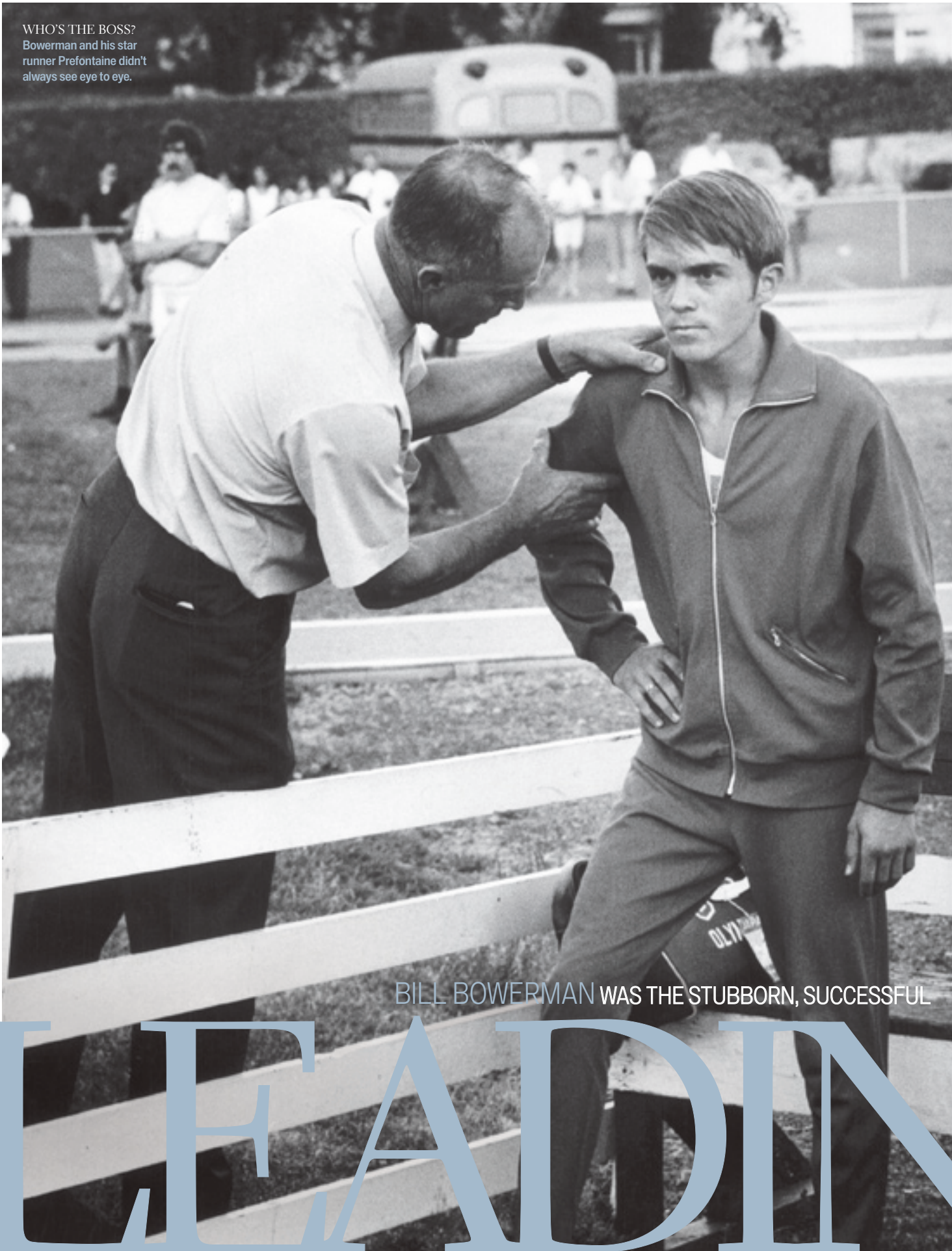
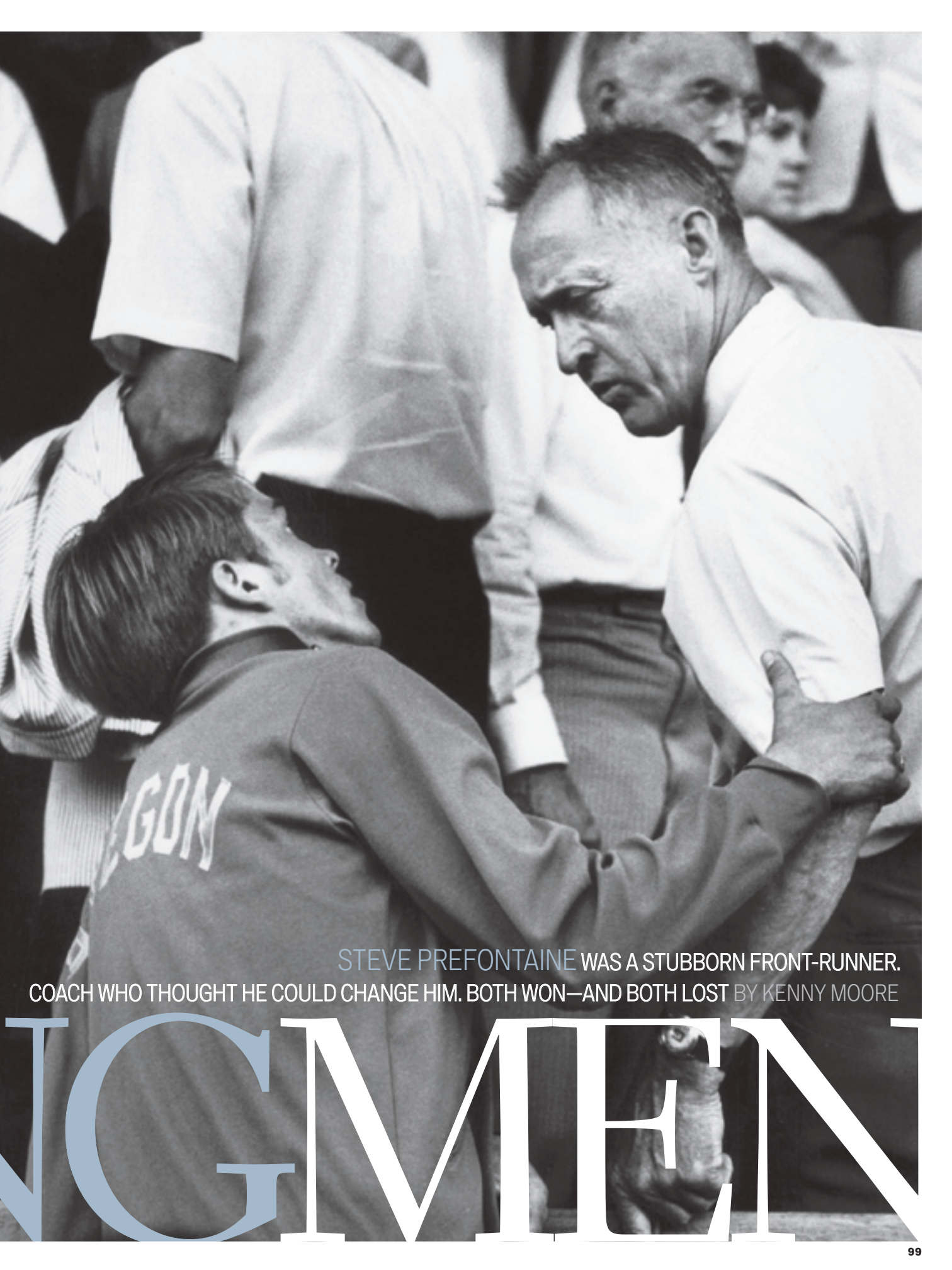


WHO'S THE BOSS?
Bowerman and his star
runner Prefontaine didn't
always see eye to eye.



BILL BOWERMAN WAS THE STUBBORN, SUCCESSFUL

LEADIN



STEVE PREFONTAINE WAS A STUBBORN FRONT-RUNNER.
COACH WHO THOUGHT HE COULD CHANGE HIM. BOTH WON—AND BOTH LOST BY KENNY MOORE

ICGMEN

The Talent and the Temper

AFTER THE 1968 MEXICO CITY OLYMPICS, Bill Bowerman hung his serape and sombrero on a nail and thought about how to make the best use of the next four years. One of his top priorities was to get more help for his University of Oregon track program. Bowerman had had dozens of graduate assistants in the 19 years he had been coaching at Oregon, but never a fully paid position. Perhaps the time was right to remedy that condition.

Bowerman decided to hire Bill Dellinger away from Lane Community College. Dellinger was an Oregon grad, a former Bowerman runner, and, in 1964, a medalist in the Olympic 5000 meters. As a coach, “Dellinger was good in the running events. He’d tell his boys that when you get really fit, running’s easy, running’s like brushing your teeth,” Bowerman said. “Of course, that wasn’t training. Training is like having your teeth cleaned an hour a day.” Dellinger would be the first of Bill’s assistants to work directly with runners of distance. In the fall of 1968 that was significant, because entering his senior year at Marshfield High in Coos Bay was one Steven Roland Prefontaine.

In the spring of 1968, as a high school junior in Coos Bay, Oregon, Prefontaine had set the state two-mile record of 9:01.3. Bowerman had arranged for two of his Oregon runners, the two-miler Arne Kvalheim and the miler Roscoe Divine, to take a 10-mile training run with Pre. “I had just beaten [Gerry] Lindgren with my 8:33 national record,” recalled Kvalheim, “and Roscoe was in 3:57 shape, and this kid took us out on the beach and kept saying, ‘Am I going too fast for you? Can you keep up?’”

They not only could, they felt like leaving him standing, but reined themselves in for the sake of their mission. Later they would learn that Pre was bursting out in a cockiness that had been long suppressed. His father, Ray, a carpenter and welder, had met and married his mother, Elfriede, in Germany while he was with the occupation forces after the war. Elfriede spoke German around the home, so Ray did, too. When Steve started school, he knew more German than English, and suffered for it. “Kids made fun of me,” he would say, “because I was a slow learner, because I was hyperactive, because of a lot of things.”

In the eighth grade, he found he could run well. All it took was being able to stand the discomfort of effort. His need to measure up, in the elemental ways demanded by his Oregon logging town and port, turned into a need to surpass. As a sophomore, he finished sixth in the state cross-country race, but not before wildly trying to steal the race from the favorites with a quarter mile to go. Earlier, he’d announced to his folks he was going to the Olympics some day. He knew it. He could feel it.

His mother, who’d grown up in a Nazi Germany where the last thing you wanted to do was stand out, blanched and

ordered him to never talk that way again. She insisted he was an ordinary little boy. His father gently, gradually explained to Elfriede that the great thing about this country was that it was okay to dream big, but some part of Elfriede never absorbed that. Later, when her son enumerated the errors of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) for eager reporters, it would gall and mystify her. Plenty of other people had the same problems. Why couldn’t they be the ones who stood up and exposed themselves to authority’s eye?

In fact, Pre’s bluntness was pardoned by anyone who grasped how good he was. In his senior year at Marshfield High, all boasts were quickly followed by proof. He broke the national high school two-mile record by nearly seven seconds with an 8:41.5. But even though Dellinger came to watch many of his races and Marshfield coach Walt McClure was nudging him toward Oregon (and was training him with workouts that Bowerman had suggested), Prefontaine wasn’t getting anything from Bowerman himself like the recruiting pressure that he was receiving from a hundred other schools. Finally, though, Bowerman wrote him a letter.

It was a handwritten note. “I could barely read it,” Pre would recall. “It said if I chose to run at the University of Oregon, he had every confidence I could become the greatest runner in the world.” Pre signed on. Then he hopped on a plane with McClure to Miami for the 1969 National AAU meet. That’s where I met him, the night before his three-mile.

The race was run in 90 degrees and 80 percent humidity. Gerry Lindgren and Tracy Smith ran away early and dueled to the line. Smith barely took it, though both were timed in 13:18.4. Pre began strongly but fell back to seventh with a mile to go. He looked doughy and white, not the kind of body to endure these conditions. But then he started passing people on sheer will, and drove himself into fourth place, in 13:43.0. Since Juan Martinez, who finished third, was Mexican, Pre had made the national team.

Later that summer, in Stuttgart, Germany, in the Western Hemisphere versus Europe 5000 meters, he hung with Lindgren and East Germany’s Jürgen May until the last two laps and clocked his best time to date, 13:52.8. We went on to Augsburg for the West German dual. Pre led all the way to the last turn, whereupon the cadaverous Harald Norpoth of West Germany exploded around him and won effortlessly.

Pre was mad from the instant he crossed the finish line. On the victory stand, while receiving their medals, Pre got into Norpoth’s face. “I think it’s *chickenshit*,” he hissed, “for an old guy like you to let a little kid do all the work and humiliate him in the end.” The crowd saw how hot he was, and started to jeer. Norpoth replied eloquently without a word, lifting his gold medal to the crowd and then holding it right under Pre’s nose. This was a dual meet and the win was the thing, not politesse.

Six weeks later, Pre drove his light blue, jacked-up ’56 Chevy the 108 miles up the Umpqua River from Coos Bay to Eugene and registered at Oregon. He soon met a freshman classmate, then-javelin thrower Mac Wilkins. Together they strolled into Bill Dellinger’s office, to say hello and find out the time of the annual welcoming picnic at the Bowerman home.



RABBIT STEW In a 1970 meet versus West Germany, Pre led for most of the 5000—until Harald Norpoth overtook him with 200 meters to go. The author is in third place.

As Dellinger welcomed them and gave them material on academic requirements and class schedules, Wilkins spotted a glass-framed photo on the wall and realized what it was. “Wow,” he said softly.

Dellinger saw where he was looking. “My finest hour,” he said. “Tokyo, on the victory stand.”

Pre went over, peered at Bob Schul wearing Olympic gold and Dellinger wearing bronze, and started stabbing his finger at the picture. Wilkins thought he was going to break the glass. “That’s the guy!” Pre yelled. “That’s the chickenshit guy who sat on me in Germany!”

Wearing silver, of course, was Norpoth, whom Pre had sworn to hunt down and defeat. “He’s a smart runner,” said Dellinger. “In fact, I like to think that picture is of the three smartest guys in the race. We didn’t chase after [Ron] Clarke when he tried to surge away, and we didn’t try kicking from 400 out like crazy [Michel] Jazy.”

“I would have run like Clarke,” Pre announced loud enough to be heard down the hall. “I would have made it hard all the way!”

Clarke, an Australian who broke 17 world records during his career, was a front-runner out of principle. “No matter who I was racing, I tried to force myself to the limit over the whole distance,” he once told me. “It makes me sick to see a superior runner wait behind the field until 200 meters to go, and then sprint away. That is immoral. It is both an insult to the other runners and a denigration of his own ability.” Pre believed in this front-runner’s creed.

“Notice,” said Dellinger, “Clarke isn’t in that picture. Clarke got ninth.”

Later, Bowerman asked Dellinger what the excitement had been about. Dellinger sketched the scene. “Ah, with the talent,” Bowerman sighed, “comes the temperament.” He sighed that occasionally over the years, but more often in the Prefontaine era. This had been Pre’s first salvo in a debate over front-running.

A Rube Awakening

THAT WEEK, AFTER AN ORIENTATION run with some upperclassmen, Pre went with them to the sauna, where they discovered Bowerman. Still coming off his trip to Europe, Pre told how the AAU’s Dan Ferris had put the U.S. team in an unsanitary hole of a hotel in Augsburg, while Ferris himself lived high on the hog across town. As Pre was getting worked up, Bowerman stood as if he was leaving, but then sat down right next to him, covering his key ring with his towel. Many eyes noted the keys. Many glances were exchanged.

“Apropos of the AAU,” Bowerman said, “I’m sorry to tell you that the USOC has again refused to recognize the NCAA-backed Track and Field Federation. The AAU is still our governing body. I don’t know how those old men figure to keep from stagnating if they don’t let in new blood.” He stood again. “It’s understandable. They’re crotchety old men, those kings of Olympic House. They don’t want to change. It hurts to change.”

Bill slapped his keys on the inside of Pre’s thigh. “Doesn’t it hurt to change?” he asked in his merry way, pressing down as the heated brass did its work.

“Sometimes it hurts more,” Pre finally shouted, “just to sit and take it!”

Bowerman didn't expect this. As he went out the door, the others could see he was impressed. Pre, inspecting the welt, came to a realization. He turned on everyone there. "You didn't warn me!" he yelled. "What kind of teammates are you? You set me up!"

"Welcome to Oregon," someone said when the hysterics had died down enough. It apparently was a few days before Pre could feel it an honor.

As Pre and Bill assessed one another, Bill, for one, noted similarities. Both were from small towns. Both were blunt. Bowerman sometimes called Pre "Rube" for his hopeless candor, but did so with a wink because it applied to him, too. "Or at least it did before I grew old and crafty," he said later.

How do you handle a hardheaded man? At their first goal-setting session, Prefontaine announced to Bowerman that it was great that Bill was the finest coach of milers, because that was the race he wanted to ultimately rule. Bowerman asked how fast he hoped to run. Pre said, "3:48."

Knowing the record was 3:51.1, Bowerman kept his counsel, only noting that 3:48 was 57 paces. But over the winter and spring of 1970, he observed that whereas Pre was hugely gifted over longer distances, and capable of fully recovering from most workouts with a single night's sleep (no extra easy days for him), he didn't have anything like the foot speed of a Roscoe Divine or a Jim Ryun. Speed, unlike stamina, can be improved only so much by training. Pre would never quite crack 50 seconds for a quarter mile.

"But that winter," Bill recalled years later, "all he wanted to do was train for the mile, run the mile. It got to where on our spring trip to Fresno, when I put him in the two-mile, he didn't want to run it. 'I'm not a two-miler,' he said, 'I'm a miler.' I suggested to him that he might want to give some thought to which university he'd be running for if he didn't try this particular two-mile because it wouldn't be ours."

At that, Pre had turned and run out of the room. In 15 minutes he was back. He said, "Okay. Fine. Got it," and won the two-mile in 8:40.0. After that one quick test of the waters, Pre was never seriously defiant of Bowerman again.

In April 1970, running all alone in the three-mile in a dual meet against Washington State University, Prefontaine clocked a blistering 13:12.8. He was a natural three-miler, and so good that any immediate concern about what kind of kick he had was rendered ludicrous by the pace he could sustain. "The man was designed," Bowerman grinned years later, "to run

away with things." In the success of that breaking away, Pre had brought something unprecedented to the Bowerman stable at the University of Oregon. Bowerman himself would have to come to terms with it.

Simply Unstoppable

IN JULY 1972, EUGENE HOSTED its first Olympic Track and Field Trials, which would produce the team for that summer's Games in Munich. The nerve center for runners was neither the track nor the athlete-thronged dorms. It was downtown, where flocks of ectomorphic, prominently veined competitors flitted through the Athletic Department store and were persuaded to stop, sit down, unlace, try on, and perhaps reconsider. The fledgling Blue Ribbon Sports, which would become better



STANDING ROOM ONLY During Pre's Oregon career, raucous track fans regularly filled Hayward Field to see him run.

known as Nike, was taking exuberant advantage of its Bowerman-provided opportunity to introduce its running shoes to the nation's finest. The little store was jammed even without customers. Jeff Johnson, Bob Woodell, Geoff Hollister, and the rest of the company had converged here to get shoes on feet.

Phil and Penny Knight were hot-pressing customized names on T-shirts to give athletes with their shoes. "How do you spell your first name?" Phil asked one marathoner. "D-U-M-P," he said.

"Okay," Knight said, arranging the letters. "What's your last?" "Nixon." Thus did Tom Derderian run off in an emblem of the Trials' zeitgeist.

The crowd on the last day numbered 23,000. They were there mostly for Pre, and they rose to him in the last mile of the 5000-meter final, when he broke three-time Olympian George Young with ruthless laps of 63.4, 61.5, and 58.7, and cut seven seconds from his American record with 13:22.8. His great sense of theater led him to grab a "Stop Pre" shirt (that Lindgren had

been booed for warming up in) and run victory laps in it. The sight of their champion parading the arena wearing the metaphorical pelt of the vanquished foe (Lindgren didn't make the team) made for atavistic hysteria.

Through all this drama, great and small, Bowerman abandoned his usual practice of watching from high in the stands. Instead, he was a presence on the infield, a genial general, welcoming new members to the team of Olympians he was taking onward. There, he pulled every string for them. Just as the 200-meter finalists were bending into their blocks, ABC wanted a delay for a commercial. Bowerman overheard the TV cameraman's walkie-talkie ordering him to run onto the track and take a slow shot of every tense face, thereby blocking the start until ABC was ready. The cameraman trotted to obey, but before he reached the track his camera refused to go any farther. He turned to see Bowerman standing on his cord. Bowerman nodded to starter Ray Hendrickson and the sprinters were sent on their way on time—meet time, not media time.

The Bowerman/Dellinger race plan for Munich, conceived with Dellinger's experience in Tokyo in mind, was for Prefontaine not to simply surge and slow, as Clarke had done, but to free himself with inexorably faster laps late in the race. His battle against Young in the Trials, when he'd run the final mile in 4:10, was a dress rehearsal, but all involved knew he could run faster.

Dellinger, both to enhance that ability and to know exactly what Pre could stand, put him through training to simulate that long last mile. There were three key workouts. One was four three-quarters in 3:12, 3:09, 3:06, and 3:00, with one lap recoveries, followed by a bunch of repeat miles. One was warming up, going to the line, and running, all alone, a four-minute mile. Pre did it in 3:59.0, changed shoes, and continued with his day.

The last workout gave him real concern. It was two essentially back-to-back runs of a mile and a half in 6:30, with an 880 jog in between. These were brutal because the pace dropped every half-mile, from 70 to 65 to 60. No one could stay with him on both of these six-lap efforts, so Dellinger asked young Oregon miler Mark Feig and me to alternate halves (I had qualified for the Olympic Marathon and would also be going to Munich). I drew the two-flat final 880 of the first run. Pre kept the pace but you could see he was going all out to hold it. He finished and looked so chartreuse Dellinger was about to say, "Knock it off for today." Pre didn't let him.

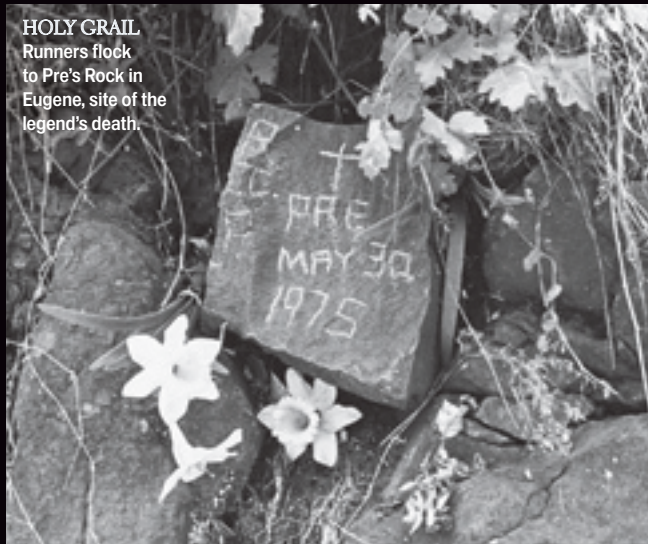
"The next one will be easier," he said, and threw up a sticky yellow mass all over Dellinger's new Adidas. "Didn't give those last three Danish time to digest." The second one was easier.

Munich Gone Wrong

ON AUGUST 19, we flew to Munich, were bussed to the banner-bedecked Olympic Village, and checked out our rooms in the United States' 14-story building. Groups of four or five would share apartments. We found everything comfortable and clean. But our coach was looking beyond our creature comforts.

"Since the war I'd been conscious of security," Bill would say. "So I walked around the Olympic Village and there was none. As guards they had boys and girls dressed in pastels or

HOLY GRAIL
Runners flock
to Pre's Rock in
Eugene, site of the
legend's death.



UNSOLVED MYSTERY

THE AUTHOR OF *BOWERMAN* SAYS MORE THAN DRINKING CONTRIBUTED TO PRE'S FATAL ACCIDENT

DBecause Steve Prefontaine's blood alcohol level was 0.16 percent when he died on May 30, 1975—well beyond Oregon's then legal intoxication level—the legend persists that Pre got drunk, slammed his car into a stone wall on Skyline Boulevard in Eugene, and killed himself. I'm here to say that it wasn't that simple. In *Bowerman and the Men of Oregon*, I detail why Pre's story should not always end with "he died drunk."

For one thing, Frank Shorter, Pre's 1972 Olympics teammate, has told me that he felt perfectly safe riding with Pre minutes before the accident. For another, the accident had none of the hallmarks of inebriated inattention. Just the opposite. While police reports reveal there were scuff marks near the accident, it's inconclusive that speed was a factor. Pre was in second gear, and the nearest people to the wreck, Bill and Karen Alvarado, who lived just 50 yards from the accident site, didn't feel Pre was speeding when he drove past their open window. And then there's my own research; while it's hardly scientific, it has convinced me that Pre was fully focused in the seconds before his death.

Pre's MGB slammed into a rock wall on the far side of Skyline. For the MGB to be lifted and overturn as it did, Pre must have approached that wall at a very specific angle. To attain that angle, he had to have made a forceful, leftward turn of his steering wheel. I lived on the road for 10 years after Pre's death, and drove its curves daily. When it was safe, I tried every combination of speed and angle, going faster, slower, taking my hands off the wheel at different points. Never could I come close to Pre's fatal angle. Not without jerking the wheel to the left 10 yards away.

I concluded that something had been in his lane, and to avoid it he slammed on the brakes and swerved left. What was it? Maybe a deer or a raccoon. Or maybe another car. Karl Lee Bylund was the first on the scene, but he then drove to his nearby home to report the accident. Bill Alvarado said he heard Bylund's car start from first gear right before it came around the turn and past his house. That was about 30 seconds after the accident. Moments earlier, perhaps, Bylund had swung too wide around the turn from Birch onto Skyline, which is easy to do, and placed himself in Pre's lane. Bylund, for his part, has always maintained that Pre's car was already overturned when he came upon it.

It's not likely we'll ever know for sure what happened, but here's the point: Pre didn't die in a drunken stupor. He was the victim of freakishly bad luck, the kind that can take any of us in a moment. —K.M.

Bavarian uniforms, not one with a weapon. The back fence was nothing, six feet, chain-link, no barbed wire. The Germans were trying to erase the memory of Hitler and Berlin in 1936. I went to Clifford Buck, our USOC president, to whom the Oregon Track Club had sent our fat check, and said we needed some real security on our building. If we let visitors just walk in uninvited, the place would be picked apart.”

Buck told Bowerman to write him a letter, which Bill did. “We should be able to keep out,” he wrote, “thieves, harlots, and newspapermen.” Buck sent the letter on to the Olympic Village Mayor, Walther Troger, who, Bill would say, “took rather strong umbrage.” Troger informed Bowerman and others with similar concerns that the Munich Organizing Committee, under International Olympic Committee member Willy Daume, was determined to minimize police or military presence. These were intended to be the “Happy Games,” the ultimate statement of how peaceful and free life was in postwar West Germany. “Let’s pray it stays that way,” said Bowerman to all and sundry.

“The Germans were outraged that one of these whippersnappers from America would say their security wasn’t good enough,” Bill’s wife, Barbara, would recall. “So they went to the IOC and complained about Bill. From then on Bill was caught between the IOC and the Germans. But what happened then was something that happened to Bill strangely often his whole life. Something that started out simple became a great prophecy.”

The early track events were eye-opening, especially if you were a 5000-meter runner studying your competition while they ran the 10,000. Finland’s Lasse Viren was tripped and fell hard midway through the 10,000 final, almost taking American Frank Shorter down with him. Viren arose 40 yards behind, gradually caught the pack, and went on to beat Belgium’s Emiel

Puttemans in a world record 27:38.4. Pre sat with Dellinger and watched in silence. Viren was not ghostly and corpse-like like Norpoth, but tall and ran with an eerie smoothness, the exact opposite of Pre’s chesty power. You would never have guessed Viren had covered his last 800 in 1:56.6. “Better hope that guy has shot his wad,” Arne Kvalheim told Pre.

That night, Bowerman left the Olympic Village and went out on the town. Barbara’s hotel put on a Bavarian dinner, so Bill didn’t go back to the Village (“feeling guilty about it,” Barbara would say) until quite late. He slipped into his ground-floor room and lay down. It seemed to him his head had just touched the pillow when there was a pounding.

Shorter was the only one in our apartment five floors above who had heard anything. “I was out on our little balcony,” he recalled later. “I’d dragged my mattress out there and had been sleeping there for a week or more. I heard a sound like a door slam.” It brought him from fitful sleep to apprehensive alertness: “That’s a gunshot.” It was about 4:45 a.m.

A few minutes later came the pounding on the coaches’ door. Bowerman groggily opened it. Before him stood an Israeli racewalker, Shaul Ladany. “Can I come in? Can I stay here?” asked Ladany distractedly, puffing, pushing close.

“What for?”

“The Arabs are in our building.”

“Well, tell them to get out.”

“They’ve shot some of our people,” Ladany told him. “I got out through a window.”

“That,” Bowerman said later, “changed the whole complexion.”

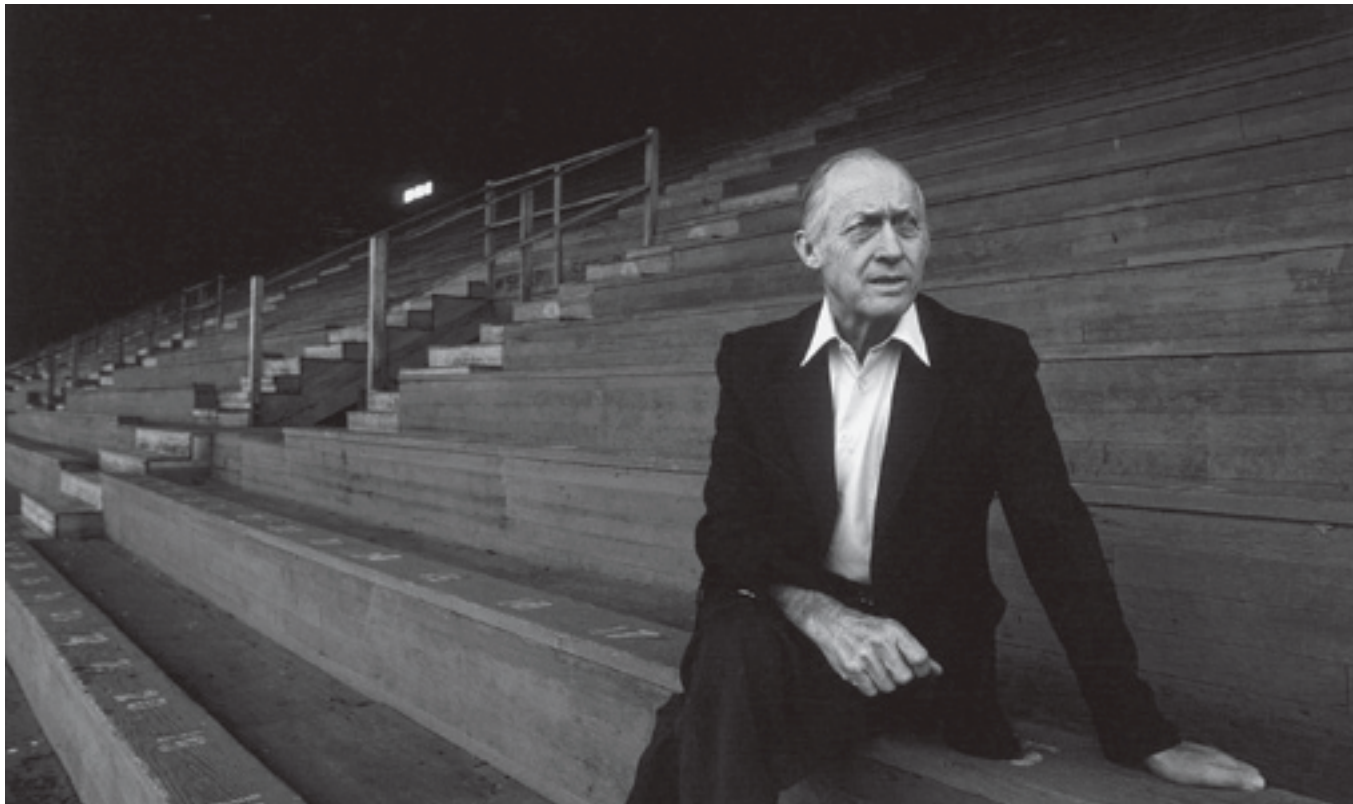
Bowerman was the first of the U.S. delegation to know we had become caught up in the Olympics’ great loss of innocence. He called the U.S. Consul. “We’ve got a problem in the Village,” he said. “I want some security.”

Thirty minutes later there were two U.S. Marines at the U.S. entrance and two in the halls. “We secured the building,” said Bowerman. “But I got a call about 6 a.m. from the IOC. They said, ‘You’ve done it again, Bowerman, bringing Marines in here. We want to see you first thing in the morning.’ I said I’d be glad to be there.”

By 7:30 a.m., German security forces had begun to flood the Village streets. We would eventually learn that eight members of the Black September faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization, dressed in track suits and carrying rifles in sports bags, had scaled the back fence of the Village and forced their way into the Israeli men’s quarters. They shot and

BEATEN In the Munich 5000, Pre (center) couldn’t catch Lasse Viren (228), then lost out on a medal to Ian Stewart (309).





HOME-FIELD ADVANTAGE **Bowerman retired as Oregon's coach in 1973 after 25 seasons, but then led a fund-raising effort to renovate historic Hayward Field.**

killed Moshe Weinberg, a wrestling coach, and mortally wounded weight lifter Yossef Romano. They took nine other athletes and coaches hostage in the two-story duplex. The terrorists tied and gagged their captives, took up defensive positions, and shortly after 5 a.m. tossed a list of demands from the balcony to a policeman. To show their seriousness, they threw Weinberg's body out the window onto the sidewalk.

Thus began a day and long night of terror. The German authorities finally helicoptered the Palestinians and captive Israelis to a nearby airfield, where they falsely promised a plane would take them to Cairo and the prisoners to Tel Aviv. But at the airport, the Germans horribly botched an ambush. All nine remaining hostages were killed.

The Games were postponed for 24 hours, but few felt like competing. "If they loaded us all into a plane right now to take us home," said a devastated Prefontaine, "I'd go." Instead, Dellinger persuaded Pre to come away into the countryside. He drove Prefontaine a full hour, well into Austria, where they stopped and inhaled truly Alpine air. To keep Pre from running himself to death as therapy, Dellinger had them take a jog together. This was September 6. Assuming the Games went on with only a day's postponement, the 5000 semifinals would now be on the eighth and the final on the 10th.

"I knew I didn't have to worry about Pre's bouncing back emotionally," Dellinger would say, "because he was so pissed that all this was giving Viren an extra day to recover after the 10,000." Dellinger goaded him a little more, pointing out that since he was, at 21, the youngest in the race by two years, every veteran in there—say, defending champ Mohamed Gammoudi of Tunisia or Harald Norpoth—was going down the list of entrants, coming to his name, and writing him off as a cocky kid who was going

to be thrown back into babyhood by the attacks. Personalizing it like that was working, Dellinger saw.

Pre qualified for the 5000-meter finals, and on the last day of the Olympics, he and 12 others were leaning over the starting line. Pre's plan was unchanged. With four laps to go he would begin a mile-long drive to run all pursuers off their feet. The field was the strongest ever assembled, the best being Gammoudi, Puttemans, Norpoth, Viren, and his countryman Juha Vaatainen, as well as Britain's Ian Stewart and Dave Bedford. Bedford, the world cross-country champion, had been vocal in his opinion that Prefontaine was a cocky little prick in need of quieting.

The USSR's Nikolai Sviridov and others led, but listlessly, and the pack remained a tight, worried clump. Pre remained in the middle of the pack, taking elbows and spikes. Everyone else's racing cowardice (or intelligence, depending on how they finished) was combining to create terrible luck for him. Never happy in a pack at the best of times, it was all he could do to keep his cool. He did so by visualizing how great it would be to be free.

They passed two miles at 8:56.4. It was almost time. On the home stretch with four to go he cocked his head, moved out, and took the lead. They had been going 67 paces. He ran the next lap in 62.5, and followed with a 61.2. Only five men were in contention by then, Prefontaine, Viren, Puttemans, Gammoudi, and Stewart.

With 800 to go, Viren passed Pre, perhaps as a psychological blow against the kid, who had to be feeling his blazing previous half-mile. Puttemans went by too, *(continued on page 121)*

Excerpt adapted from the book *Bowerman and the Men of Oregon*, by Kenny Moore (Rodale, April 2006). To purchase an advance copy, visit www.rodalestore.com.

Leading Men

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 105

as if he felt Pre was shot and was going to now fall back. Pre responded on the backstretch by charging past them and retaking the lead with 600 to go, just where Dellinger had led in Tokyo. He finished that lap with a 60.3.

At the bell with a lap to go, Viren passed him again, and Bowerman said later that he thought the Finn was sprinting too soon, that if Pre could tuck in and draft on his back, he could run him down late. But Pre wasn't hanging anywhere. As soon as they hit the backstretch with 300 to go, he moved out to pass Viren. But Gammoudi, who had done this to Billy Mills in the Tokyo 10,000, sprinted by, hit Pre so hard he drove him inside, and made his own charge to seize the lead. Pre was third with 250 to go. Again, Bowerman felt that if he gathered and waited, he could catch them in the stretch. Again, Pre refused to wait. With 200 to go he went wide and got to Viren's shoulder. He gave a tremendous effort, his head going side to side, but couldn't get past before the turn. Gammoudi cut him off again and went back into second. The top three men ran the last turn a yard apart praying that after all these moves and countermoves they would have something left in the stretch.

Only Viren did. He drew gracefully away to win in 13:26.4. Gammoudi was seven yards back in 13:27.4. Prefontaine died. At the line he was staggering. The madly sprinting Ian Stewart just caught him to steal the bronze in 13:27.6. Pre was clocked in 13:28.3. He had run his last mile in 4:04. Viren had run 4:02.

In the stands, Pre's girlfriend, Mary Marckx (now Mary Creel), didn't know what to do. "I didn't know how to reach Steve through the bowels of the stadium, so I started running up to the top of the stands. I was alone, crying. I couldn't imagine what he'd do. Would he kill himself? He'd been completely shut out, even of the 'horrible bronze' he'd disparaged."

At the top of the stadium there was a broad concourse. "There were Bill and Barbara Bowerman," Mary would recall. "I said, 'I don't know if he can take this. I don't know if I can help him.' Bill patted my arm and said it was a heroic effort, he couldn't have done any better. 'He's young,' Bill said. 'He's got a lot of races ahead. He'll be fine. Believe me, he'll be fine.'"

Mary knew her man. This was not going to be easy. Mortification did not sit well with Steve Prefontaine.

What's Next?

ON HIS RETURN FROM Munich, Pre never questioned Bowerman's race plan. He complained to friends or coaches only of the slow pace and of Gammoudi's spikes and punches. "If it had been 8:40 for the first two miles," he

told *Track & Field News*, "I would have had gold or silver. It would have put crap in their legs. It was set up for Gammoudi and Viren." After watching the tape 50 times, I disagreed. I came to feel that if he'd let Viren lead the last 800 and made a single, all-out sprint with 250 to go, he'd have been second even as the race was run. His wild abandon was why he had been staggering blind before the line.

Still, Dellinger and Bowerman saw Pre wasn't bouncing back. He was moody, hopping from emotion to emotion. Creel, who would call Munich "a turning point" in Pre's life, saw that, too. Pre began partying and drinking much more than he used to, Creel would say, and seemed to take running less seriously. It may have begun to occur to him, on some level, that he might need to consider making a living at something beyond track.

Tough as it was for Prefontaine to regain his former eagerness, it was tougher for Bowerman. The man who had been such a rock for everyone in Munich came home exhausted and discouraged. He felt that "all the guff he had taken from the Olympic officials," Barbara would say, "defeated what he had tried to do there." He put up a good front for the sake of team and family, hoping the ancient rhythms of timing workouts and making shoes would restore his vigor.

Before they took effect, the city of Eugene's fire marshal informed the university that Hayward Field's west grandstand along the homestretch was no longer patchable. The 5,000-seat structure, built in 1919, would have to be torn down after the 1973 season. New stands would have to be built in order for the facility to host future Olympic Trials.

Neither the athletic department nor the university had funds for this, and raising money for it would be an enormous task. "It was impossible," Bill said later, "to do justice to my coaching and to a big construction project at the same time. And we didn't have much time." So, without a word of warning, he retired. After 25 years in the job of Bill Hayward (Oregon's legendary coach from 1904-47), Bowerman, at the age of 62, announced that he was leaving to do the greatest good for the greatest number, by chairing a drive to restore the facility. Dellinger was soon appointed as Bill's successor.

Early in the planning phase for the new stands, pledges were about \$25,000 short of what was needed to pay for bulldozing the stands and architects' fees. An idea was hatched to hold a restoration track meet that, according to Bill Landers, an Oregon administrator, would have "as its big hook our wonder child Steve Prefontaine racing Dave Wottle in a mile." Pre had scheduled a stint in Europe with the U.S. national team, as well

as a slate of Scandinavian races. He'd planned to leave a week before the June 20th fundraising meet, but his loyalty to Bowerman and Oregon carried the day, and he agreed to the race. He also called Wottle. "Come to Eugene before we go to Scandinavia," Pre said to Wottle, "and we'll try for a new world record mile. I'll lead and you'll get a great time." Wottle, a wait-and-kick miler and no fool, accepted that rare gift, a respected opponent setting a hard pace.

A crowd of 12,000 witnessed the Hayward Field Restoration Mile, double what attendance would have been without this duel. Prefontaine took over after the half and hit an eye-opening 2:56.0 for three-quarters. Wottle shot out to a 10-yard lead in the backstretch and held it to the end, which he reached in 3:53.3 to Pre's 3:54.6, both lifetime bests. Wottle had missed Ryun's record, but was now the second-fastest American ever. Bowerman exulted that Pre was fully, emotionally back. "He ran a great race," he said. "If Wottle had drifted five yards off, he'd have gotten whipped!"

The meet cleared \$23,204. "How many world-class guys," Landers would say of Pre, "would agree to a race they knew they were going to lose?" Afterward, Norv Ritchey, Oregon's athletic director, congratulated Pre for his magnificent gesture. "Well, Pre," Ritchey said, "this is a great thing you're doing, and it will repay every bit of grant-in-aid you ever received." Pre looked Ritchey right in the eye and said, "I did that the first race I ever ran at Hayward Field."

Once Prefontaine graduated, he faced a reality that would be unbelievable to later national champions: penury. To run his best, he needed the freedom to train and travel. A full-time, entry-level job in his major field of communications—lugging equipment at a TV station—wasn't compatible with that. So the bulk of his income came illegally, or at least in violation of the amateur code. He would run bursts of European races, where promoters would pay in cash or fungible airline tickets. And he tended bar at the Paddock, his own favorite haunt. The Pad always did great business when Pre was drawing the pitchers.

Bowerman heard about this and sat Pre down for an unscheduled goal-setting session. He knew his man by now, knew to lead with the irrefutable. "No one in Oregon," Bill said, "can influence kids the way you can."

Once Prefontaine had nodded in prideful agreement, the discussion was essentially over. However free Pre might feel to lead his own life, said Bowerman, he wasn't free to set an example that if followed by the youngest of his people, would (continued on page 126)

do them harm. “You’re right, Bill,” Pre said on very little reflection. “I’ll quit. You’re right.”

Bowerman said later that he and Prefontaine seldom engaged in lengthy talks. “But there wasn’t a picture of them,” Barbara would observe, “where they weren’t looking at each other and saying, ‘Hey, who’s boss here?’” Each operated by laying out a position, and presuming the other would respect it.

On April 27, 1974, Pre ran his first serious race of the year, a 10,000 at the Twilight Meet, in rain and wind. It would be a lonely race. The west stands had been bulldozed, and although 7,000 people were in attendance, they were all huddled in the remaining seats on the far side. Lap after lap, Prefontaine ran 67s, but he ran them by sprinting 32s with the wind in front of the crowd and muscling 35s against the wind on that lonely backstretch.

As he came by on the backstretch, eyes rolled back, mouth agape, moaning, he seemed to be running into oblivion. Yet when he came past the crowd and it stood up and thundered, he showed that he heard. The rest of us would hear the crowd, be moved to hang on, and try to lift a grateful arm afterward, but Pre always acknowledged his crowd in the moment. He cocked his head *then*, surged for them *then*—and they thundered all the more. He won them by stripping himself naked, unembarrassed at revealing his need and his agony. He ran an American record 27:43.6 that day, only five seconds slower than Viren’s world record in Munich. “I think,” he said later, subdued, “this indicates I’m ready.”

Early in 1975, Pre was offered \$200,000, the largest contract in the short history of the International Track Association. Pre had little of the traditional distance man’s feeling for austerity. “I like to be able to go out to dinner once in a while,” he’d say. “I like to drive my MGB up the McKenzie on a weekday afternoon. I like to be able to pay my bills on time.” But he turned the contract down. Until the Europeans were well and truly thrashed, he said, “What would I do with all that money?” He had abstained, of course, for one reason—to keep his eligibility to take on Viren in the 1976 Olympics in Montreal.

From Tragedy...

AT 7 A.M. ON MAY 30, 1975, we awoke to the shock of our lives: Steve Prefontaine had been killed in a one-car accident on Skyline Drive, no more than a minute after dropping Frank Shorter off at my house. We walked down through neighbors’ yards to the scene. The car had been removed by then, but there was broken glass on the street. We saw the accident report and learned he’d struck a natural outcropping of black basalt. He hadn’t been wearing his seatbelt. The car had flipped

over, coming to rest on that great chest. He had not broken a bone. It was simply the weight of his beloved butterscotch MGB pressing the life out of him. If anyone had found Pre then, in the first five minutes, he might have saved him with a two by four and a brick.

Pre had to have left this world with a fine regard for its absurdities, one being that he was dying on a road he loved to run, on a hill where he made others suffer. His last moments surely recapitulated his finest races, his blacksmith-bellows gasping, his fighting down panic, his approaching death's door, his needing the crowd to call him back.

The effect of all this was to make us wild to cling to Pre's legacy, to define and protect it. He hadn't left a will, but he might as well have. "I did not want to waste or squander any effort Pre put forward," Shorter would remember. "I felt if you could keep momentum going on something he cared about, then you should."

Our leader in much of this was Bowerman. Earlier that year, when Hayward Field's new west stands were completed, the annual restoration meet had been renamed the Bowerman Classic. Bill now scotched that. "He was the driving force in the two restoration meets," Bowerman wrote in a press release. "Our Oregon Track Club Board concurs that in living memorial to Pre—his inspiration, his ambition—the meet he did so much to make successful should bear his name. Next Saturday you may attend the Steve Prefontaine Classic, a first step in a parade of opportunities to share directly in the dreams of Prefontaine."

Bowerman got a note that week from University president Robert Clark. "Your gesture in naming Saturday's event for him was magnanimous," Clark wrote. "We owe much to Steve, but we owe even more to you for your years of service and for the quality in you that brought Steve Prefontaine and others to us."

The Pre Classic would grow into the finest invitational meet in the country. And a living memorial it is, coming at the season he left us, when the roses and peonies are most potent, the season that blends the opposites that warred in him, the voluptuary and the ascetic. **RW**

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