

Mutola returns for ninth straight Pre Classic

■ Eugene resident and Olympian Maria Mutola headlines a tough field in the 800-meter race

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

Maria Mutola will compete in the Prefontaine Classic this year.

Wait, haven't you heard that before?

Mutola, arguably the best women's 800-meter racer in the world and a Hayward Field crowd favorite, will take part in her record ninth straight Prefontaine Classic May 27. A native of Mozambique who resides in Eugene, Mutola has competed in the meet more times than any other women's runner.

Mutola is coming off a gold-medal performance in the Sydney Olympics last year, a feat that complements her bronze medal in 1996 and World Championship gold in 1993.



MUTOLA

She holds the Hayward Field record in the 800, which she set in 1995, and her personal best is less than two seconds slower than the world record.

There is a reason Mutola is so adored by the Eugene crowd. She has won the 800 in eight of nine

years she has competed, and her only loss came at her first Pre Classic in 1991 — when she attended Springfield High School.

Mutola will face a deep field at this year's Pre Classic, including the current American record-holder, Jearl Miles-Clark, the top-ranked American runner in last year's Track and Field News magazine, Hazel Clark, and Helena Fuchsova, who finished fifth in Sydney. Rounding out the field are Suriname's Laetitia Vriesde, Slovenia's Jolanda Ceplak, Mozambique's Tina Paulino and Germany's Linda Kisabaka.

Paulino is Mutola's cousin, and they aren't the only relations to square off in the event. Miles-Clark and Clark are sisters-in-law.

All the competitors in the 800 are

good enough to have personal bests under 2:00. Mutola's personal best is 1:55.19, and the slowest personal best, Kisabaka's, is 1:58.24.

High jump gets tough

Two additions to the Prefontaine Classic high jump field will ensure close competition in the event.

Sweden's Kajsa Bergqvist, the bronze medalist in Sydney and the world's top-ranked high jumper last year, will square off with America's top-ranked jumper, Amy Acuff. America's top-ranked collegiate jumper, Harvard's Dóra Györffy, will also compete with Bergqvist and Acuff.

Men's mile adds depth

Hicham El Guerrouj will have some competition in the Pre Classic mile.

The world record-holder in the mile, El Guerrouj will run the event on American soil for the first time at the Pre, against top-notch competition.

Bernard Lagat of Kenya, last year's Olympic bronze medalist, will race against El Guerrouj. So will Canada's best runner, Kevin Sullivan, and Daniel Zegeye of Ethiopia.

The top Americans in the race will be Seneca Lassiter, Bryan Berryhill, Jason Pyrah and Alan Webb. England's top runner, John Mayock, will also compete. The top-flight field is rounded out by Brazil's Hudson De Souza, Somalia's Ibrahim Aden and Uganda's Julius Achon.

All the runners have personal best times under 3:55 in the mile. For comparison, El Guerrouj's world-record time is 3:43.13.

Minnesota fires women's basketball coach for violations

By Dave Campbell
The Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Minnesota women's basketball coach Cheryl Littlejohn was fired Monday for a pattern of rules violations, including giving money to a player, the school said.

A university investigation also found Littlejohn interfered with an earlier investigation by telling players to lie. She had been on unpaid leave since earlier this spring.

The violations will probably be considered major infractions by the NCAA. The men's athletics department is already on four years' probation for an academic fraud scandal uncovered in 1999.

The university also reprimanded the school's compliance director for failing to follow up on one violation identified in a report, which outlined the results of the investigation. And the school

placed limits on recruiting, including reducing the number of official visits and evaluation days.

"Our coaches have an obligation to both know and follow the NCAA rules, and the pattern of disregard for the rules that is reflected in this report is simply unacceptable," said Tonya Moten Brown, the school's vice president and chief of staff.

Littlejohn and her lawyer, Blessing Rugara, did not immediately return phone calls seeking comment Monday.

According to the report, Littlejohn acknowledged to investigators that she gave \$200 to a player in fall 1999. She said the player was desperate because her financial aid was delayed, and Littlejohn had been frustrated in her attempts to help her.

Natea Motley, who left the team in December 1999, has said Little-

john gave her money when she arrived on campus that fall from Detroit.

It wasn't clear whether Motley was the player mentioned in the report because names were blacked out. But the player in the report told investigators she was not in a desperate financial situation and was able to obtain a \$500 advance from the university by mid-September.

The report said Littlejohn first tried to pass money to the player by putting it on the passenger seat of Littlejohn's car as she spoke to the player through the open window. The player said she declined. Littlejohn later gave money to the mother of a different player, with instructions to use it to buy necessities for the first player.

The report also found Littlejohn interfered with university officials during an investigation into sum-

mer 1998 housing and transportation arrangements for four recruits that Littlejohn was accused of improperly arranging.

Littlejohn called at least one player and manager into her office to rehearse the story she wanted them to give investigators, the report found.

The report also found that Littlejohn:

- Bought fleece clothing for players in 1998.
- Let players stay overnight at her house and make free long-distance calls in September 1999.
- Gave money to a recruit to pay recreation center admission for several kids, including a recruit's sibling, in fall 2000.
- Bought groceries and used them to make a meal at a recruit's home during the 1999-2000 academic year.

— Required a recruit to participate in individual workouts with a player or players in summer 1998.

— Required players to play in pickup games before sanctioned practices began in October 2000, and had student managers keep stat sheets and report to the coach.

— Sold personal clothing at very low prices to players.

— Had a student assistant make contact with a recruit after a high school game.

— Bought or arranged purchase of a restaurant meal for a player or players.

Littlejohn is in the fourth year of a five-year contract paying \$101,800 each year. The Gophers were 8-20 and 1-16 in the Big Ten this past season, and Littlejohn is 29-81 and 7-58 in the Big Ten during her career.

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