

Prefontaine places 2nd but makes finals

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MUNICH — Steve Prefontaine, America's last hope to break up the impending stranglehold of the Olympic Games distance races by the Finns and Africans, qualified rather effortlessly Thursday afternoon for Sunday's final of the 5,000 meters.

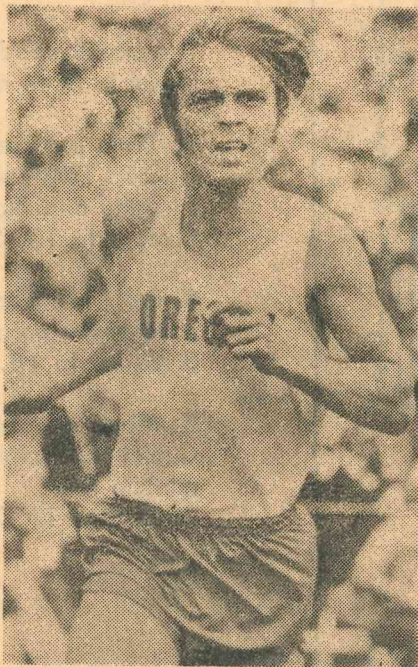
Running stride for stride with Belgium's Emiel Puttemans on the final two laps, Pre held the lead with 110 meters to go but finished second to Puttemans' Olympic record of 13:31.8.

Pre was also well below the old Olympic mark of 13:39.6 set by Russia's Vladimir Kuts in 1956. Pre's time of 13:32.6 was the second fastest of the day, although off his personal record of 13:22.8.

America's fortunes on the track brightened considerably Thursday as Rod Milburn equalled the world record of 13.2 in winning the 110-meter high hurdles and much maligned Vince Matthews won the 400 meters in 44.7.

The U.S. total now reads three golds in men's track and field, the other belonging to Dave Wottle, who won the 800 meters.

In the 5,000, the favorites had little problem advancing. Olympic champion



STEVE PREFONTAINE

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Mohammed Gammoudi won his heat in 13:49.8, just ahead of England's David Bedford (13:49.8). England's Ian McCafferty ran 13:38.2 to win his heat, European champion Juha Vaatainen of Finland won his in 13:32.8 and Olympic 10,000 meter champ Lasse Viren, also of Finland, breezed to first in the final heat in 13:38.4. A surprise scratch was Ethiopia's Merus Yifter.

Pre was superb, and obviously pleased with himself following the race. He took off his shoes and walked barefooted on the track, trying for a minute to run a warmdown lap but was retrained by the Germans.

He looked up into the stands for the voices behind some "Go Pre" chants and smiled broadly. He was relieved.

The pressure of only the first two in each heat, plus the four other fastest runners, qualifying had made the competition tense.

Pre's heat was particularly rugged and with 2,000 meters left there was a tight pack of eight runners, although the top four were emerging as Puttemans, Javier Alvarez of Spain, Prefontaine and West Germany's Harald Norpoth, the silver medalist in 1964.

Although a few shouts of "Go Pre" could be heard, it was hardly Hayward Field. And with two laps to go, the crowd of nearly 80,000 began screaming wildly for Norpoth.

Then Pre took over. Aware of Norpoth's kick, and that of Alvarez, Pre pushed it for a lap. Puttemans stayed close and so did Norpoth. Alvarez was beaten.

On the gun lap, Pre was still leading but Norpoth was fading.

Pre and Puttemans went stride for stride down the backstretch and it became apparent that Norpoth could not keep up. At the top of the turn, Puttemans made a strong move, Pre stayed with him for a moment, but thought better of it and seemed content to follow Puttemans down the final 100 meters.

Puttemans and Pre shared much of the pacesetter as they went through the first 1,000 meters in 2:41.8, hit 2,000 meters in 5:24.0 with Pre in the lead and then Pre was fourth at 3,000 meters.

"His workouts have just been great," said Bill Dellinger, Pre's coach at the University of Oregon. "I think he'll do all right."