

World record holders looking to better marks

■ No record is safe when world class athletes swarm Hayward Field for the annual Prefontaine Classic

By Robbie McCallum for the Emerald

Fans might have a difficult time deciding which event is the most exciting at the 26th annual Prefontaine Classic Grand Prix.

Olympic champion and world record holder Michael Johnson makes a case for the 400 meters, but so does an army of long distance runners in the 5,000. Depending on how many runners break the hallowed four-minute barrier in the mile, that could be the marquee event.

One thing is for certain: There won't be a dull moment.

Johnson is no stranger to Hayward Field. He owns the field record in the 400, the Classic record in the 200 and has won countless races in between. At this year's meet, Johnson will attempt to break the meet record in the 400 of 44.13 seconds owned by Derek Mills. Johnson's world record of 43.18 could surpass that by nearly a second.

The only question is whether anyone can come close to Johnson. Brazil's Sanderlei Parrela is ranked third in the world with a personal best 44.12. Jerome Davis is ranked seventh in the world with a personal record time of 45.95.

A title is not so certain for another world record holder. Maurice Green, dubbed "The World's Fastest Man," should receive a challenge in the 200 meters from former Olympic gold medalist Michael Marsh. After years of rehabilitation from bone spur surgery, Marsh has returned to top form. The 32-year-old Marsh has season bests of



Michael Johnson, who holds the Pre Classic record in the 200, is one of many elite athletes to participate in this year's Classic.

9.90 in the 100 and 20.10 in the 200, .05 seconds faster than the meet record. Green is the two-time defending champion in the 200 and is looking to break Johnson's records in that event.

For American record holder Jeff Hartwig, the Pre meet is an opportunity for another record in the pole vault. Hartwig recently upped his own record of 19 feet, 9 inches by a quarter of an inch, making it the fourth time he has surpassed an exist-

ing record. Oregon graduate Piotr Buciarski will also participate in the pole vault.

The 5,000 meters will also feature a distinctive local flavor with two Oregon alumni participating. Great Britain's Karl Keska and Nick Rogers are both eager to perform in the friendly confines of Hayward Field. The Classic "is a great tune-up for the Olympic Trials," Rogers said. "It's a great atmosphere and the best place in the country to run. I'm fortunate to be able to workout here."

The favorite in the race is Kenyan Luke Kipkosgei, who is a two-time Prefontaine Classic winner who set both the meet and Hayward Field record at the 1998 Pre Classic with a time of 13 minutes, 07.83 seconds. Kipkosgei's time nabbed the field record from Kennedy who held the honor for the previous five years. Kipkosgei's personal best in the 5,000 is 12:57.32.

Several former Pacific-10 Conference runners will also be on hand for the race. Former Stanford twins Brad and Brent Hauser, Arizona's Abdi Abdirahman and Washington State's Meb Keflezighi are all looking for personal bests.

A number of runners will be looking for sub-four-minute times in the Bill Bowerman Mile. Leading the way are Kenyan William Chirchir and Stanford's Gabe Jennings. Chirchir has the fastest 1,500 time in the world this year at 3:32.55, which equates to a 3:49 mile. Jennings, the NCAA 1,500 champion, owns a personal best 3:37.15, which equates to a 3:54 mile.

Joining the field is high schooler Donald Sage, of Elmhurst, Ill. Sage is second on the prep mile list this year behind Alan Webb, who withdrew from the Classic last week.

One of the greatest American 800 runners ever will return to Hayward Field for this year's meet. American record holder

Johnny Gray, who turned 40 on Monday, will have the second fastest time coming into the half mile, behind Kenyan David Leilei.

Gray has a personal best of 1:42.6, but has not broken 1:45 for the last five years. Leilei's trademark event is the 1,500 but decided on the 800 after running a 1:43.9 earlier this year.

Gray's successor in the United States, Bryan Woodward, as well as defending Classic champion Khadevis Robinson should push the two-lap pace.

Although no big name stars have entered into the 100 meters, the race will still be competitive to say the least. The 100 will essentially be a college all-star race, with two NCAA champions, a runner-up and a Pacific-10 conference champ.

Florida's Bernard Williams — this year's national champion — Auburn's Coby Miller and Washington's Ja'Warren Hooker are all entered in the race. The lone "veterans" are John Drummond and Terrance Trammell. Williams' personal best (9.99) would surpass Carl Lewis' meet record of 10.08 if ran at the Classic.

For the first time in many years, Eugene resident and fan favorite Lance Deal will not be the favorite in the hammer throw. Hungarian Zsolt Nemeth and Russian Vasily Sidorenko both have better marks this year coming into the throwing event.

Deal has already earned a qualifying mark for the U.S. Olympic Trials in the hammer throw, but he will need a season best to win his third straight Classic title. Fellow New York Athletic Club thrower Kevin McMahon should give Deal a challenge with a 257-8 personal best.

"The Pre Classic is a real community happening," Deal said. "No where else do athletes feel as comfortable as they do here. It's just a great place to get some throws in."

Prefontaine Classic Time Schedule

- 11:15 Hammer Throw (M)
- 11:30 National Anthem
- 11:32 Introduction of Bowerman Team Members;
- unveiling of Bowerman statue
- 11:45 Pole Vault (M)
- 11:50 Discus Throw (W)
- 11:54 Masters 800M (W)
- 12:02 Shot Put (M)
- 12:06 200M (M)
- 12:14 100M (w)
- 12:23 Mile (M)
- 12:34 800M (W)
- 12:37 Long Jump (W)
- 12:41 1,500M (W)
- 12:53 400M (M)
- 1:00 100M High Hurdles (W)
- 1:06 110M High Hurdles (M)
- 1:12 400M (W)
- 1:17 800M (M)
- 1:24 100M (M)
- 1:30 5,000M (M)
- 1:50 High School High-Point Winners Award Introduction
- 1:55 Presentation of the Prefontaine Trophy to the 5,000M winner

Athletes gear up for Olympics with Pre meet

■ With the Olympic Trials around the corner, the Prefontaine Classic draws top-level competition

By Robbie McCallum for the Emerald

Races of this caliber haven't been seen since 1996 and may not be seen again until September in Sidney, Australia.

The 26th annual Prefontaine Classic Grand Prix will feature Olympic-level competition from track and field stars who reside in Eugene, the rest of America and the rest of the world. Some former Olympians will be on hand, as will some future Olympians.

Mrs. Jones herself, the legendary Olympian Marion Jones, highlights the entry list in two events. Jones holds the meet and Hayward Field record in two events — the 200 meters (21.18 seconds) and long jump (21 feet, 11 3/4 inches). This year, Jones will try for a third record in the 100 meters. Gwen Torrence currently holds the meet record at 10.96. Jones will also try to better her meet record in the long jump.

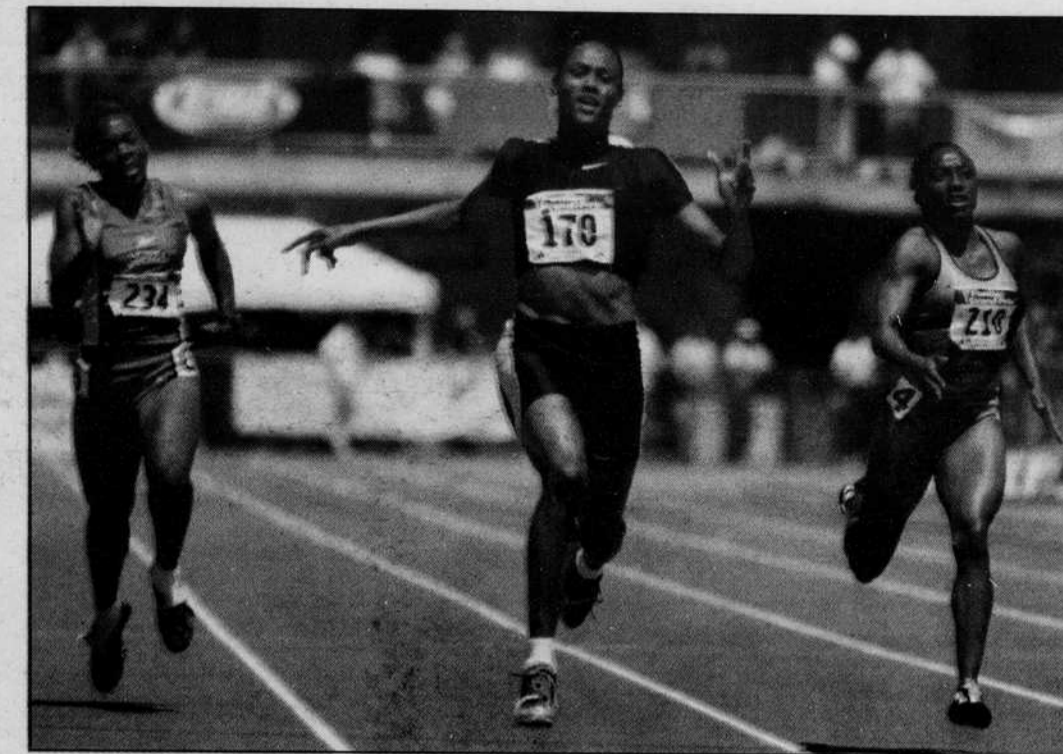
The favorite to win both the 100 and 200 meters at the upcoming Olympic Trials in Sacramento, Calif., on July 14-23 is also Jones, who has a personal best of 10.71 in the 100.

Chasing Jones at the Classic will be Philomena Mensah and Torri Edwards in the 100. Eugene resident Shana Williams and Adrien Sawyer will compete against Jones in the long jump.

Seven-time gold-medalist Gail Devers begins her quest for a fourth Olympic bid next month in Sacramento, but for now she will run the 100 meter hurdles at the Pre Classic. Devers owns the meet record at 12.84 but ran a personal best and American record of 12.37 last summer. The race will be Devers' first in the 100 hurdles this year. Devers is the eleventh gold medalist to enter into the meet, the most ever.

Challenging Devers will be Anjanette Kirkland, who has the fastest time in the world this year (12.63), and NCAA Champion Joyce Bates.

One of the biggest head-to-head matchups in the Classic ever will take place in the 800 meters. Local athlete and half-mile specialist Maria Mutola has been victorious in the Pre Classic



Marion Jones will compete in the 100 meters and long jump, where she is the meet record holder

for the past eight years and owns the meet and field record at 1 minute, 57.5 seconds. She has been the only woman to be ranked No. 1 in the 800 five times. Needless to say, she has not had much of a challenge in the half mile in recent years.

That will change this year when three-time Olympian and two-time World Champion Regina Jacobs takes to the track. Primarily a 1,500 meter runner, Jacobs is stepping down to the 800 for some speedwork before the Olympic Trials. Suriname's Letitia Vriesde has gone under the two-minute barrier (1:56) in the 800, as well as sisters Joetta and Hazel Clark.

"I'll be running the 800 at the Prefontaine next weekend, and I expect to run a very fast time," Jacobs said. "I'm exactly where I want to be this year."

Another exciting showdown could take place in the 1,500 between Romanian Gabriela Szabo and former Eugenean Suzy Faver Hamilton. Maria Runyan was entered in the event, but had to withdraw due to injuries.

Something will have to give between Faver Hamilton and Szabo, both of whom are undefeated this year. Faver Hamilton holds the top times in the world in the 1,500, 3,000 and 5,000 me-

ters. She won the '98 Classic 1,500, but had to sit out all of last year with an achilles injury.

Favor Hamilton, Runyan and Jacobs are considered by many as the greatest American trio of 1,500 runners ever.

Szabo has a personal best 3:56.97, which would break both the meet and field record if ran at the classic. Szabo won this year's indoor 1,500 and was a silver medalist at the '96 Olympics, which was her first race on American soil. The Classic will be her second.

Also in the mix is Canadian Leah Pells, who finished fourth at last year's meet and has a personal best 4:03.56.

"In the 17 years I've been associated with the Prefontaine Classic this is one of the best potential match-ups we've ever had," meet director Tom Jordan said. "It's the best field ever assembled on American soil outside of the Atlanta Olympic Games."

One of the first high school women in the classic will compete in the 400 meters on Saturday. Morse High's (San Diego) Monique Henderson ran the 3rd fastest 400 by a prep athlete ever at the California State meet on June 3 and the eighth fastest this year with a time of 50.74.

One of the favorites in the race

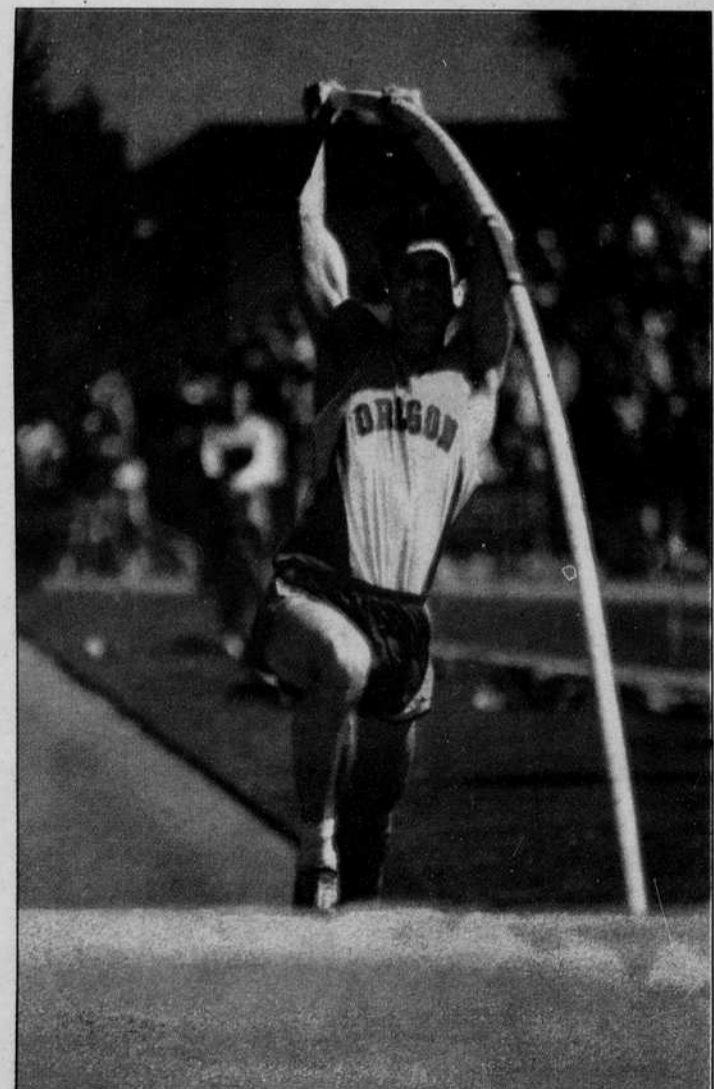
is former world champion Jearl Miles-Clark, who owns a personal best of 49.40. The last time the 400 was contested, in 1998, Miles-Clark finished fourth behind Jamaican Lorraine Graham, who is also entered.

The other favorite is Nigerian Fali Ogunkoya who is ranked second in the world this year with a personal best 49.10.

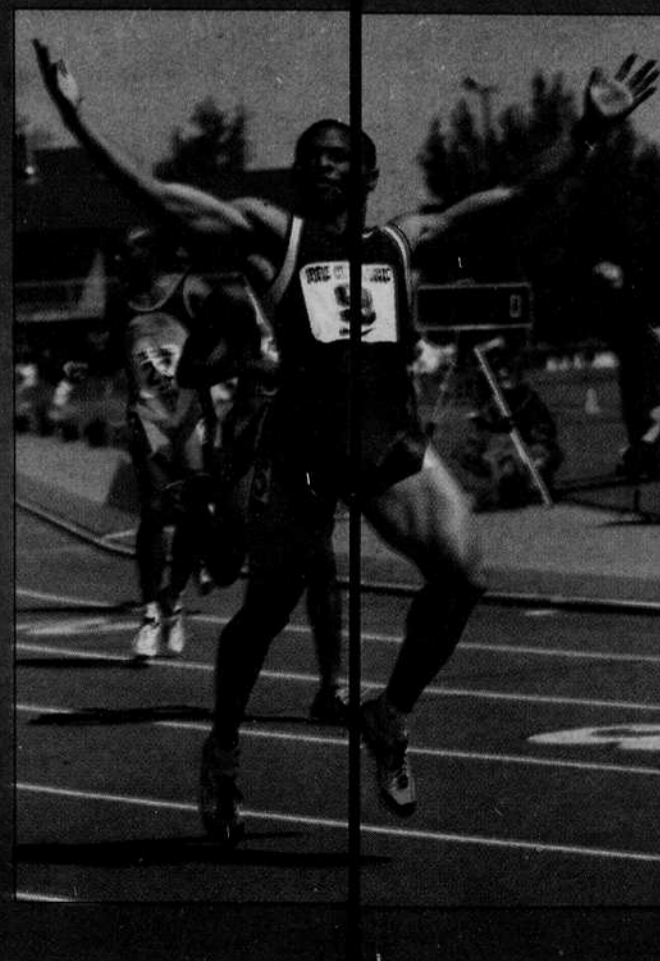
American Kim Graham, a member of the gold medalist 4x400 meter relay team at the '96 Olympics, will also run in the race. She finished seventh at the '98 Classic and has a personal best of 51.18.

Inside the oval, the discus throw is a wide open event that could go to a number of competitors. Belarus' Ellina Svereva has that top mark coming into the event with a throw of 221-9. Svereva was a bronze medalist at the '96 Olympics and was ranked fifth in the world last year. She will attempt to break Australian Lisa Marie Vizaniari's four-year-old meet record of 212-11. Vizaniari and fellow Australian Allison Lever could also be a contender.

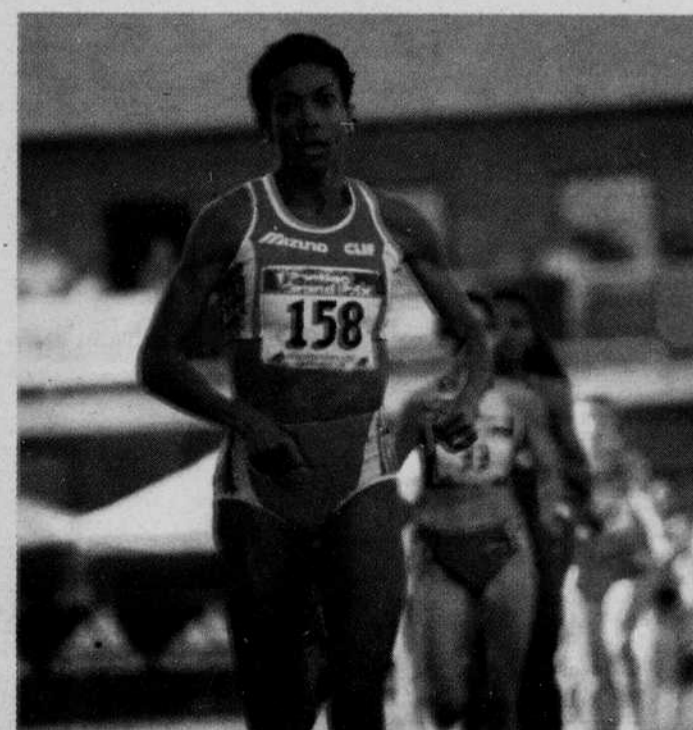
The field also includes five of the top six American throwers this year: Kris Kuehl, Suzy Powell, Aretha Hill and recent UCLA graduate Seilala Sua.



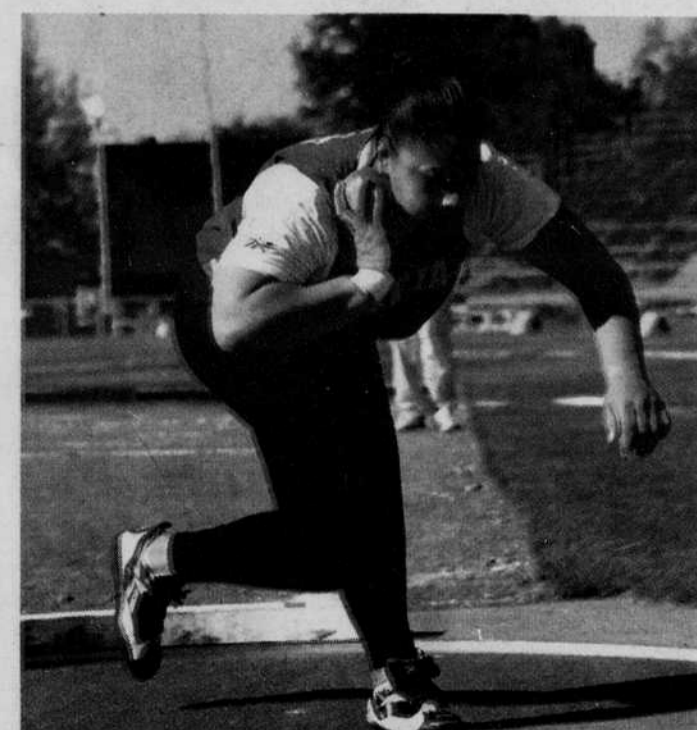
Oregon grad Piotr Buciarski returns to Hayward field to compete in the pole vault



Muarice Greene is the two-time defending champion in the 200 meters



Regina Jacobs will compete against local favorite Maria Mutola in the 800 meters.



Seilala Sua returns to Hayward Field after winning the Pac-10 title this spring.