

Alan Webb returns to Hayward Field for the first time since 2001 on Saturday.

# Hayward favorites return to highlight men's field

The men's Pre Classic field is filled with athletes who have Eugene ties in different ways

**Peter Hockaday**  
Sports Editor

The way athletes are pulling out of the 2003 Prefontaine Classic, you'd think Eugene was a hotbed of evil allergy-causing pollens.

Oh, wait, it is. But that's not why athletes like Tim "World's Fastest Man" Montgomery and Hicham El Guerrouj won't show up for this year's meet. Montgomery is recovering from Achilles tendinitis, El Guerrouj is preparing for an attempt at the 5,000-meter world record next

month, hurdling legend Allen Johnson is recovering from a calf injury and shot putter Adam Nelson is recovering from a back injury.

"The fact that it's a World Championship year means nobody wants to take a risk," meet Director Tom Jordan said. "With a guy like Allen Johnson, if he's got any kind of doubts at all about an injury, he's going to pull out."

But Jordan said there are still plenty of highlights on the men's side of the field, especially for the fans from Eugene. Duck fans will get to see current, future and former Oregon athletes go head-to-head with the world's best at one of the world's best track meets — even in an off-year.

The Duck contingent is strongest in the 110 hurdles and the Bowerman Mile. In the hurdles, former Duck Micah Harris will square off with current Duck Eric Mitchum. Harris graduated last year and his Oregon record is being threatened with each passing meet by Mitchum, a freshman who's now only .06 seconds behind the former Oregon star.

In the mile, Portland native Mike McGrath, a high school senior who's signed to come to Oregon next year, will square off with Texas native Steve Magness as both will try to break the four-minute barrier. The high schoolers will run alongside former prep phenom Alan Webb, who broke the high school mile record at the 2001 Prefontaine Classic.

"I'm intrigued by the local angles," Jordan said.

That mile field is deep and should be one of the more exciting men's events Saturday. The field includes the three aforementioned American stars and four of the top 10 mile runners in the world. At least six of the runners have run

under 3 minutes, 54 seconds.

"I didn't think anybody had a chance to break 3:50 in the mile this year, then Bernard Lagat ran the equivalent of a 3:52 last weekend, and he looked so easy, he was cruising," Jordan said. "That opens up some possibilities."

The spotlight should be on the field events early in the day as the shot put — the most thrilling event at last year's Pre — takes place near the main grandstand. Nelson, who is currently ranked No. 1 in the world in the shot, won't be back, but Kevin Toth and John Godina will. Toth won the event last year, and Godina won silver at the 1996 Olympics.

"Well, basically, this is my meet," Toth said of the Prefontaine Classic. "I think I put my stamp on it last year."

There are other field highlights. Savanté Stringfellow, the world's No. 1 ranked long-jumper, returns to Hayward Field for the first time since electrifying performances at the 2001 NCAA Championships and USA Championships. He leads a field that includes the world's three best long jumpers, who all happen to be Americans.

"Ever since Carl Lewis retired, the long jump has been in the doldrums," Jordan said. "With the top three long jumpers being American, hopefully it will get exciting again."

Benjamin Limo, ranked No. 1 in the world in the 3,000 and 5,000 last year, will compete in Saturday's 5,000. The field also includes American favorite Bob Kennedy.

Altogether, the 2003 Pre Classic is nothing to sneeze at. Unless you've got allergies.


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