

Prefontaine hedges on chances in 5,000

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MUNICH — Steve Prefontaine is nervous. And a little upset.

"I don't want to talk about the race," he said Monday morning, "not about the race."

On Wednesday, Prefontaine will run one of five heats in the Olympic Games 5,000 meter run. Of more than 75 entrants, only the first two in each heat and four others will run with the

fastest non-placing times will advance to Saturday's final.

"**I MIGHT NOT** even make it to the finals," he said.

"That's why I don't want to talk. Everybody is expecting so much from me, and why talk if I don't know what's going to happen out there?"

Pre is a victim of Olympic Village fever. A tense, unsettled atmosphere in the hours before competition. And in Pre's case, it is days, not hours.

"The wait is killing me," he said. "My training is going well but right now I'm looking forward to a long vacation. I'm sick of track and field. I just want to get the dang thing over with."

In a day or two, Pre will start his pysche. Right now, he's emotionally ebbed.

"**MAYBE I'M** too young to handle all of this," said Pre, 21. "My season has been three times as long as theirs. I've been running in meets

since March, while most of the Europeans have been running since May or June. Maybe in four years if I come back then it will be better because I won't have had a collegiate season.

Pre was leaving the village with Bill Dellinger, his coach from Oregon.

"I get away from here during the day," he said. "There is just too much hassle around here. I don't need that."

From the beginning, the Olympics have been tainted for the Americans. There was the problem over Rhodesia, then the embarrassing failure of the American sprinters to get to the stadium on time for the 100 meters. And the dispute over the green poles in the pole vault.

"This has been a letdown for me," said Pre. "The Olympic games are not what they're made out to be . . . not what you think they are."

"**THEY'RE NOT** for the athletes, but for people to bring in their political grievances."

Pre, of course, was very interested in Sunday's spectacular 10,000 meter final in which Lasse Viren broke Ron Clarke's world record with a time of 27:38.4.

"I was impressed, very impressed," said Pre. "It was a good race."

Pre knows better than anyone that the majority of his competition will come from that field, especially from Viren, the fast Finn who set a world two-mile record of 8:14 two weeks before the Olympics.

EARLIER, PRE had said he wasn't concerned about the athletes attempting the fatiguing 5,000-10,000 double.

"That's a lot of running," he said. "Anytime you run under 28 minutes twice as Viren and Puttemans did, you're going to feel it."

"Maybe Viren is superman, but I don't think so."

Viren, of course, must recover from the glory of gold in the 10,000 and rededicate himself to two punishing races in the 5,000. And the heats come just three days after the 10,000 final.

Dave Wottle, the gold medal winner in the 800 meters faces a similar problem preparing himself for the 1,500 meters.

"**I DON'T** have anything to prove anymore," said Wottle. "I really got psyched up for the 800. I thought I owed the United States that much and they got what they expected from me. I'll do my best in the 1,500 meters, but I won't have the same motivation."

In these lonely days before the competition, Steve Prefontaine is considering the possibility that he might not win the gold medal. The thought is foreign and a little frightening.

"If I really fall flat on my face, I might retire from track," he said. "But as long as I satisfy myself, that's all that counts."