

John Dunlap Pre's death: a time to cry and ponder

Even in sports, life can present us with the cruelist of absurdities.

This past Friday Steve Prefontaine, an amateur long distance track performer, died tragically in a car wreck. He had just finished trimming a second and a half off his own American record in the 5,000 meter run. He also had left a party attended by a group of Finnish athletes he had helped bring to America.

And then the car he was driving skidded into a rock embankment and flipped over. At the age of 24, an age a great many of us can relate to, Steve Prefontaine was dead.

At the same time Evel Knievel was lying in a London hospital bed being visited by actress Ann-Margret. Knievel earned his right to the news by attempting to jump 13 buses with his motorcycle. One can only guess that the money Knievel made off the 80,000-strong crowd will go well beyond the hospital bills.

Supposedly, Ann-Margret was telling Evel that America wants him to continue to jump. Therein lies the irony of the last few days' events. One man makes a living defying death; another man who should be alive is dead.

Steve Prefontaine was an outpoken athlete as well as an outstanding runner. Sandy-haired and small, this thickly-mustachioed man would amble away through the beginning of a race and then blister away from his competitors with a strong final kick.

Yet Prefontaine had some thoughts about his role as an athlete in America. "People say I should be running for a gold medal for the old red, white, and blue and all that bull, but it's not gonna be that way. I'm the one who has made all the sacrifices. Those are my American records, not the country's."

Prefontaine felt the American system of training athletes was faulty, that not enough good facilities were available to

the amateur athlete. He also felt that money played too big a part in one's chances of making the Olympic games, and that he was not getting any support.

Yet Evel Knievel says he is as American as Mom and apple pie. He piously and dramatically tells us how great America is, and then puts on his star-spangled uniform to jump a bunch of buses, or trucks, or whatever. Or he packs in a quick million in a farcical attempt to rocket over a canyon.

And who knows? Maybe Knievel, with his knowledge of American's gullibility and the fact that people in this country are infatuated with violence (he must watch TV), is the epitome of modern-day America. He is a hustler in the finest sense of the word—he knows how to take people.

When I heard that Evel Knievel had bashed himself up again, I shook my head in disgust. But when I heard that young Steve Prefontaine had died needlessly in a car wreck, I just cried.

Lydecker punts minors for Sainthood

by John Hopkins
Staff Writer

The card on the apartment mailbox reads, "Mr. and Mrs. Dale Lydecker."

"Come in," calls a voice. Inside Linda Lydecker is bustling around the kitchen. The table is set and the salad is made. She takes time out to say hello on her way to check the charcoal.

The television is tuned to channel 5. On the screen, Ben Cartwright is reminiscing about his first wife.

About 15 feet from Ben, Dale Lydecker's punting leg is resting on the coffee table, as well it should be.

"I kicked 150 today," he said with a voice that indicated that was too many.

"I kicked a few extra today since I won't be able to work out tomorrow."

Dale is hard at work getting in shape for the New Orleans Saints' training camp. He has earned a free agent contract with the NFL club and hopes to land the job of punter.

You might remember Dale on some of those warm Fall afternoons at Kenan Stadium. He's the one who trotted on the field when it was fourth down, amid a chorus of boos. The entrance of the punter is not a particularly happy occasion.

Even though the boo birds meant nothing personal, it still made for an uneasy feeling for Dale. "Nobody who's behind his team wants to see the punter come in," he said. "It was weird. I never really felt that I was a football player."

Nevertheless, Dale did what he was supposed to. He thumped the ball at nearly a 40-yard clip for the Tar Heels. Not only did this keep the opponents backed up in their own territory, but it kept the stadium's birds honest, too.

During the spring semester, Dale moved his headquarters from Kenan to Boshamer

Stadium, where he was a fixture in the outfield of UNC baseball teams for three years. His exploits on the diamond earned him a pro contract with the New York Mets, for whom he played in the minors last year.

It took only one season in the minors for Dale to realize that punting was the career of the future. "I'm lucky as hell I had this to fall back on," he explained.

Dale feels he has a good chance to get the New Orleans job. "Their punter (Tony Blanchard) led the league last year, but his return average was high. He doesn't hang the ball up high enough, and that's what I do best," he explained.

The Nyack, N.Y. native learned about the Saints' punting difficulties by watching the NFL games on TV. He put in a call to Jim Shively, a former UNC defensive back coach, now a member of the New Orleans staff.

Lydecker impressed the team's brass enough to earn the free agent contract, and now he's eagerly awaiting the beginning of training camp next month.

Dale signed with the Mets last May, and

by virtue of his December, 1974 graduation date, became the first UNC student to take advantage of the new rule allowing an athlete to turn pro in one sport and still be eligible for collegiate participation in another.

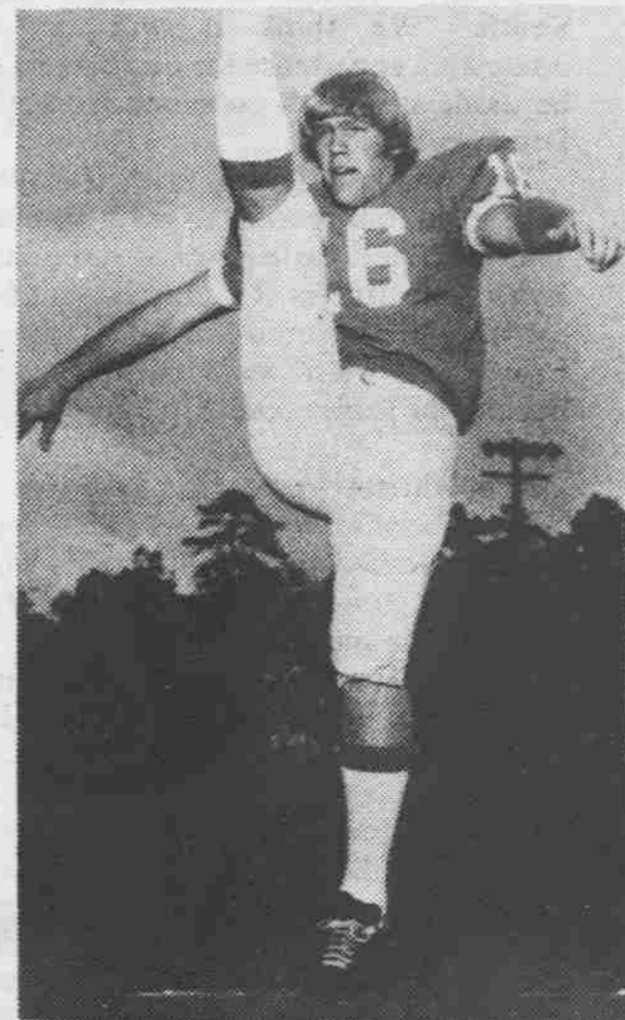
The Mets sent him off Batavia in the Class A New York League, last summer, where Dale hit over .300 and was named to the all-league team.

Dale was not particularly taken with minor league baseball.

The Mets didn't seem too impressed with Dale either. Though he was the only Met minor leaguer to hit over .300, they had him ticketed for Wisconsin and another Class A team. "I was really disappointed," he said. "When you're 23 and don't move up fast, it's time to think about getting out."

Dale seems to think he's made the right decision. His hard work and confidence might just surface on the turf at New Orleans' domed stadium come next fall.

Oh, yes. A little advice for your frustrated minor league baseballers. If all else fails, drop back and punt.



Dale Lydecker

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