

Prefontaine Classic promises to be grandest of them all

■ PRE CLASSIC: Michael Johnson out with a strained hamstring, but the field will still be star-studded

By Ryan Frank
Freelance Sports Reporter

Carl Lewis, Sergey Bubka and Jackie Joyner-Kersey can all be seen on international television this summer from the Olympics in Atlanta.

But this Sunday, those three will be at Hayward Field for the Prefontaine Classic.

The Prefontaine traditionally has a field filled with Olympians and world-record holders, but the athletes in the 22nd annual Prefontaine outshine any field in past meets.

"This is the greatest field we have ever had at the Pre Classic. There is a world champion or Olympian in every event," meet coordinator Tom Jordan said. "This is not only the best field that we have ever had at the Pre, this is the best field ever for a meet at Hayward."

Other top athletes will join Lewis, Bubka and Joyner-Kersey, including Olympic decathlete Dan O'Brien, world record holders Leroy Burrell and Kevin Young and gold medalist Gwen Torrence.

Bubka will open the meet in the pole vault at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday morning against the No. 2 pole vaulter in the world, Okkert Brits.

Lance Deal, one of the United

States' top athletes in the hammer throw, highlights the competition at 9:45 a.m.

In other field events, Joyner-Kersey and ex-Duck Kelly Blair will compete in the long jump at 10 a.m., while the men's long jump begins at 10:10 a.m.

World-record holder Kevin Young will take part in the 400-meter hurdles at 10:30 a.m., followed by the men's qualifying 1,500-meter run at 10:40 a.m.

In one of the top match-ups of the day, Kelly Blair will race against Gail Devers at 11:03 a.m. in the 100-meter hurdles.

Two time NCAA national champion and ex-Duck Claudette Groenendaal will return to Hayward Field for the 1,500 at 11:18 a.m. Also racing in the 1,500 is the 1995 women's Athlete of the Year Sonia O'Sullivan.

In addition to the 100-meter hurdles, Devers will also race against Carlette Guidry in the 100-meter dash. In 1991 Guidry won three individual NCAA national championships at Hayward Field as a member of the Texas Longhorns' women's track team.

Leroy Burrell, a world-record holder in the 100 with a 9.85-second clocking, will race at 11:36 a.m.

Ex-Duck and gold medalist Joaquim Cruz will compete in the 800-meter run at 11:42 a.m.

Lewis will forgo his traditional 100 for the 200-meter dash at 12:21 a.m.

Double World Champion

Michael Johnson, who was scheduled to race in the 400-meter dash at the Pre, will not be able to race because of a soreness in his right hamstring.

For the second time in the last five years, Oregon will host the NCAA Track and Field Championships starting Wednesday. Although Jordan thinks that the interest generated by the NCAA Championships will spill over to the Pre, he doesn't feel it is needed.

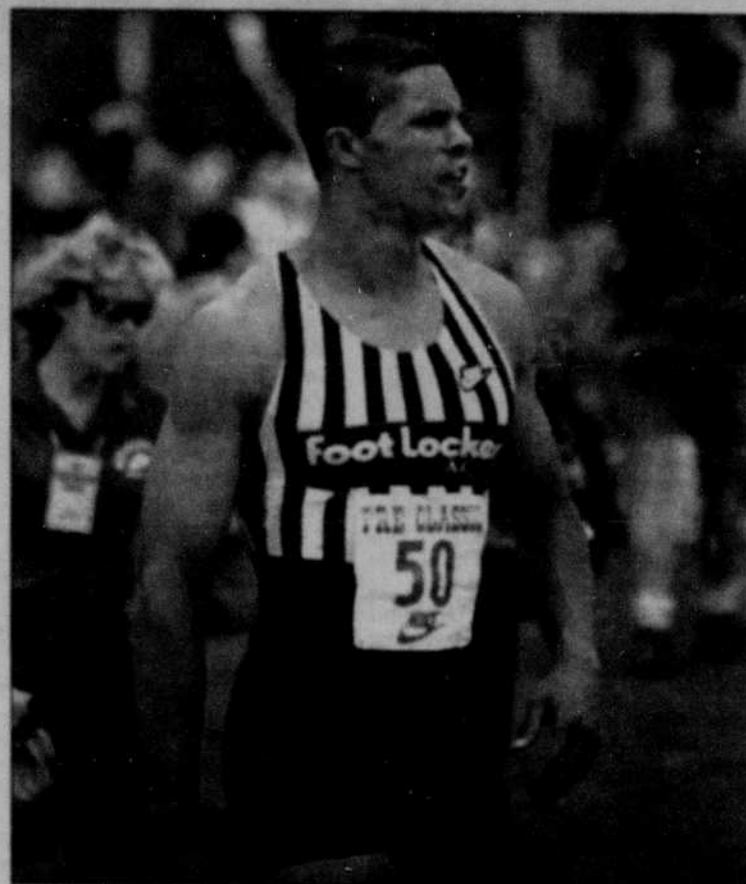
"I think NCAA has something to do with the popularity this year, but the Pre Classic is an event that stands on its own," Jordan said. "With the Olympics this year and the support from Nike that we get, this is a great meet, regardless of whether the NCAAAs are here or not."

New at this year's meet will be the Kid's Tent, created by Warsaw Sports Marketing students Chris Prindiville, Sandy Sachs, James Peterson and Allison Rieke. The tent will allow children to experience track and field up close and personal. Children will be able to handle equipment, see autographed shoes and have their face painted.

Each child will also be given a race number that resembles the same numbers that the athletes competing in the meet will wear.

"How often do children get a chance to see Michael Jordan's jersey while they are at a Bulls game?" Prindiville said.

"Our goal is for kids to have fun with track," Prindiville said. "Tom [Jordan] has been pushing



Dan O'Brien, an Olympic decathlete, will compete in the 22nd annual Prefontaine Classic on Sunday beginning at 9:30 a.m.

for family entertainment, and this is one way to open it up to the whole family because kids are part of the family, too.

"We are also trying to rekindle the spirit of track and field in Eugene. What happens next year when it isn't an Olympic sport and some of the athletes have retired?"

The Prefontaine Classic was created in 1974 in memory of the legendary Oregon distance runner Steve Prefontaine — later known simply as Pre.

While at Oregon from 1972 to 1976, Pre set 13 American records and recorded four NCAA individual championships.

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