

It's Pre versus the Europeans

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MUNICH—Where others have failed before him in a stadium Americans must remember with the fondness of the San Francisco earthquake and the Jamestown Flood, Steve Prefontaine today chases the gold medal in the Olympic Games 5,000-meter run.

It is, without saying, the premiere event on the men's track and field calendar. With Jim Ryun out of the 1,500 final, the field for the 5,000 is the most demanding and talented in the Olympic Games.

PRE IS nothing more than a rank outsider here—the Europeans foreseeing a classic match between the late charging Finns Juha Vaatainen and Lasse Viren and front-running Eil Puttermans of Belgium and David Bedford of England. Defending champion Mohamed Gammoudi is also held in high esteem.

To win, Pre must have help.

Although he won't divulge his strategy, it is logical that he will attempt to force the race the last mile, maybe even the final 2,000 meters.

"The key," said track authority Dick Bank, "is whether somebody like Bedford will force the pace in the first 3,000 meters. If the pace is fast early, then Pre might lose people when he takes off in the last mile."

Vaatainen is the defending European 5,000 and 10,000 champion who strikes fear into the field with his kick. He turned the final 400 meters in his European 10,000 victory in 52.7. Viren, his young countryman, outkicked a classy field in winning the 10,000 last week with a world record.

IF THE Europeans aren't taking Pre seriously, it isn't necessarily surprising. The 1972 Olympic Games haven't been a testimony to American superiority.

Saturday, the one cinch gold medal evaporated when the Americans couldn't field a 1,600-meter relay team. The eviction of Wayne Collett and Vince Matthews for their victory stand actions after the 400 meters left America with only four men from a list of six it could run. And one of them, John Smith, has a pulled hamstring muscle and couldn't run.

"My final decision was to run," said Lee Evans, the American anchorman and gold medal winner at Mexico City. "But we couldn't get a team together. We gave the Germans the names of three alternates—Rick Wohlhuter, Jeff Bennett and Larry Black—and they turned them all down."

According to the Olympic rules, a country must name six possible relay runners before the Games begin. Besides Evans, Collett, Matthews and Smith, quartermilers Tommy Turner and Maurice Peoples had been brought along in reserve. Even they weren't enough.

"THIS IS A gross injustice to the American team, not just to the black Americans," said Evans.

"The Olympic Games have become a farce to me. You know, the Olympic Games are the dream every athlete has. I started working for it when I was a freshman in college. I wanted to win the gold medal.

"Then came Mexico City. It caused me so many hardships and I caught so much hell, but I came here to these Games with the hopes of win-

ning another gold medal. And Avery Brundage, a cat I've never met, takes it away from me."

The Americans advanced quite easily in the 400-meter relay team, setting up a classic anchor dual between Eddie Hart and Russia's Valeriy Borzov.

Only little Randy Williams, the 19-year-old freshman from USC, reversed the trend.

HE HELD together for an opening leap of 27-1/2 to win the gold medal in the long jump. West German Hans Baumgartner was second at 26-10 and Arnie Robinson picked up the bronze for the U.S. with a jump of 26-4 1/2.

Dave Wottle was a non-qualifying fourth in his 1,500-meter semifinal heat (3:41.6) and George Woods (69-5 1/2) was second, Al Feuerbach (68-11 1/4) was fifth and Brian Oldfield (68-7 1/2) sixth in the shot put, where Poland's Wladyslad Komar won with an Olympic record of 69-6.

Williams was refreshing. As an American black, he was asked to give his feeling on the victory ceremony.

"When I stood up on the victory stand I thought it's good to be from

the United States ... that's all I could think of as I watched the flag go up."

Williams was relieved, and he felt fortunate that his opening mark had stood up.

"I WAS WARMING up and I felt something go pop. I almost panicked. But I knew I couldn't let any of the others know about it. On the first jump I just got a good one, the conditions were perfect. After that my leg started tying up and I just didn't have anything left."

Woods almost overhauled the Pole on his last throw. The shot, in fact, bounced off the metal sign marking Komar's best throw. He was a half-inch short.

"That last throw probably wouldn't have won anyway," said Woods, who did not protest the ruling by Dr. Joseph Sir that Woods' put was not hindered by the sign.

"I was beaten," continued Woods, "so let's drop it. I had a very poor performance today, one of my worst this year. But that's the Olympic Games. You're under a great deal of pressure."