

It highlights a dismal day

Pre clocks 8:31.8 in two-mile

By JOHN CONRAD
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It became obvious as the afternoon wore on — with rain and wind and biting cold negating any chance for the spectacular — that Steve Prefontaine would provide whatever excitement was to be had at the Oregon Invitational track meet Saturday.

So an estimated 3,500 track nuts stuck around Hayward Field waiting for the Oregon distance star to do battle with Mother Nature.

The faithful were rewarded as Pre methodically ground out a Hayward Field two-mile record with an 8:31.8 clocking, and they received a bonus when Paul Geis, the transfer from Rice University, trailed Pre to the tape in 8:37.2 in his first outdoor two-mile venture.

Geis, whose best event is the 5,000 meters, is in exile at the present time. He will not become eligible to compete for the Ducks in regular meets until next year. But that will be fortunate timing for Oregon, for the Prefontaine Era will be over and Duck Coach Bill Dellinger will have a gaping hole to fill in his distance ranks.

No one is going to single-handedly replace Prefontaine, but the Ducks are confident that the distance events will be in good hands with Geis.

"He's going to be great for Oregon next year," complimented Prefontaine. "He's great for me this year just to work out with."

Geis obviously feels lucky to work out with Prefontaine, too.

"It's a challenge to try and stay with him just in practice," said Geis. "He really burns in practice, he's really an inspiration to work with."

And Geis is quick to praise the coaching talents of Dellinger.

"I came to Oregon because of him," Geis said. "He's a three-time Olympian in my best event (the 5,000), and if he tells you to do something you know it's right."

"He really helps you out. He really has a well devised program."

The Oregon stars, present and future, had different reactions to the race in which Pre led virtually the entire distance but didn't really pull

away until the final half-mile.

"I didn't have a set plan for the race," Pre said. "I had no intentions of setting any records; I just wanted to have a good performance under the conditions."

Geis, who was ninth in the 5,000 meters in last year's NCAA meet here and turned in a 4:06 mile two weeks ago, was somewhat disappointed.

"When I saw the weather I made up my mind to be happy with anything under 8:40," he said. "But I really think I'm ready to go under 8:35."

Had he done it he would have been flirting with the old Hayward Field record of 8:33.2 shared by Prefontaine and Arne Kvalheim.

Dellinger, whose team meets Washington in a Pac-8 dual meet here next weekend, was satisfied with the results of the meet, considering the weather and the lack of competition.

The Ducks were up against the likes of Lane Community College, Mt. Hood Community College, Southern Oregon, Portland University, Willamette University and a number of track clubs from around the state. The meet was non-scoring, but the Ducks won 16 of 19 events.

"The big thing in a meet like this is the attitude of the team," Dellinger said. "They all went out and competed pretty well under the conditions so I'm happy."

"I didn't expect any great performances."

The marks that pleased him the most, besides the two-mile efforts of Prefontaine and Geis, included a 1:51.6 for 800 meters by distance runner Todd Lathers, a 21.3 for 200 meters and two solid relay stints by Al Hearvey, and a 54.1 time in the 400-meter intermediate hurdles by freshman Dave Hagmeier.

Hagmeier, a 440 star, was running the hurdles for the first time and didn't impress anyone with his technique. But Dellinger still feels that the intermediates could someday be Hagmeier's best event.

"Over the long haul it could be," he said. "But you never know. He likes the open 440 and not the hurdles."

Hagmeier doesn't try to hide his dislike for the hurdles, either.

"I hope that isn't my event," he said. "I really felt terrible running it."

Another Duck who was running in an unfamiliar event was Steve Bence, the 880 man, who turned in a 4:08.8 mile to go with a 4:05.5 venture two weeks ago.

"I'm still not used to running it," he said. "The second and third laps are pretty rough and I've been bothered by a cold all week."

"I didn't tell Dellinger about the cold, though. He might have held me out had he known."

No matter the weather, Steve Bence chose to run.