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DARKO AIMS FOR FINALS
AT NCAA TRACK MEET

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MISSOULA.....

Nervousness and small irritating physical ailments are the nemesis of all distance runners.

University of Montana distance man Doug Darko plans to avoid both bedevilmments when he competes in the trials of the three-mile at the NCAA Track and Field Championships Thursday.

It will be the Great Falls' sophomore's second trip to the NCAA meet and he says he is in "top shape" and "hoping to be more relaxed" for this year's gathering of some of the world's top track and field participants.

Darko finished 10th in his heat of 17 at last year's NCAA meet in Eugene, Oregon, but figures he can do better this time around. "I had a bad foot last year. My Achilles tendon was sore and I was also nervous. Too much nervousness is harmful to distance runners," Darko explained.

The top six from the two trials advanced to the finals. Darko recalls the finish of the race which, because 1972 was an Olympic year, was 5000 meters in length. "It is a funny feeling to come to the normal finish line and have to keep going," Darko laughs. The 5000 meter race is 188 yards longer than the three-mile event.

Grizzly coach Harley Lewis believes Darko can make Saturday's finals at the meet being held in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. "Doug ran 13:45 in qualifying for the meet. That was early in the year and I'm sure he is in better condition now. I think it will take a time of 13:35 to make the finals and Doug should be 10 seconds faster than he was in Seattle," Lewis said.

The Seattle meet was in mid-March and Darko's only other performance in the event was at the Big Sky track meet two weeks ago. In the Big Sky meet his time was 14:22, but the runners in the race were hampered by a 30 mile-per-hour wind.

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The University of Montana record-holder in the mile feels he has a shot at the school record in the three-mile this weekend. "I think I can run 13:28 if I make the finals," Darko said. All American Doug Brown holds the UM record at 13:29.

Strategy, rather than blistering speed, is the norm for the trials and the Great Falls Central product says he will run with the leaders. "Last year I ran up front until midway through the race. At that point I looked up and Prefontaine was running away from the pack," Darko remembers.

Steve Prefontaine, a senior at the University of Oregon, is the heavy favorite to win this year's race. He has clocked 13:06.4 this spring and seems certain of capturing an unprecedented fourth straight victory in the race.

Darko said that he felt Prefontaine would be going all out this year. "Last year the runners were saving themselves for the Olympic Trials. I think Prefontaine will go for a fast time since it is his last year of eligibility," Darko said.

Lacking natural speed, Darko feels that the longer events are his forte. "That 4:05.8 mile is my best performamnce in track and would indicate that the mile is my best event. But because I am not fast I think I am suited for the longer races," Darko reasons.

He will be shooting for Saturday's finals and an appearance on national TV when he lines up with some 20 other runners at 7:50 MDT Thursday night.

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