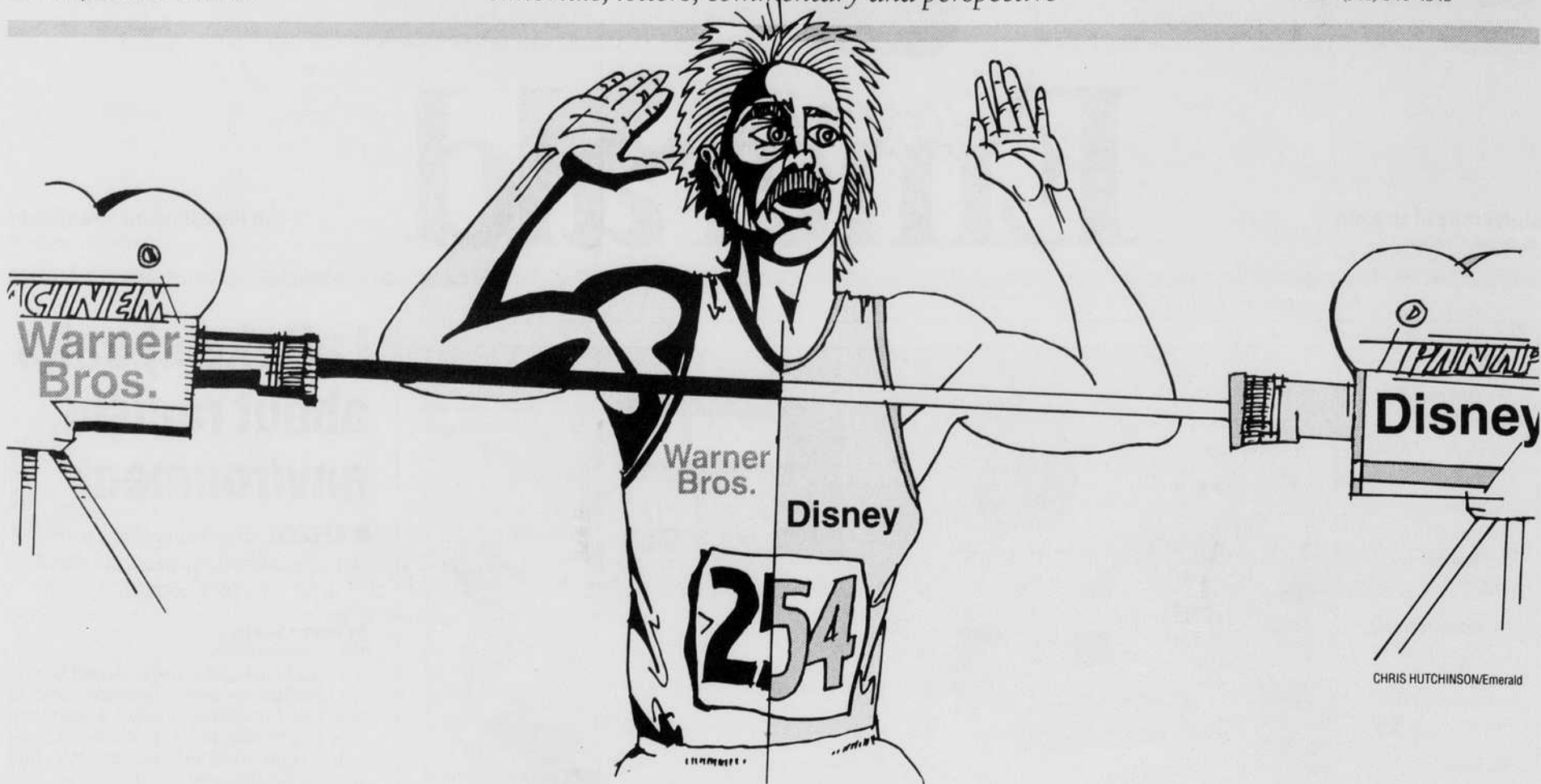


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CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

Prefontaine: Two movies are barely enough

OUR OPINION:
The former University runner's extraordinary life is worthy of more than one film treatment

Looking back on the life of Steve Prefontaine, his effect on the city of Eugene and the sport of running is undisputable.

After Prefontaine's tenure at the University in 1969-73 (and other stars before him), the city would forever be known as "Track Town U.S.A."

Sold-out crowds of all ages would attend his races at Hayward Field, shouting "Pre! Pre!" as he repeatedly ran down the competition.

He energized long-distance running with a charismatic personality and made watching a footrace an adventure for a crowd more used to last-minute basketball and football games.

Eugene will never forget him. Running will always remember him. But does the average American even know him? Probably not.

Hollywood hopes it can change that. With two movies on Prefontaine's life coming out within the year, film types are betting the life that touched our hearts will have the same effect on the whole country.

The race to release a film on Prefontaine first was fought long and hard by Walt Disney Pictures and Warner Brothers for two years. Both films had rights and stories from different Prefontaine associates and varying budgets. Both films also sought to bring Pre's story to the big screen almost twenty years after his death, inspired by the 1995 documentary on the runner's life, "Fire on the Track."

Disney's entry, "Prefontaine," outdis-

tanced the competition with its release on Jan. 24 in Eugene and major cities. But its portrayal of Prefontaine, endorsed by his family, has been far from a victory. Many people who knew Pre say the film glamorizes his life and his "spirit." That spirit, they say, was actually Pre's dominating, cocky personality — which infuriated as many people as races it won.

And the film's representation of Pre's death has been called into question. The two-car, non-alcohol related theory of the car crash shown in the film is not what Eugene police believe happened that fateful night. Prefontaine's alcohol level was actually beyond the legal limit, and some people who saw him before the accident say he'd downed more than a couple of beers.

Nonetheless, the film accurately portrays the effect Prefontaine had on the Eugene and running community. And most of Pre's family and friends who attended a screening say the film was right on.

The second film, "Pre," isn't scheduled for release until the fall and has a much larger budget than its predecessor (\$1 million was reportedly spent on the 1972 Olympic sequence alone). Looking back on other multiple movies on the same subject (e.g. "Tombstone" and "Wyatt Earp"), Warner Brothers will no doubt take a different slant on Pre's life.

However, the biggest question may be whether Prefontaine's life is worth two movies. Both film companies decided to make a film around the same time — determined to bring their own image of Pre

to the screen. But history shows us, including in the Wyatt Earp movies, that one movie is always enough — at least for the general public. In 1993, "Wyatt Earp" hardly enjoyed the same box office success as "Tombstone."

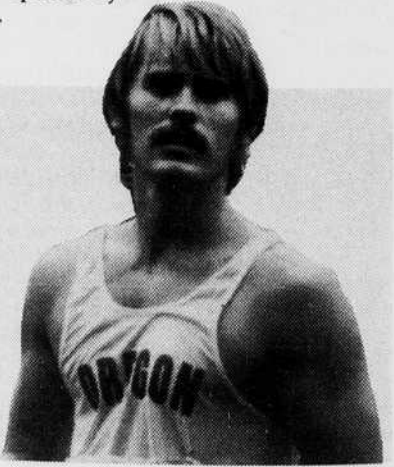
But as evidenced by the controversy surrounding the first movie's treatment of Pre, chronicling someone's life is not as easy as it sounds. Any biographer, whether it be in print or on film, has endured the difficulties of showing a life that was seen by many different people, and therefore, many different points of view. Pre's life is no different.

Stories of personal experience with Pre still echo in Eugene, more than twenty years after he left his legacy. Depending on who one talks to, Pre may be a hero or a fool, a thoughtful friend or a selfish egomaniac. One may hear a story of how Prefontaine signed autographs for a half hour after a race without a hint of irritation. The next minute, one may hear a tale of how he openly bragged about going to the Olympics or winning a tough race.

Steve Prefontaine was a complex, incredible person with obvious faults and strengths. Two movies on his life may seem excessive, but for a person of his stature and ultimate effect on his city and the running community, they may be necessary. If two films, with two different approaches, can shift the complicated, fascinating life of Prefontaine into the national spotlight, they will be a success.

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This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.



A tale of two movies

- **JANUARY 1995:** Walt Disney Pictures announces it has begun pre-production on a motion picture based on the life of Steve Prefontaine.
- **MAY 1995:** Representatives from Disney and Warner Brothers speak to University representatives about filming on campus.
- **MARCH 1996:** Warner Brothers secures the right from the University to film on campus from June 1- Sept. 10.
- **JULY 1996:** Disney begins primary photography on its film, "Prefontaine," in the Seattle area. Jared Leto stars as Prefontaine and R. Lee Ermey plays coach Bill Bowerman.
- **AUGUST 1996:** Warner Brothers begins filming in Eugene for its feature, "Pre," starring Billy Crudup as Prefontaine and Donald Sutherland as Bowerman.
- **JAN. 24, 1997:** Disney's "Prefontaine" opens in Eugene and other national markets.
- **FALL 1997:** Warner Brothers' "Pre" is tentatively scheduled for release.