

SUMMER 2005

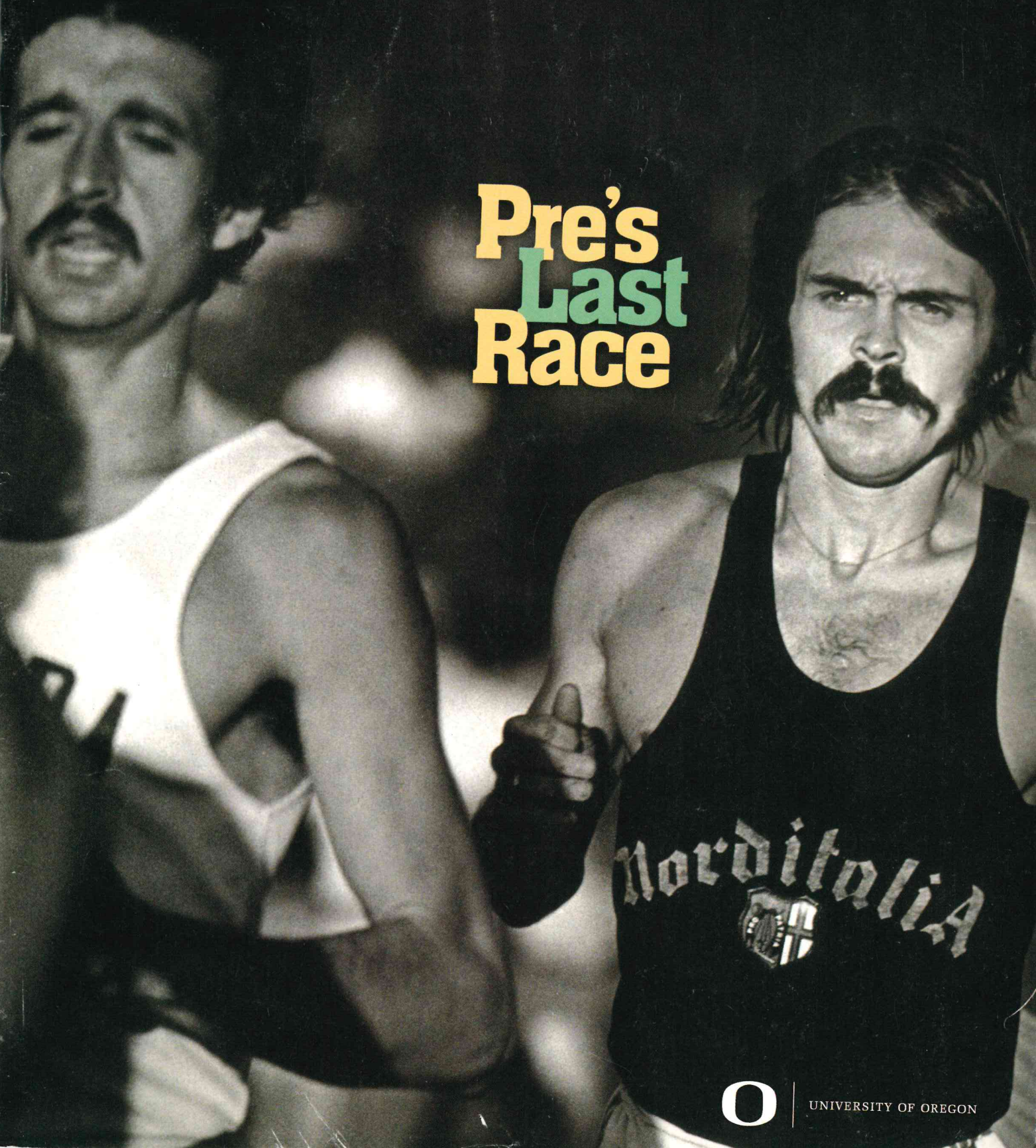
RUSSEL
WONG, STAR
PHOTOGRAPHER
A LATIN PASSION
HUMAN
PHYSIOLOGY
RISING
ESSAY CONTEST
WINNER

OREGON

OREGON QUARTERLY THE NORTHWEST PERSPECTIVE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

\$8.00

Pre's Last Race



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON



Thomas Rubick

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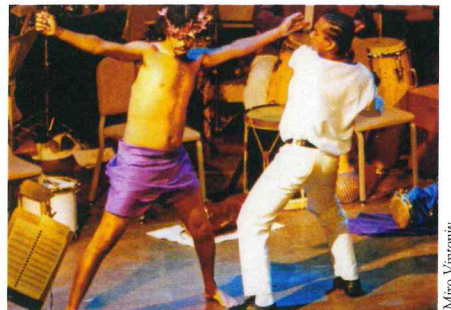
Geoff Parks

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Cover: Photograph by Geoff Parks

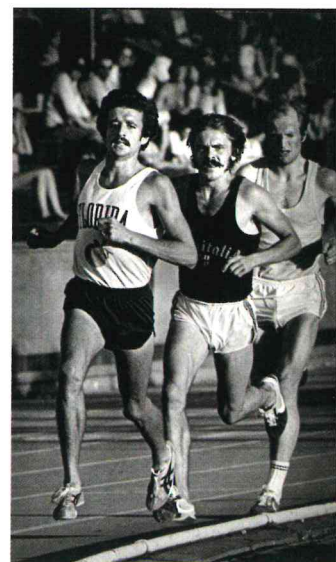


Where Glory Stays

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY GEOFF PARKS

Steve Prefontaine's life and mine intersected at one singular moment as we were both doing our best to further ourselves in our respective careers — he as easily and confidently as expected, me as unexpectedly as could have been imagined.

Two memories have remained with me since the late afternoon of May 29, 1975, when Pre eventually and inevitably outlegged his friend and colleague 1972 Olympic marathon gold-medalist Frank Shorter, in an early season 5,000-meter run at Hayward Field.





Moments fade, the fitness of athletes fades, and even my film negatives marked "Pre's Last Race" are beginning to fade. In the darkroom, though, under the light, through the lens, on the printing paper, and into the developer, Pre is always striding, sweating, focusing on the finish line, characteristically peeking at the clock over his left shoulder as he rounds the turn, forever young, forever strong, forever master of his gift.



One is an actual image — the photograph I took that day of Pre and Shorter flying around the third turn of that storied stadium, Pre's east grandstand faithful urging him on past an outgunned Shorter, whose best racing involved much longer distances. Pre's oversized, barrel chest is covered in perspiration, his eyes sharp with focus, determination, and intensity; Shorter's eyes show resignation in the inevitability of the outcome.

A freelance photographer, I was shooting high-speed black-and-white film for reproduction in a sports trade magazine. Pre died in a single-car accident in the early morning of the next day. After I heard the news at about three that morning, I had to steel all my will and muster all my patience to nervously process the film.

The second memory is the recollection of a poignant little poem reprinted in the *Register-Guard* later in the long, sad week of remembrance and grief that followed Pre's death. Written a bit more than a century ago by one of those hoary old authors now read only in middle school lit classes, A.E. Housman's "To An Athlete Dying Young" seemed all the more melancholy for its damnable relevance. And it fit the track-mad fervor of Eugene in 1975:



*The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder-high. . . .*

That was Pre and His People, the east grandstand fanatics who believed there was no limit to the greatness he could bring to his sport and his town. But these lines of poetry brought tears to the eyes of even those without the passion for the man and his drive, his fierce pride of accomplishment. His loss shook the city and the state that loved — and owned — him.

Each time I go into the darkness of my lab to create yet another print from the

fourteen three-decades-old negatives of that race, and especially of the image of the two gladiators rounding the north-east turn at Hayward with Pre's fans shrouded in darkness behind him and the full afternoon sun lighting his straining features, I pause a bit.

I pause, because though I have looked at Pre's piercing eyes and focused on that moment for thirty years, I realize that the scenes of that afternoon, that competition, those comrades on the track, were some of the last his eyes ever saw.

Moments fade, the fitness of athletes fades, and even my film negatives marked "Pre's Last Race" are beginning to fade. In the darkroom, though, under the light, through the lens, on the printing paper, and into the developer, Pre is always striding, sweating, focusing on the finish line, characteristically peeking at the clock over his left shoulder as he rounds the turn, forever young, forever strong, forever master of his gift.

People want to see this image, and I never tire of providing it to them, though some day I hope to make one final, perfect print, then frame and label it accordingly. I would place it on my wall in a special place where only my family and I can relish the moment that ties me to that incredible athlete and that profoundly sad time. Yet I know that I'm not alone in forever remembering the man and his accomplishments, and the promise of what could have been.

Still — realizing how the sport of track and field has lost its luster through commercialism, the move to professional status for the sport's current stars, drug controversies, the overall slip of interest in such an individual, esoteric sport, and the loss of fans because of all these changes, for all that, he was most certainly, as that same poet said, a

*Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields where glory does not stay. . . .*

Geoff Parks '74 is a writer and photographer who lives in Salem.



Tim Jordan

New Twist on an Old Turn

New plaza improves Hayward Field and east campus gateway.

A new entrance to Hayward Field has transformed what was once an eyesore into a fitting front door to the legendary track and field mecca. Completed in May, the 40,000-square-foot Powell Plaza project on Hayward's northeast corner has replaced a parking lot surrounded by a chain link fence with a handsome and inviting exterior plaza, stadium gateway, and terraced seating area. The project also enhanced the corner of 15th Avenue and Agate Street with twin concrete and masonry lighting columns that more distinctly identify this well-traveled east campus entry point.

Story boards decorate the structure, telling the history of Hayward Field, with a timeline of historical highlights and brief biographies of UO track coaches Bill Hayward, Bill Bowerman, and Bill Dellinger, as well as renowned Duck distance runner Steve Prefontaine.

A two-section, five-tier seating area accommodates 200 to 250 people and provides good views of the backstretch, the steeplechase pit, and the starting point for the 200- and 5,000-meter events. On the side walls of the seating areas, mounted metal plates list world records set by UO track and field athletes at Hayward and other locations; Duck Olympic competitors; and UO individuals and teams that have won national collegiate championships.

Three private donors funded the \$1.25 million project. Lloyd '55 and Sharon Powell, of Kirkland, Washington, contributed \$500,000. Lloyd's son Peter '78 and his wife Molly Powell '78, of Bellevue, Washington, split their \$1-million gift between the Hayward improvements and the UO's Lundquist College of Business. The family of late longtime UO Track and Field Coach Bill Bowerman also contributed \$250,000 to the plaza project.