

Former Oregon prep star comes home for title

■ Bryan Berryhill, a Central Point native, is hoping to close out his collegiate career as a champion

By Jeff Smith
Oregon Daily Emerald

Lost in all the jubilation of Sunday's Prefontaine Classic mile run at Hayward Field was Colorado State stand-out Bryan Berryhill's school-record time in under four minutes.

While the fans cheered and the media hovered around world record-holder Hicham El Guerrouj and prep sensation Alan Webb following their exciting miles, Berryhill simply strode to the covered athlete area and lay down, unnoted.

Berryhill's time of 3 minutes, 55.01 seconds beat out his previous school record of 3:56.91 that he set in 1999. Yet, showing how much of a competitor Berryhill is, he was not satisfied with his eighth-place performance among

the talented 16-person world-class field.

"It wasn't quite the race I was looking for," Berryhill said. "I never got in a real flow of the race and didn't run the race I wanted to, so that was discouraging."

"Now, it's time to switch gears and go after the NCAAs."

While at the Pre Classic, Berryhill was just another face in the crowd, but that will not be the case at this week's NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships at Hayward Field.

Berryhill is ranked first in the men's 1,500 meters (3:37.23), and he is going after an NCAA outdoor title to go along with the indoor one that he captured earlier this year. His first race will be at 6:15 p.m. Thursday in the semifinals, where he will look to advance to Saturday's 6:15 p.m. finals.

While the senior is thrilled at the possibility of ending his collegiate career as a champion, what makes him even more excited is that the NCAAs will be held right

here in Eugene.

Berryhill is an Oregonian from Central Point who was a five-time state high school champion while at Crater High.

"I can't think of a better place to run my last collegiate race," Berryhill said. "The crowds are always great, and it's just a prestigious place to run. I've ran here three times, and I love to come back here."

One of those times was during the 4A high school track and field championships his senior year, where he put on a show that many still remember. Berryhill outlasted the field in the men's 400 meters that day, and then a mere 10 minutes later, he turned around and doubled that distance to win the 800 meters.

In order to capture this year's 1,500-meter championship, he will have to outrun some difficult competition. The two runners he'll have to keep a close eye on are Stanford junior Gabe Jennings and Alabama junior David Kimani.

Jennings is the defending NCAA

champion in the event (3:37.76) and is coming off a spectacular summer in which he won the U.S. Olympic Trials and advanced to the Olympic Games.

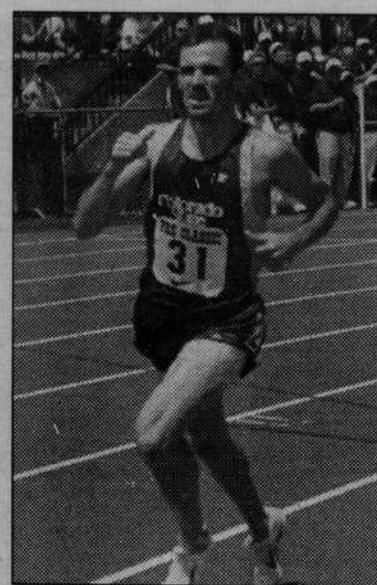
Kimani, a Kenyan, is ranked second in the event this year (3:38.99) and is a four-time indoor champion in the 3,000 and 5,000, as well as being the 1999 NCAA cross country champion.

"It's going to be a tough field, no question about it," said Berryhill, who will return to Eugene once more this year for the June 21-24 U.S.A. Championships. "I'm definitely going to have to be 100 percent focused to have a chance."

Colorado State track coach Del Hessel is extremely pleased with the way Berryhill has progressed while he has been a Ram. Hessel says that all the time that Berryhill has put into running is "beginning to pay dividends."

"He has made the greatest progress in the mile of any athlete in the U.S. coming from the 400 meters in high school," Hessel told The Denver Post. "I told him when he was a freshman, 'You're not fast enough to be an 800-meter runner, but the 1,500 would be an ideal event.'"

"Everything had to change, from running 15 miles a week to learning to run 80 miles a week."



Jon House Emerald
Oregon native Bryan Berryhill represented Colorado State at Sunday's Pre Classic.

Clearly, the work has paid off for Berryhill, but he knows there's still one more important week to go.

"When I think about the NCAAs too much, I get pretty nervous," he said. "So I try not to sit around and think about it all the time because I end up driving myself crazy."

"Hopefully I'll go out with a win, and do it here in front of a lot of my friends and family."

Experienced coach excited for NCAAs

■ In his sixth NCAA Championships at Hayward Field, Tom Heinonen is confident that Tracktown, U.S.A., will host a great event

By Adam Jude
Oregon Daily Emerald

Talk about experience. If anyone knows what it means to compete at the NCAA Track and Field Championships, it's Tom Heinonen.

The head coach of the Oregon's women's track and field team has led the Ducks to 22 national championships since his arrival in 1977, placing in the top 10 10 times.

And better than anyone, Heinonen knows how to be a gracious host.

Since 1962, the NCAA has made nine appearances at Hayward Field; Heinonen has been here for six, the last in 1996. He was also the meet director for four NCAA Championships.

Coming off a weekend packed with high-energy competition — in which about 26,000 fans saw the two-day state high school championship and the prestigious Prefontaine Classic — Heinonen said he is excited to bring in the NCAA meet.

"We are the mecca of American track and field," Heinonen said. "We are thrilled to be able to put on the NCAA Championship meet, and we know that the athletes will love it."

Heinonen said the passionate support from the community is what makes Eugene Tracktown, U.S.A.

"We are immensely proud [of Tracktown]," said Heinonen, who was honored as a Master Coach by USA Track and Field in 1994. "The knowledge of our spectators is what's always been great about Hayward Field. We don't have enough [hotels] in Eugene to host the Olympic Trials, but everything else is world class."

The 55-year-old Minnesota graduate led the track program to a national title in 1985 and is 118-21 in dual meets. Heinonen also guided the Ducks to an unprecedented nine straight Pacific-10 Conference titles from 1978 to 1986.

Heinonen will again be at center stage for the four-day event this week, beginning today, but his team — unlike the days of old — will take a back seat to powerhouses USC and UCLA.

Just four Ducks — all field competitors — qualified for the championship, putting a second team championship on hold for another year. Comparatively, 14

Duck women competed in the 1996 championship held at Hayward, although the team scored just five points overall, tying them for 33rd place.

With the four representatives this year, Heinonen said he hopes to put on a good show.

Two Ducks will shoot for an NCAA title in the javelin throw. Freshman Sarah Malone, a Newberg native, is ranked second in the nation with a throw of 174 feet, a school record. Sophomore Charyl Weingarten of Grand Forks, N.D., was also invited to the championships after a throw of 155 feet, 6 inches at the Pac-10 Championships.

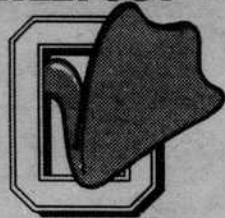
Junior Niki Reed ranks fifth in the pole vault and sophomore Mary Etter is 10th in the discus.

"We're very strong in the field events this year, and we'd like to make a good showing in front of the hometown fans," Heinonen said. "We've made some strides ... and we'll certainly be motivated this week. It's an opportunity for us to showcase what we've got."



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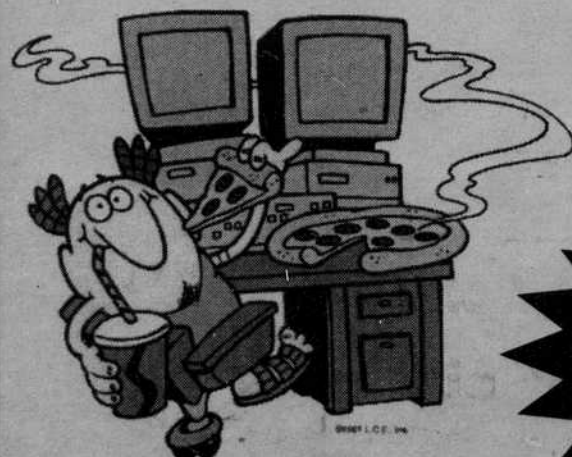
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