



Apologies, apple pies

By **BLAINE NEWNHAM**
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YOU HAVE TO THINK that if Steve Prefontaine were working as a soda jerk, he'd complain that the ice cream was too cold.

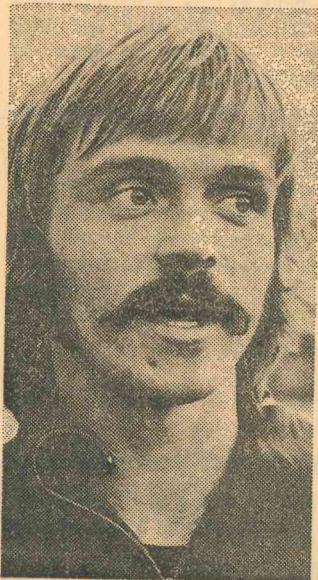
Across the globe, Steve Prefontaine is known as a talented, tough competitor. American's best. Also, America's loudest.

In a recent poll, Prefontaine ran away from the world as the "favorite athlete" of Track and Field News readers.

Said the magazine: "The enthusiasm he generates at meets more than substantiates any doubts as to his general popularity, which borders on fanaticism."

Pre received 31.7 per cent of the votes, almost doubling second-place Frank Shorter (16.0).

It is no secret that the International Track Association (ITA) has offered its largest contract ever to Pre, even though the ITA's own Ben Jipcho has been running the most incredible distance doubles of all time.



STEVE PREFONTAINE
Quoted out of context

Pre's popularity stems from his invincibility at home and his courage abroad. He has never backed away from foreign competition, he has run Dave Wottle at a mile and every decent European at any distance and at any site they might want.

He is, as Bill Bowerman always said, a "tough rube."

Some admire Pre's penchant for saying what he thinks. And if people don't listen, he says it again. Louder.

Others think him an incurable egotist, a 9-flat mouth with an ability to beat anybody in Eugene, but no one of consequence away from Eugene.

Pre, as a Duck, let criticism run off his back. He didn't really care what people thought. He was his own man. When the AAU banned him from its tour, he took off on his own. He was continually feuding with the American athletic establishment.

AS USUAL, PRE took off on the lack of a national amateur athletic program in the United States. In the story, Pre was quoted saying, "People say I should be running for a gold medal for the old red, white and blue and all that bull, but it's not gonna be that way. I'm the one who had made the sacrifices. Those are my American records, not the country's. I compete for myself. To hell with love of country."

The article also said Pre said he is fed up with the manner in which America treats its amateur athletes and would change his citizenship tomorrow if he could.

Zap. The quotes were picked up by the Associated Press and carried across the nation. Every American had to cringe.

Pre cringed.

"I'm embarrassed," he said, "and people have a right to be upset about what I said.

"Really," he continued, "the Associated Press owes me an apology. I don't want to have to justify something that was taken out of context."

Pre has a point. In the Denver Post story, writer Mike Monroe makes the point "Prefontaine, 'Pre' to his fans, is kidding on the level about changing his citizenship. He is an intense individualist and classifies himself as an internationalist. He's not un-American, just pro-Pre.

From the beginning, Monroe prefaces Pre's remarks with "Steve Prefontaine isn't a Communist. Hasn't burned his draft card. Probably loves apple pie."

"I do love my country," said Pre Saturday. "I would have gone in the Army had I been drafted. I do like apple pie. I wasn't an anti-war demonstrator when I was a student. I wasn't a hell raiser. I've got a diploma.

"The Associated Press version of that story didn't differentiate between the American government, and the American sports structure.

"IF YOU ASKED ME if I would give up my American citizenship, I would say never. But if you asked me if I'd trade our sports program for a Finnish sports program or a Russian program, I'd say darn right."

Pre has received much criticism for his "anti-American" remarks. It bothers him because he doesn't believe the Associated Press story properly related his feelings.

"They say nationalism starts at home," Pre continued, "and if I weren't loyal to Eugene and Oregon then I would run in Europe all summer instead of attempting to bring Lasse Viren and the other Finns to our country to run.

"I want them to see real America. There is more to this country than Los Angeles and New York."

Pre says he will continue his harassment of the AAU in an attempt to improve this country's national program.

"We don't have a national sports program," he said. "Even Canada has a national track coach. All we do is name an Olympic coach four months before the games.

"As a senior athlete in the United States who do you go to for help? There is no coach available to those after they leave college. This country will find out the hard way that we can't get by on talent alone. That just isn't enough anymore."

In the meantime, Pre will head on home to Coos Bay for a piece of apple pie.