

Women's

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4:05.59 in her country.

Three other national record holders will challenge Favor Hamilton, who recorded a lifetime best of 3:57.40 in 2000. They include Mexico's Dulce Maria Rodriguez (4:06.12), Canada's Leah Pells (4:03.56), and Jamaica's Mardrea Hyman (4:05.25).

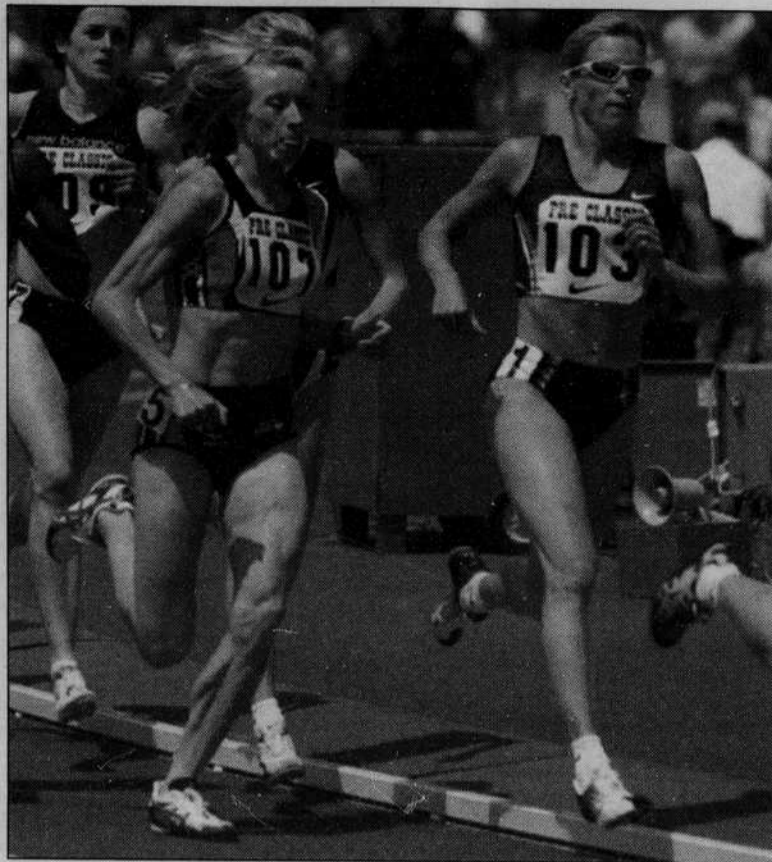
The race should prove nothing short of monumental as Favor Hamilton has been a part of some of the closest races in Pre history. In 1991, she won a photo finish against PattieSue Plumer and lost by mere millimeters to Romania's Gabriela Szabo nine years later.

The Pre meet should prove to be more than just track events as the high jump field ranks among the best to ever step on Hayward field in the 29-year history of the Classic.

Kajsa Bergqvist of Sweden is the definite favorite after clearing the two-meter mark 10 times last year, which equals the total of every other high jumper in the world combined.

The 26-year-old is ranked No. 1 by Track and Field News and has back-to-back World Indoor Championships on her resume. If Bergqvist can clear 6-6 3/4, her personal best, it would better the meet record by 3/4 of an inch.

Amy Acuff, who set that record, will attempt to hold it as she joins the crowd along with Tisha Waller, No. 1 in the U.S., to provide another star-studded event.



Emerald

Suzy Favor Hamilton (103) will run at the Pre for the first time since 2001.

"Overall, the women are stronger than the men and it has never been that way," Jordan said.

World recordholder Stacy Dragila will attempt to again win the pole vault event as Australia's Olympic Gold Medalist Cathy Freeman is a

favorite in the 400 meters. Yet, Mexico's Ana Guevara, who was recently ranked No. 1 in the world by Track & Field News and in the IAAF World Rankings, could contest that position.

Contact the sports reporter at jessethomas@dailyemerald.com.

Freeman

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feelings. I was worrying about whether I still had it or not. I was asking myself what the hell I really wanted to do."

In that five years, Freeman has faced her fair share of challenges. She took off the entire 2001 campaign, then was beset by a stress reaction in her tibia at the outset of 2002. But that didn't even come close to being her biggest challenge last year.

Her husband, Sandy Bodecker, was diagnosed with throat cancer in May. Freeman, who lit the Olympic torch at the 2000 Sydney games, decided to sit out while he received radiation treatments.

Months later, it was determined that Bodecker, an executive with Nike in Portland, was free of the

problem. He had already convinced her to go back and compete, but for Freeman, it was a relief.

"She's a fantastic competitor," Track and Field News statistician Dan Lilot said. "It's exciting to see if she can come back to the success she had in 2000. She's hugely talented. But she didn't reach the top overnight."

The last time Freeman participated in the Prefontaine, she nipped the competition in the 400, finishing in 50.02. It set the Prefontaine and Hayward Field record at the time, one that still stands today.

But, according to Lilot, it will take a supreme effort for Freeman to take first Saturday. Also running will be Ana Guevara of Mexico, this year's No. 1-ranked runner in the event.

Amy Mbacke Thiam of Senegal

is also competing, setting up an impressive eight-competitor list in the event.

"The Prefontaine meet is the only place in the U.S. where you can see that kind of matchup," Lilot said.

Nevertheless, having Freeman back in the Prefontaine fold is a welcome sight for meet Director Tom Jordan.

"Cathy Freeman transcends track and field," he said. "She's been seen by more people on the face of the Earth. And it's like having a celebrity here."

Freeman begins her run to Prefontaine immortality Saturday at 2:45 p.m.

As Lilot said, don't blink. "You might miss it."

Contact the sports reporter at hankhager@dailyemerald.com.

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