

# The anatomy of a world record

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Steve Prefontaine looked up and smiled.

Sort of.

"I'm glad you asked me now," "Tomorrow I will begin to get untouchable. I won't be talking to anybody but myself. I'll go into hiding."

The countdown to a world record drives tickets sales up and athletes into a frenzied search for a proper psychological and physiological framework.

You don't climb Mt. McKinley in tennis shoes.

"Sure I feel good about having the opportunity to set a world record," said Pre. "There is no question that very few people are in that position. But, remember, I've worked for it."

Behind Steve Prefontaine are high school championships and high school records, collegiate championships and collegiate records, American championships and American records.

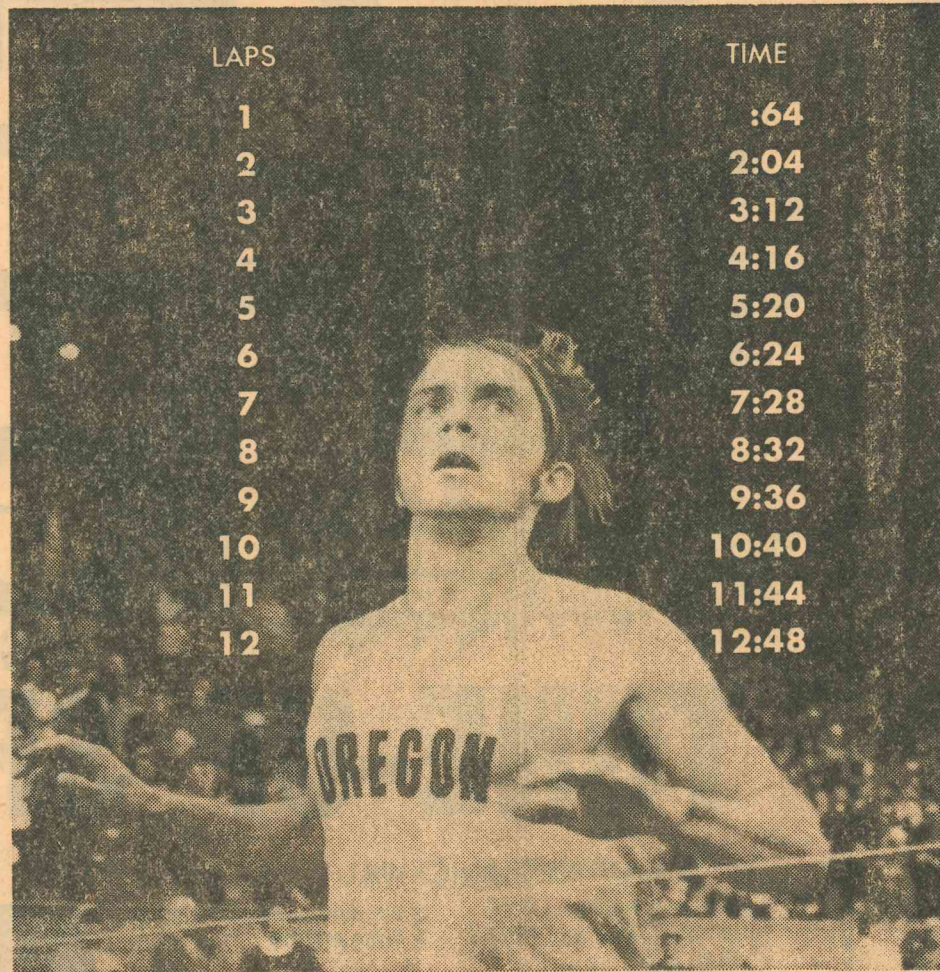
"I'm very goal oriented," he said, "and my next goal has to be a world record."

That opportunity comes for Steve Prefontaine Saturday night at Hayward Field. Pre picked the spot and the time.

The distance will be both three miles and 5,000 meters. The competition will be Olympic marathon champion Frank Shorter and Norwegian Knut Kvalheim.

There is obviously a difference between a man chasing a world record and a man setting a world record. Remember that a world record testifies that you have done something never before achieved in recorded history.

What must happen Saturday night to put Pre past Emiel Putteman's world



record of 12:47.8 for three miles and 13:13.0 for 5,000 meters?

"You must feel perfect and the race must be perfect," continued Prefontaine, "and I've never been in a race when both elements were there."

"A thousand things can happen to ruin it."

Listen to Pre describe what must happen:

"It would have to be warmer than it was for the Twilight Meet . . . between 60 and 75 degrees would be best. In the 80s is too hot. You need a light breeze; I would have to think that the cold wind the night of the Twilight Meet cost me five or six seconds in effort."

"The next thing is to hit a pace, a pace so perfect that if you go slightly too fast it's going to hurt you."

"If Frank and I can do that we should run between 64 and 64.5 seconds a lap. That would put us at the two-mile between 8:32 and 8:38. The last mile you maintain that pace and then begin to pick it up whenever you can."

In other words, Pre wants to run each of his three miles at 4:16. The total would be 12:48, or three-tenths of a second off Putteman's three-mile mark.

"If we can hit 8:32 for two miles," said Pre, "then realistically I've got a chance. It's not impossible to run a 56 or 57 last quarter which would take me under both the three-mile and 5,000-meter marks."

Pre thinks of a thousand things that can go wrong. He's not coming up with an alibi; he's being realistic.

"I've had the flu," he said, "and I'm not sure if I'm back to the stage I was three weeks ago. I haven't run a decent workout in a couple of weeks, but I'll attempt the record. It's not every day that somebody does that."

There comes a magical transformation of the crippled, decrepit pre-race Prefontaine once he steps on the sand brown Hayward Field track.

More than once he has pondered not running a race at all, and hours later set an American record. If Prefontaine is in the race, Prefontaine is tough. Remember that he never lost a collegiate race at Oregon.

"When the people get keyed for a race, I get keyed," he said of the Hayward Field crowd. "I can feel the electricity . . . it does something to me."