It was 1:57.5 through the half and 2:56.7 through

three quarters, with Wottle staying within a few steps of the Oregon runner.

"I wanted to explode but I didn't," said Prefontaine. "I wanted to get 10 or 15 yards on him but just didn't have it. I don't think running those three miles (four under 13:20 in 2 weeks) helped me."

Pre started a sprint with 600 yards to go but Wottle stayed close until a sudden, decisive burst with about 200 yards to go. He opened up five to seven yards on Pre and kept it to the tape.

"I don't think my final 220 was that good," he shrugged. "I think I could have gone faster. I wish I would have gone all out in the last 220 and seen what I could do."

One of those looking on was Bill Bowerman. He liked what he saw.

"Both runners did a good job," said the longtime Oregon coach. "Anybody knows that Wottle can kick if he's there. And he was there. The thing I like about Pre is, he could have gotten third really easily if he wasn't so tough."

Right on Pre's tail was Villanova's John Hartnett, who ran 3:54.7, or about four seconds faster than his lifetime best. Oregon's Paul Geis was fourth in 3:58.0 and Canada's Ken Elmer ran 3:58.5.

"I don't think this is my best," Prefontaine reflected about 20 minutes after the race. "I was satisfied, though, because to beat me, Wottle had to run four seconds faster than he'd ever run before."

Pre left for Finland and a 3000-meter race on Friday a few hours after the meet. Wottle leaves this week and left the door open for Round Two.

"Sure, we'll probably run some more races. Tonight he had to shake me by three quarters but I felt really good after three quarters. I didn't start breathing hard until about 660 left. I could sense he wouldn't have a real good kick."

"Look," said Pre, "I'm not making excuses, but the mile is not my race. I don't train for it, but I can race with anyone. With a little speed work, I can do much better."

Europe, brace yourself.

Geis improving, but ineligible for cross country

By ART BUSHNELL
Of the Emerald

Paul Geis was looking forward to running for Oregon after he broke the four-minute mile barrier Wednesday night.

"I'm going to have to do better during track season next year. I'm going to have to go against John Hartnett (of Villanova who took third in the mile in 3:54.7, just ahead of Geis 3:58.0). He'll be a senior next year and running against me in the three-mile."

Geis has to look all the way to next spring when he dreams about competition, though. He's found out he won't be eligible for cross country this fall.

After sitting out a year as a transfer student, the Oregon sophomore has been told there was a misunderstanding about when he would become eligible.

"When I came here, coach Bill Delinger said there were two ways I could become eligible. I could either go to Lane Community College for a year and then be eligible for cross country at Oregon or I could go to night school for one term and then go to the University for three terms and still be eligible in the fall.

"I did the latter. But now we've found there was a misunderstanding between the coach and the University's NCAA representative. I'd have to go to school for a calendar year—not an academic year like we thought—to be eligible."

For Geis that means there's no way he can become eligible for cross country by going to summer school this term. So he's

going to take a term off from school and concentrate on running with the U.S. AAU team in Europe.

He says he'll do what Steve Prefontaine is doing as a senior—come back to compete in cross country after the fourth year.

Geis said his 3:58 mile puts him "much ahead of where I thought I could ever be in one year at Oregon. The program here is just fantastic."

The time gives him excellent marks in the mile, two mile (8:24.8) and three mile (13:09.2) during his ineligible spring.

At the same time in his collegiate career, Steve Prefontaine had lifetime bests of 3:57.4 in the mile, 8:31.6 in the two mile and 13:01.6 in the three mile.

That means Geis is only half a second off Pre's mile time, seven seconds ahead of his two mile clocking and eight seconds behind the three mile time.

Paul was a little disappointed with his official time in the mile. Several people had told him he ran a 3:57.6, while he was clocked in 3:58.

"It was upsetting to find out I ran .4 seconds slower than I first thought. But I'm sure I'll get used to the idea in a couple of minutes."

Geis was in fast company for his first sub-four minute mile.

Wottle's 3:53.3 makes him America's second fastest miler and the third fastest in the world. Pre became the fourth fastest American miler and ninth fastest in the world and Hartnett is now the fifth fastest U.S. miler and

tenth fastest in the world.

Wottle's mile victory wasn't the only race he won Wednesday night.

He had to catch an exuberant fan who stole his famous white golf cap after the race. He sprinted across a field and then tripped over the thief, falling and skinning both knees.

"That's the first time anybody's ever taken my cap," said Wottle. "I had to get it back. It's the only one I had with me."

Wottle said the Stevenson track was partly responsible for the fast time—"it's such a hard surface it makes a normal 58 second lap a 57."

Equally pleased was hurdler Rod Milburn, who tied the world record of 13.0 for the 120 high hurdles he set on the same track at the 1972 Olympic trials.

He said he didn't have an excuse for his fifth place finish in last week's AAU championships. "I just lost. Now I hope I've got it back again."



Photo by James Link

Rod Milburn