

the latest I've ever stayed out is midnight. Midnight. Heck, campus life starts after midnight, and me, I've been asleep for three hours. But it's helped me in my studies. I've disciplined myself to do things that I don't want to do."

His senior year in high school, Pre ran two miles in 8:41.6, then and now a record. Forty colleges were after him. "It was terrible," he recalls. "Mail, phone calls at all hours, people showing up at the door. It got so bad I really began to wish I had never set the record. I referred all the calls to my coach, and he usually told the caller to leave me alone. He wanted me to go to Oregon."

But Prefontaine wasn't sure that Oregon wanted him. Where is Mr. Bowerman, he wondered. Bowerman, of course, was at home sitting on top of his mountain just outside of Eugene, and waiting for Prefontaine to come to him. Bowerman recruits no one, at least not in the usual sense of the word. He considers it immoral. Nonetheless, in his 22 years at Oregon, he has won three national championships and finished second or third three times. In 12 of the last 17 years Oregon has finished in the top 10 at the NCAAs, and until two years ago Oregon never gave a full four-year scholarship in track. Bowerman wasn't happy when the school decided it would.

"Oh, I recruit," he says, "but I don't go out and make love to some kid. We're not in the business of making deals with a kid. We are offering him a chance for a good college education, and if I'm talking to a kid who has a chance for a better education someplace else, I tell him to go."

Which is something that has not endeared Bill Bowerman to the most fanatic of Oregon track fans, although the first one has yet dared to voice an objection to his face. Bowerman is 59, but he is tall and rawboned and in dandy shape, and when he sets forth his principles, don't make light of them. He was a major with the 10th Mountain Division during World War II, an outfit that fought and skied across Italy and took every objective it went after. In the late '40s, shortly after he became track coach at Oregon, Bowerman bought 70 acres on top of a mountain and built a home—156 feet straight up from the winding McKenzie River and with a breathtaking view across the Willamette Valley to the Cascade Mountains which rise 70 miles

to the southeast. Prefontaine often runs on the hillside in front of Bowerman's house (*see cover*).

At the bottom of his mountain, Bowerman put up a mailbox, which soon became the target of a rock truck driver. Finally, Bowerman went to him and asked him to please stop running over the mailbox. The driver ignored him. O.K., said Bowerman. He took a half-stick of No. 2 logger's dynamite and booby-trapped the box. When he came home that night, there was the truck, its right rear wheel blown off. "I didn't want to hurt the guy," Bowerman says. "I just didn't feel like asking him not to hit my mailbox a second time."

Bowerman's firmness of purpose has cost him innumerable talented athletes who would have come to Oregon on hands and knees if he had but beckoned. "Everybody knows about the University of Oregon," he says. "If some kid wants to come here all he has to do is write a letter. If he doesn't want to write, he can't be very interested."

Prefontaine was interested, and hurt. "I thought it very strange and I was a little angry," he says. "I'd get a letter from Bowerman only about once a month, and schools like Villanova were writing me *every day*. I'd get tons of mail. It'd take me an hour and a half at night to read it all. But I knew deep in my heart I wanted to go to Oregon, only Oregon. Then one day I got a very special letter from Bowerman. It blew my mind. Just two paragraphs. It said something like if I want to go to Oregon, under his guidance and supervision, there was no doubt in his mind that I'd be the greatest distance runner in the world. Man, all I could think of was where's the dotted line, I'll sign. I'll never forget the first time I met him. I felt like I was talking to God. I still do."

And Prefontaine went to the mountain. By way of Europe last summer, and his first look at world-class competition. It was a rough trip abroad. Out of six meets, his best was a second in a 5,000 in Augsburg, West Germany. "I really learned. Oh, how I learned," Pre says, laughing. "I remember another 5,000. I was staying up with Lindgren and Jürgen May. I thought I was doing real well. Then the last 600 meters they just ran away from me."

Then he went to college. "The first thing I learned," he says, "is that with Bowerman, school comes first.

Then athletics. Then what you want to do. He says he is a teacher first, a coach second, and, boy, he means it. The athlete that doesn't learn that in a hurry is in for a lot of trouble. Right now, with the NCAA championships coming up, if I screwed up somehow he'd leave me home. Heck, if he thought it was right, he'd leave the whole team home. He's a man of principle, and for that very reason if he says I can do something, I believe it. It's almost superhuman. He can look at a guy and tell what he can do inside."

Prefontaine opened his collegiate career with the win over Lindgren in the six-mile cross-country race. Their second meeting ended in a photo finish, the judges giving the victory to Lindgren. The NCAAs were next, with Prefontaine third behind Lindgren and Mike Ryan of the Air Force. Then, after a short indoor tour, he scored 10 straight outdoor victories in the mile, the two mile and the three mile. It was in the three mile against Washington State that he did his 13:12.8, the best by an American in two years. As usual, Prefontaine was away fast, setting a burning pace. He passed the two-mile mark in 8:45. "I said, 'Oh, oh, I've never been here before,'" says Prefontaine. "It was unexplored territory. It's strange. You find yourself in a spot in time you've never hit before and you don't know if you can finish. But I'm always exploring myself. I haven't reached the threshold of unconsciousness yet. Maybe I never will."

"Right now," says Bowerman, "he's the greatest *long* middle-distance runner in the world. Lindgren, of course, is the greatest distance runner and he will be—until Steve beats him."

But Bowerman and Prefontaine aren't in a hurry. Bowerman wants his latest ace to progress at a rate of 10% improvement a year over the next 10 years. "We could move him a lot faster," he says, "but by the time he got out of school he'd probably be sick of it and quit. That's what happens to most of our runners. Steve's in no hurry."

"Bowerman is right," says Pre. "I don't want to be like Jim Ryun. No doubt he'll come back, and when he does he'll again be the greatest, but I don't want to go through what he did, all that tremendous pressure when he was so young. It came so quickly. World records at 19. I don't want that. Later, yes.