

Pre Classic wins world-class praise

By JODY MURRAY
Of the Emerald

If Hayward Field had an ego, the synthetic track would have burst at the seams with the praise heaped upon last Saturday's Prefontaine Classic by several world-class athletes.

"This place is utopia," said Tom Byers, winner of the 1,500 meters in 3:36.5 — the third-best time in the world this year. "I'm from Ohio State, where we'd get 200 (fans) at the most."

"The crowd's on everybody's side," said Craig Masback, who was nipped by Byers at the tape. "The spirit is certainly here." He said the great European races depend on several factors, some of which were shared by the Pre meet — most notably a good-sized (about 7,000), knowledgeable, vocal crowd.

John Walker, the former world record holder in the mile and third-place finisher in the Pre 1,500, continued the accolades.

"You give the losers an ovation, and that's great. Track is for everybody. You don't need the primadonnas.

"It reminds me a little bit of New Zealand (his home country). On some of the backstreets in Eugene you'd swear you were in Norway."

Such an allusion seems fitting, since the Pre meet was the last competition for many athletes before hitting the European circuit. Judging by Saturday's marks, most are ready to make the trip.

Byers, winner of the Twilight Mile one week ago, lost the lead to Masback after setting the pace for 3½ laps. But the Athletics West standout ignited a mini-kick with 20 meters to go and nipped Masback at the tape by two hundredths of a second.

"When you take the pace, you've got to be careful because someone always leeches off you," Byers said. "If someone else takes the lead,



Photo by Steve Dykes

Tom Byers blazed to a 1,500 meter win in 3:36.5, the third fastest time in the world this year, at the Pre-classic Saturday night.

then it becomes their problem, because now they have to worry about me. This time it paid off."

"Tom deserved to win. He did all the work," said an ailing Walker, whose third-place time was 3:37.29.

Oregon's Leann Warren couldn't take all the credit in her race, the 800 meters. Teammate

Rhonda Massey ran rabbit for her, taking the field through 400 meters in 57.7. Warren roared away from the pack on the second lap and finished in 2:00.47 — the world's best this year and sixth-best on the all-time U.S. list.

"Very close," said Warren, who would have liked to break two minutes. "I've got to say I'm disappointed, but not deeply disappointed. I wanted to get in a good race in Eugene."

Warren said she didn't look at the scoreboard clock as she came down the final stretch. "That would have slowed me down. I just gritted my teeth and tried to keep my form."

The next big race for Warren will be the Athletics Congress meet later this month. A good showing there will qualify her for several biggies, such as the World Cup.

"It's hard to say (if she'll break two minutes) at the TAC, because the races are more tactical because they mean so much more. Plus there are three rounds. So I don't know if a great race will happen there, but it could lead to some great races."

In the women's 1,500, Athletic West's Cathie Twomey shaved six seconds from her personal best to win in a U.S.-leading 4:11.96. Twomey hung back until the last turn, kicked into the lead and held off a late charge by Joan Hansen (4:12.09).

"I felt so strong," said Twomey, grinning from ear to ear. "I came through the turn and said, 'Big deal about passing on the turn, I've got to go when the momentum is going.'"

Mike Boit, the Kenyan Olym-

pian doing his graduate work at the University, took the 800 in the world's third-fastest time this year (1:45.18). Randy Wilson of Athletics West was second in 1:45.32, followed by Wayland Baptist's Joel Ngetich (1:45.34).

"I think I did all right," Boit said. "I am a little disappointed in my home stretch. I'll have to work a little on that. But I'm sure now that I can run 1:45, so now I can shoot for 1:44."

In other events, Matt Centrowitz blazed through the last 400 in 56 seconds to win the 5,000 in 13:27.06; Amos Korir of Kenya clocked the world's fastest steeplechase of 1981 in 8:18.57, nipping AW's Ken Martin (8:21.52); and Peter Farmer won a duel with Dave McKenzie in the hammer, 233-2 to 233-1.

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