

Steve Prefontaine

Arguably Oregon's greatest sports legend, no former Duck athlete captured the hearts of a nation as the brash, charismatic native son.

His quest after Olympic glory fueled the American running craze in the mid-1970s, and even though he was tragically killed in a car crash at the age of 24, he still claimed seven NCAA titles, a fourth-place Olympic finish in 1972 (5K), and American records from 2,000 meters through 10,000 meters.

BIOGRAPHY

Born: January 25, 1951 in Coos Bay, Ore.

Died: May 30, 1975 in Eugene, Ore.

Height: 5-9

Weight: 152

Family: Parents Ray and Elfriede Prefontaine, one older (Neta) and younger sister (Linda, who played tennis at the University of Oregon). Raised in Coos Bay, Ore.

Degree: B.A. in communications

Prep: Coached by Walter McClure, a former Oregon track star, at Marshfield High School. He went undefeated in cross country and track as a junior and senior. As a senior, he also broke the previous American record for two miles (8:48.4, Rick Riley of Spokane, Wash. in 1966) at the Corvallis Invitational with a time of 8:41.5. Bill Dellinger, then an Oregon assistant track and cross coach, first saw him run as a junior at the state cross country meet in November 1967 at the urging of McClure, and he signed with Oregon on April 29, 1969.

College: Entering the University of Oregon in the fall of 1969 and graduating in the summer of 1973, he won seven NCAA titles (three in cross country (1970, '71, '73), and four in the three-mile in track (1970 (13:22.0), '71 (13:20.2), '72 (14:01.4-5K) and '73 (12:53.4)--the first collegian to accomplish the feat in track and the second ever in cross country). In Pac-8 Conference track competition, he won 3-mile titles in 1970 (13:27.4), '71 (13:18.0), '72 (13:32.2) and '73 (13:10.4) and also the mile title in 1971 (4:01.5). In his first outdoor track race, he won the 2-mile (8:40.40.0) at a triangular against Fresno State and Stanford at Fresno, Calif., on March 21, 1970. Later in that first track season, he clocked 3:57.4 for the mile at the Oregon Twilight (6/5/70), finishing second and setting an Oregon freshman record and a then-personal best. Adding to those victories' drama, Pre's first NCAA 3-mile track title came with a dozen stitches in his foot after a diving board accident days before. The final cross country win came after making up a 100-yard deficit on Western Kentucky's English distance star Nick Rose. At the close of his collegiate career he had set nine collegiate track records. Pre's first-year notoriety earned him *Sports Illustrated* cover honors (6/15/70), showing him running on a ridge near Bowerman's house. Altogether, he never lost a race more than a mile in length as a Duck.

Overall Records: He owned every (8) American record between 2,000 and 10,000 meters and between two miles and six miles. He also held eight collegiate records while at Oregon, with his three-mile (12:53.4) and six-mile (27:09.4) still standing. During his career, he broke his own or other American records 14 different times, broke the four-minute barrier nine times, ran 25 two-mile races under 8:40 and 10 5K races faster than 13:30.

Olympics: He competed at one Olympiad, the 1972 Summer Games in Munich, when he was 21 years old -- two years younger than anyone else in the 5,000-meter field. Taking the lead with a mile to go, and holding it until less than 600 meters remaining, he ultimately finished fourth (13:28.25) behind Lasse Viren of Finland (first, 13:26.42), Mohamed Gammoudi of Tunisia (second, 13:27.33) and Ian Stewart of Great Britain (third, 13:27.61). Stewart passed Prefontaine less than 10 meters from the finish line for the final medal.

The Hayward Connection: Pre raced at Hayward Field in 38 races between 1970-75, losing only three times, all at one mile. His first loss came as a freshman at the Twilight Meet on 6/5/70, running an Oregon freshman record and then-PR of 3:57.4. As a sophomore, he finished second to teammate Arne Kvalheim at the Twilight Meet (6/6/71) in a time of 3:57.4. He lost his other race in front of "Pre's People" in one of the greatest mile races ever. In a rare appearance as a rabbit, Prefontaine paced '72 Olympic 800 gold medalist Dave Wottle through an attempt at the American record on June 20, 1973. Pre led until 200 meters remaining and finished second in a PR of 3:54.6. Wottle kicked to the win in what was then the third-fastest American mile and a PR of 3:53.3.

The Activist: Not afraid to speak out against injustice, Prefontaine was an activist and reformer in various areas. In the community, he often volunteered at Roosevelt Junior High School and at the Oregon State Prison (even starting a running club while corresponding with many of the inmates). One of Pre's most famous stances was against the AAU, the American track and field governing body, and its treatment of amateur athletes.

Pre Today: Besides the books, movies and magazine mentions, tangible evidence of Pre's impact can be found in the Steve Prefontaine Memorial Jogging Trail, nine and a half miles of wood chip path that winds through Alton Baker Park in Eugene. The Prefontaine Classic track meet, held annually at Hayward Field at the end of May, features the best mix of American and international talent on American soil. Statues commemorating him stand at the Nike corporate headquarters in Beaverton (he was the first athlete to sign with the company for \$5,000 in 1974), the site of his fatal car accident in Eugene (near Henricks Park near the intersection of Skyline and Birch Drives), and in his hometown of Coos Bay. A documentary narrated by Ken Kesey and entitled "Fire on the Track: The Steve Prefontaine Story" came out in 1995. A Hollywood Pictures movie, 'Prefontaine' was released in the fall of 1996, while a second movie produced by Warner Brothers, 'Without Limits' was scheduled for release in April 1998.

OVERALL PERSONAL BESTS

1,500 meters	3:38.1	6/28/73, Helsinki
Mile	3:54.6	6/20/73, Eugene
2,000 meters	5:01.4	5/9/75, Coos Bay
3,000 meters	7:42.6	7/2/74, Milan
5,000 meters	13:21.87	6/26/74, Helsinki

10,000 meters 27:43.6 4/27/74, Eugene

OREGON'S TOP-10 LISTS

1,500 meters

1. Joaquim Cruz	3:36.48	1984
2. Matt Centrowitz	3:36.7	1976
3. Dub Myers	3:37.89	1984
4. Steve Prefontaine	3:38.1	1973

Mile

1. Joaquim Cruz	3:53.00	1974
2. Steve Prefontaine	3:54.6	1973

3-Mile

1. Steve Prefontaine	12:53.4	1973
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5,000 meters

1. Bill McChesney	13:14.80	1982
2. Rudy Chapa	13:19.22	1979
3. Alberto Salazar	13:22.31	1979
4. Steve Prefontaine	13:22.4	1973

6-Mile

1. Steve Prefontaine	27:09.4	1973
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RECORD PERFORMANCES

1969

2-mile American H.S. Record	8:41.5
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1971

5,000 meters American Record	13:30.4
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1972

5,000 meters American Record	13:22.8
(Olympic Trials at Hayward Field)	
2-mile	8:19.4

1973

5,000 meters American Record	13:22.4
2-mile indoor American Record	8:24.6
6-mile American Record	27:09.4

1974

Feb. 17, San Diego

2-mile Indoor American Record	8:20.4
3,000 meter indoor record	7:50.0

April 27, Eugene

10,000 meters American Record 27:43.8
(Hayward Field)

6-mile American Record 26:51.8

June 8, Eugene

3-mile American Record 12:51.4

June 26, Stockholm, Sweden

5,000 meters American Record 13:21.9

July 2, Milan, Italy

3,000 meters American Record 7:42.6

July 18, Stockholm, Sweden

2-mile American Record 8:18.4

1975

May 9, 1975 Coos Bay, Oregon

2,000 meters American Record 5:01.4

ALL-TIME U.S. JUNIOR LISTS

Mile

1. Jim Ryun 3:51.3 7/17/66 Berkeley
2. Alan Webb 3:53.43 5/27/01, Eugene
3. Dub Myers 3:57.06 5/14/83, Eugene
4. Steve Prefontaine 3:57.4 6/5/70, Eugene

5,000 meters

1. Galen Rupp 13:37.91 7/4/31, Heusden-Zoeller
2. Franklin Sanchez 13:38.59 3/1/31, Stanford
3. Steve Prefontaine 13:39.6 7/16/70, Stuttgart

3-Mile

1. Gerry Lindgren 13:04.2 7/10/65, London
2. Steve Prefontaine 13:12.8 4/25/70, Eugene