

# Prefontaine Classic features regional, international champion mile runners

■ Hicham El Guerrouj is one of 17 athletes competing in the highly publicized race Sunday

By Peter Hockaday  
Oregon Daily Emerald

From all the hype, you might think that Hicham El Guerrouj is the only athlete running the mile at the Prefontaine Classic on Sunday.

How wrong you'd be.

The 17-member mile field includes NCAA champions and U.S. champions, Olympians and international stars.

El Guerrouj won't be running by himself.

The athlete with the best chance to challenge El Guerrouj will be Kenyan Bernard Lagat. Normally a 1,500-meter specialist — he is the second-fastest man in the world at that distance — Lagat has battled El Guerrouj in the past and has the experience to upset the star.

"One thing not to overlook is Bernard Lagat," meet director Tom Jordan said. "El Guerrouj can't just go out on the track and run a time trial."

Lagat finished third to El Guerrouj and Kevin Sullivan in the Pre Classic mile in 2001, running to a time of 3 minutes, 53.14 seconds. But if Lagat could run close to his 1,500 best time of 3:26.34 and finish strong, he could challenge El Guerrouj.

Sullivan won't be back, and neither will Alan Webb, the former high-school star who broke the high school mile record at the 2001 Pre Classic. Webb is currently preparing for next week's NCAA Championships as a freshman at Michigan.

But several other Hayward Field favorites are in the field for Sunday's mile. One is Central Point native Bryan Berryhill, who won the NCAA title in the 1,500 at Hayward Field in 2001, a week after he finished a disappointing eighth at the Pre Classic.

"Berryhill is one tough runner," Jordan said. "I would expect him to mix it up. I would expect him to be the best American runner."

Challenging Berryhill for top American status at Sunday's mile will be Seneca Lassiter and Adam



Thomas Patterson Emerald

At last season's Prefontaine Classic, Bernard Lagat, left, battled Hicham El Guerrouj for the mile title, with El Guerrouj prevailing.

Goucher, the second- and third-ranked Americans in 2001. Lassiter finished a close second to Andy Downin at the USA Championships 1,500 in Eugene, losing the race by a mere 0.03 seconds.

Mike Miller will also make an appearance at Hayward Field on Sunday. Miller has won the Bill McChesney Jr. Memorial Mile — usually held at the Oregon Twilight but held at the Oregon Invitational this season — two years in a row.

Miller "always says he loves coming back to Hayward," Jordan said.

From outside the American borders, two top international stars will challenge the international su-

perstar of El Guerrouj. Kenya's William Chirchir is ranked third in the world in the 1,500, and fellow Kenyan Benjamin Kipkurui is ranked eighth. Kipkurui is training with Lagat in Pullman, Wash., where Lagat is a volunteer coach for the Washington State track and field team.

All told, four of the world's top 10 and five of the United States' top 10 from the 2001 season will be in the field of 17 runners.

El Guerrouj will hardly be running alone.

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## Men's

continued from page 2C

Championships, each runner won his heat, then Montgomery edged Crawford by 0.14 seconds in the final.

In the 2001 World Championships, Montgomery was the only one of the two to make the final, where he finished second to Maurice Greene. The bronze medalist at that meet was Bernard Williams, who will also compete on Sunday.

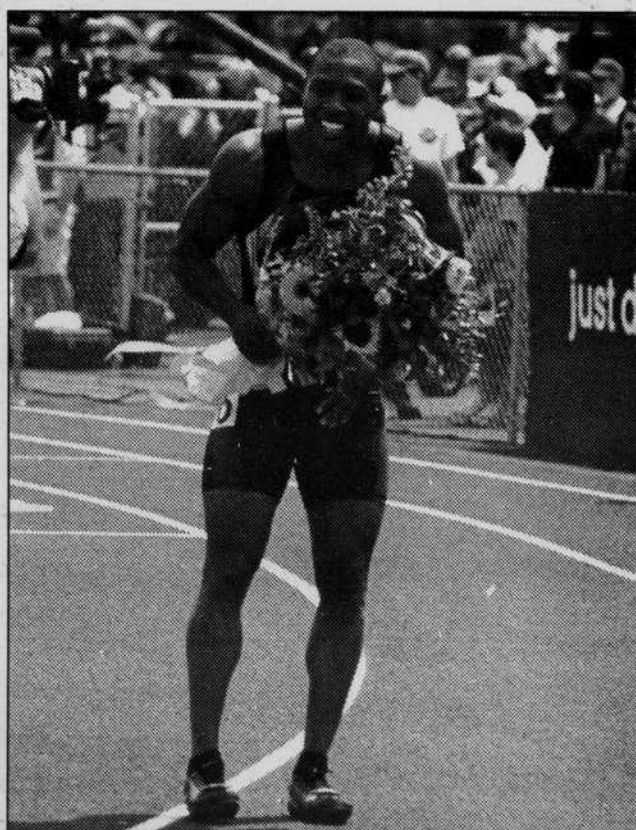
Greene is a noticeable scratch from Sunday's competition. Normally a fan favorite at Hayward Field, Greene hasn't returned to Eugene since the U.S. Championships last year, when he sat out the final rounds of the 100 in protest of a USA Track and Field resolution.

But the absence of one athlete shouldn't ruin a meet that is shaping up into one of the best in the country this year. To prove the validity of the meet, ESPN2 will carry coverage, albeit on tape delay, on Sunday night. European sports station Eurosport will also cover the meet.

Being on Eurosport "adds international appeal," Jordan said. "Literally millions of people will see the athletes in Eugene."

Those millions shouldn't be disappointed, either by El Guerrouj or the athletes surrounding him.

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