

Steve Prefontaine (second from right) on his way to 5000-meter victory at the 1971 Pan African/USA meet in Duke's Wallace Wade Stadium.

Track and Field Day in Dixie

The Russians are coming, the Russians are coming!

by Richard John Pietschmann

Duke, that North Carolina institution of higher learning, is mighty fond of calling itself the "track capital of the South." Well, for a couple of days this Fourth of July weekend, the ProTurf track of Duke's Wallace Wade Stadium will be the track capital of the world.

You see, the Russians are coming to Durham, North Carolina, to spend July 5 and 6. But, *nyet*—no hot dogs and beer. Instead the Russian national track and field team is toting its shorts, spikes and shots to do battle with its American counterpart in the 12th USA-USSR International Track and Field Meet.

Brainchild of the Cold War, the meet has grown yearly in importance, if not in enthusiasm (the best American athletes have an odd habit of passing up the meet to tune for more important tests such as the Bloomsburg Fair). The first meeting was in Moscow in 1958, and American cities that have hosted the meet are Philadelphia (1959), Stanford (1962), Los An-

geles (1964, 1969) and Berkeley (1971).

This year, as usual, the American team will be pitted against a 60-person Russian squad that is called "amateur" only to preserve detente. Everyone knows by now that there are no professional athletes in Russia—only full-time state-supported citizen athletes.

The Soviets have been training for months, even years. But the Americans, in typical fashion, will select its men's team a scant two weeks before the meet. Our women, in an Alphonse-and-Gaston act, will wait until a *week* before they are due in Durham to decide just who will run, jump and throw.

It is somewhat of a triumph for our system that, even with the cards self-stacked against us, the 11-meet series has thus far produced an 8-3 edge for the U.S. men's team. The women have fared somewhat less gloriously against the maidens of Mother Russia, holding the very short end of a 10-1 record.

Last summer, a somewhat ragtag and bickering U.S. squad (which had just completed an exhausting meet tour in Europe) limped into Minsk, the picturesque capital of Byelorussia, and shortly thereafter filed obediently into Dynamo Stadium and to the slaughter. The men lost convincingly, 121-112 (although first-place medals were split 11-11), while the women were defeated by the surprisingly respectable margin of 95-91.

But the dashes came home again to America last year. Top surprise of the Minsk meet (and this year's big question) was Valery Borzov, Russia's double Olympic gold medalist, who showed up 20 pounds overweight and promptly dropped out of the 100-meter dash, his specialty. Some observers blamed his heavy winter Borscht Circuit schedule; others say he scratched when he heard Californian Steve Williams was making the trip.

Williams won the Borzov-less 100, then

easily outran the "world's fastest human" in the last leg of the relay. Borzov then pondered his future, faced Siberia and decided to demure in the 200-meter dash (which Williams also won) due to what translated as "trauma."

Another of the few American bright spots last year was Mary Decker, the child wonder from Garden Grove, California, who is track's current answer to Russian Olympic gymnast Olga Korbet. Mary, then just 14, easily won the 800-meter run.


Both Ms. Decker and Williams should be on hand in Durham. Another probable performer is Tony Waldrop, who has strung together an incredible series of sub 4-minute miles. Willye White, the lady from Chicago who has long-jumped in all 11 US-USSR meets, is a good bet to test the Russians in the 12th.

The Russians will send their usual polished crew, but major speculation is brewing about whether Borzov will board Aeroflot when the time comes. Steve Williams and a gaggle of other American sprinters hope so. Americans also want a crack at hammer throw record holder

Antatoliy Bondarchuk, 800 meter silver medalist Yevgeniy Arzhanov, triple jump record holder Viktor Saneyev and pole vaulter Yuriy Isakov.

Whatever the outcome, the 60,000 or so spectators expected to converge on Durham should enjoy a lively Fourth of July weekend. The ProTurf track is said to be the fastest in the country, a claim perhaps supported by the fact that 11 meet records were broken on it last year during the Martin Luther King Freedom Games.

World records may fall and more than a few interesting matchups will result. But will the American men prevail this year to resume mastery over their Soviet brothers? Will the American women summon the courage and strength to win for the second time in 12 tries?

You know what they say about the home-court advantage. This time the meet is in North Carolina. Durham is just 25 miles from Raleigh. And you know what happened in Raleigh to UCLA in the NCAA basketball championships. Decker, Waldrop, Williams and North Carolina may just do it. 

Off the Track

If you tire of the dust and groan inside the stadium, those hospitable folks in Durham will have a "summer arts festival" set up outside. It's free, as long as you don't buy anything from the 150 or so craftsmen and artists.

Tickets

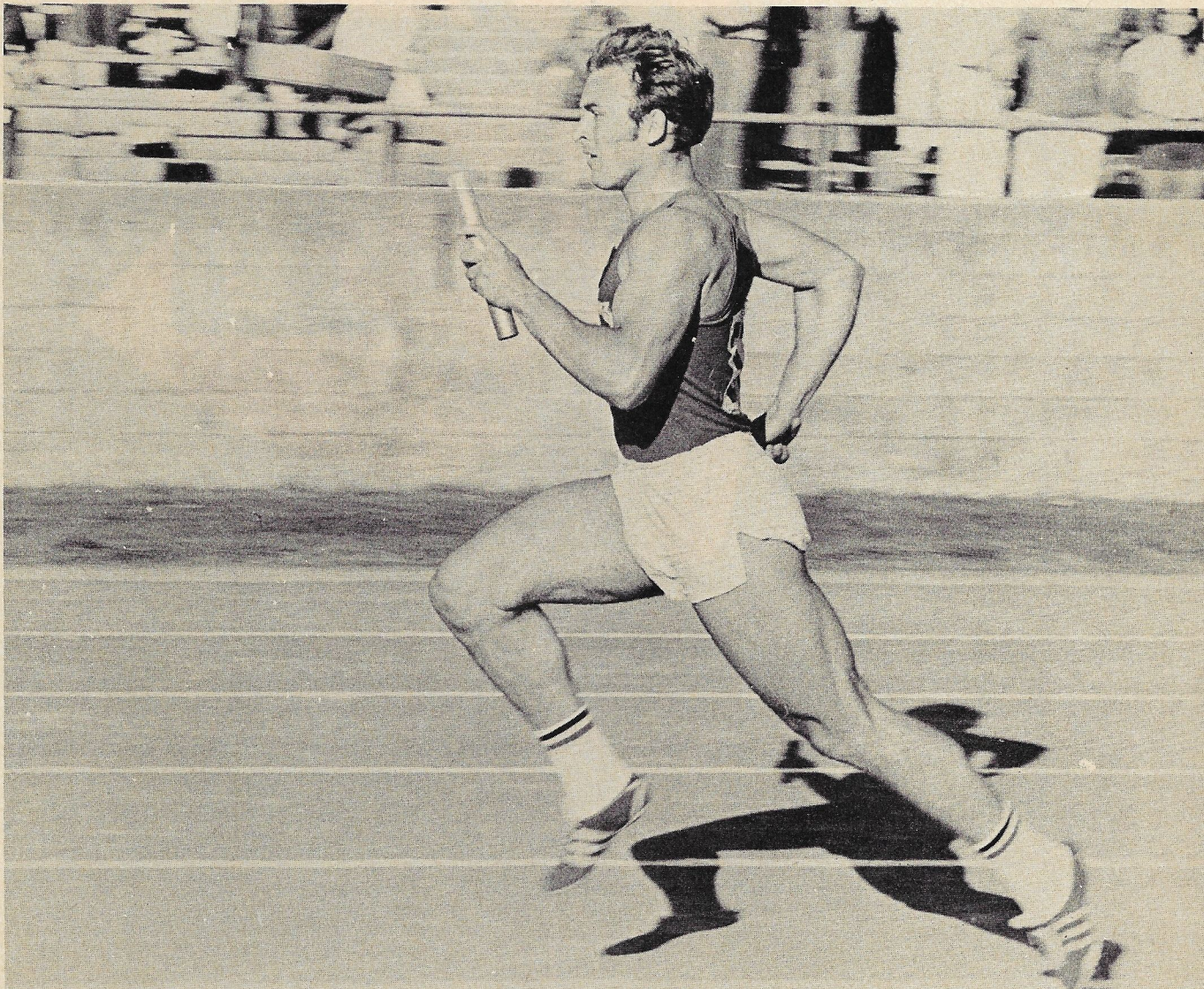
Ticket prices for the two days (all races are finals: no heats) range from \$3 to \$10. Get them through Ticketron or by writing: USA-USSR Track Committee, P.O. Box 1087, Durham, NC 27702.

On the Track

These events have been scheduled: 100, 200 meter dashes; 400, 800, 1500, 5000, 10,000 meter runs; 110 meter high hurdles; 400 meter intermediate hurdles; 400, 1500 meter relays; 3000 meter steeplechase; high, long, triple jumps; pole vault; shot put; discus; javelin; hammer throw; decathlon; pentathlon.

On the Tube

If you can't make it to Durham, CBS will tape the meet and broadcast it on Sunday, July 8.



Valery Borzov, Russia's double gold medalist in the 1972 Olympics, shown here in thinner style. Last year in Europe's Minsk meet he came in 20 pounds overweight and dropped out of the 100-yard dash.