

Inside Track

by Tim Layden



ALL IN STRIDE
Williams (20) left
Athens Olympic
champ Nesterenko
(20) in her wake.

Payback Time

At a Prefontaine meet filled with races of retribution, Lauryn Williams proved she's the new sprint queen

BEATEN OLYMPIANS carry a special motivation into the post-Games year. While gold medalists burnish their hardware and sweeten their endorsement deals, those without gold are further driven to attain it. Every race is a run at retribution. Witness last Saturday's Prefontaine Classic in Eugene, Ore., where a savvy, sellout crowd at Hayward Field watched three athletes announce their readiness to make a leap forward from Athens.

- Alan Webb. Last summer he ascended to world class in the mile (3:50.85) and the 1,500 meters (3:32.73), won a Grand Prix race in Europe and dominated the U.S. Olympic Trials. He fulfilled the promise he'd shown in crushing Jim Ryun's 36-year-old high school mile record at the 2001 Pre Classic. In Athens, however, Webb was eliminated in the first round of the 1,500, victimized by his inexperience.

On Saturday he reaffirmed his immense talent by finishing a

strong second in the two-mile to Kenya's Eluid Kipchoge, whose time (8:07.68) was the fastest ever run on U.S. soil. Webb's 8:11.48 broke Bob Kennedy's eight-year-old American record by .11 of a second. "The Olympics taught me a lesson about racing at the championship level," said Webb, 22. "My motivation to improve was always there."

He hit the halfway mark on Saturday in a searing 4:01.8. "If he had been a little slower for the first mile, like 4:03 or 4:04, I think he could have come back faster and run 8:08 or 8:09," said Webb's coach, Scott Raczko. Webb will be heavily favored to win the 1,500 at the U.S. nationals in Carson, Calif., on June 23-26.

- Lauryn Williams. In the Olympic 100 final she came achingly close to winning gold; she was overtaken in the last 10 meters by Yuliya Nesterenko of Belarus, who edged her by .03 of a second. Having given up her final year of college eligibility at Miami to run as

a pro, the 21-year-old Williams is now the preeminent American women's sprinter. She rolled to an easy victory in the Prefontaine 100, beating LaTasha Colander of the U.S. by daylight in 11.16 seconds into a stiff headwind. Nesterenko was a distant, jet-lagged last in the seven-woman field. "I'm not saying I was out for revenge," said Williams, "but it was nice to not hear those footsteps like I heard [in Athens]."

- Perdita Felicien. A Canadian who won three NCAA titles at Illinois,

Felicien was the Olympic favorite in the 100-meter hurdle final, but she crashed over the first hurdle and lay prone on the track as Joanna Hayes of the U.S. ran to a gold medal in an Olympic-record 12.37 seconds. On Saturday, Felicien beat Hayes soundly, running the fastest time in the world this year, 12.58, despite a significant headwind. "I'm never going to forget what happened in Athens," Felicien said in Eugene. "But you have to move forward. This is a new year with new races." □

Coming to America

New U.S. citizen Bernard Lagat (*right*), who won the Olympic silver medal in the 1,500 last year competing for Kenya, is an immediate threat to break the American record at that distance (3:29.77, by Sydney Maree; Lagat has run 3:26.34) and the mile (3:47.69, by Steve Scott; Lagat has run 3:47.28). Lagat, 30, will hardly be the first naturalized citizen to excel for the U.S. at distance and middle-distance running. Here are five others.



Abdi Abdirahman
Birth nation: Somalia

Claim to fame: Two-time Olympian, seventh-fastest American at 10,000 meters (27:34.24 in 2004).

Meb Keflezighi
Birth nation: Eritrea

Claim to fame: Second in 2004 Olympic marathon; U.S.-record holder in 10,000 (27:13.98 in 2001).

Khalid Khannouchi
Birth nation: Morocco

Claim to fame: U.S.-record holder in marathon (2:05:38 in then world-record time in '02).

Sydney Maree
Birth nation: South Africa

Claim to fame: U.S.-record holder at 1,500 meters (3:29.77 in 1985).

Mark Plaatjes
Birth nation: South Africa

Claim to fame: Won the marathon gold medal for the U.S. at the 1993 world championships.

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PayBack Time

Name	Country They Ran For	Best Running Event	How They Did In Last Olympics	Performance at Prefontaine Classic
Alan Webb				
Lauryn Williams				
Perdita Felicien				