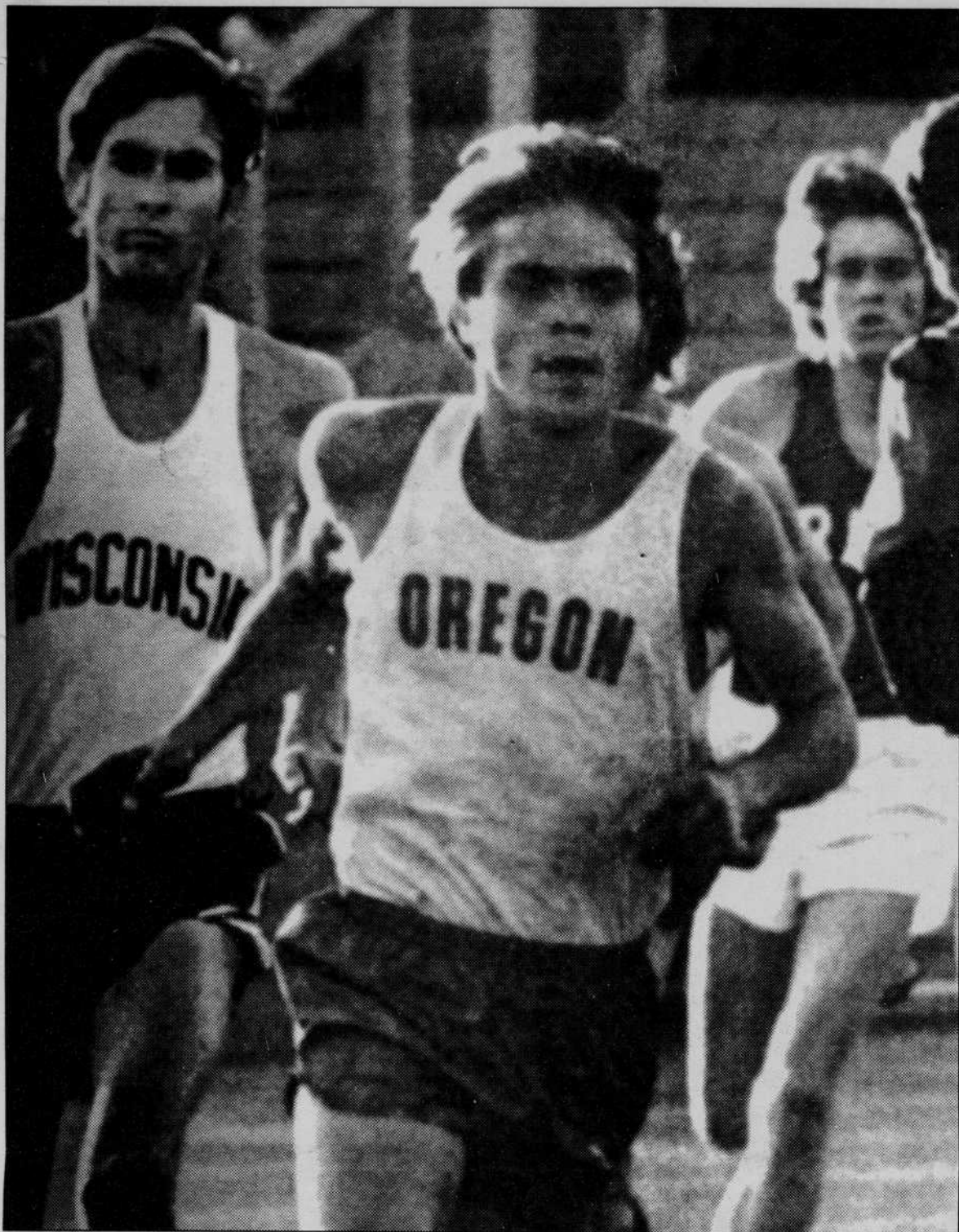




Steve Prefontaine, seen here in 1972, won seven NCAA titles in cross country and track for Oregon, and he once held all eight American records between 2,000 and 10,000 meters. His legend burns brighter than ever today, after his death in 1975.

Pre's legend lives through history

■ Steve Prefontaine's determination and desire for victory have carried his legend since his death in May 1975

By Chris Cabot
Oregon Daily Emerald

This weekend's Prefontaine Classic marks the 28th consecutive year the meet has been run, and again it's expected to live up to the high expectations that its name-sake set for his own career.

Steve Prefontaine was a running phenomenon. Describing his racing resume as extensive would be an understatement.

While at Oregon, the Coos Bay native won seven NCAA titles — including three in cross country (1970, 1971 and 1973) and four in the three-mile during the track season (1970-1974). He graced the cover of Sports Illustrated in June 1970 after his freshman campaign, in which he set an Oregon freshman record in the mile with a time of 3:57.4 as well as winning the first of his three-mile NCAA titles with 12 stitches in his foot from a diving board accident.

At one point in his career, Prefontaine held all eight American records between 2,000 and 10,000 meters and between two and six miles.

Just before he was to go to Montreal for his second Olympics, Prefontaine was killed when his car flipped over on May 30, 1975. He was 24.

Prefontaine's greatest asset was arguably his intense desire to win.

"To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift," Prefontaine once said.

Two major motion pictures, Disney's "Prefontaine" and Warner Brothers' "Without Limits," detail his life as well as a 1995 documen-

tary narrated by Ken Kesey and entitled "Fire on the Track: The Steve Prefontaine Story."

"Some people create with words or with music or with a brush and paints," Prefontaine said. "I like to make something beautiful when I run. I like to make people stop and say, 'I've never seen anyone run like that before.' It's more than just a race, it's a style. It's doing something better than anyone else. It's being creative."

During his career at Oregon, Prefontaine was a crowd favorite and rarely disappointed his fans. In 38 career races at Hayward, he lost just three — all of which were in the mile.

"Those people are fantastic," he said of the Hayward Field crowd. "They're my people, man. How can you lose with 12,000 people behind you?"

The track and field event that has been dedicated to his memory every year since his death is acknowledged as the premiere meet in the country and takes place in front of the largest track crowds in the country. Part of the international Grand Prix series, the Prefontaine Classic was the top-rated meet outside of Europe in 1998, 2000 and 2001.

If the world-class competitors in this year's competition — like Hicham El Guerrouj, whose world-record time in the mile (3:43.13) is 10.47 seconds faster than Prefontaine's fastest recorded time — derive any inspiration from Prefontaine, the Hayward crowd will be in for a treat on Sunday.

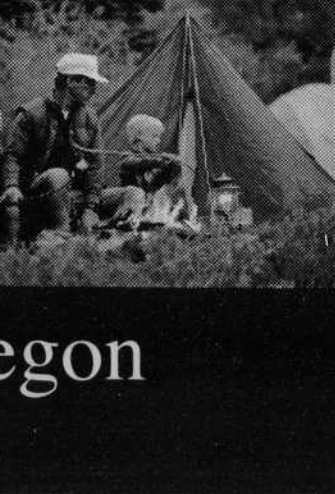
"Somebody may beat me," Prefontaine said. "But are going to have to bleed to do it."

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