

PAUL GEIS

T&FN Interview by Garry Hill

Oregon fans became rather attached to Steve Prefontaine during his four-year tenure as king of the collegiate (and, incidentally, national) distance scene. And as soon as it was realized that his eligibility would soon be up, a replacement was needed.

Stepping (or pushed?) into the breach was transfer Paul Geis of Rice (they rhyme). Geis seemed to fit right into the Pre mold—not only was he fast with his feet, but he was also quick with the tongue, and knew how to keep the customers satisfied.

And satisfied they have been. Since donning the lemon-and-lime of the Ducks this year, Geis hasn't lost an outdoor race, and in mid-April ripped off a superb 12:55.8 for three.

Typically bubbly and exuberant following his feat, Geis titillated T&FN with his Texan twang:

Geis: You know what I ran my last 220 in—25.8! I swear, it was the easiest race I've ever run in my life. I was so psyched. I don't know how I did it. I really don't, because I'm not in that good shape yet. Everybody's been telling me how John Ngeno was going to blow me off the track. All year long—even people on my team. So I had a lot of pressure on me. I just pulled it out. I really don't know how I did it.

T&FN: You were running pretty easily?

Geis: We went out so super fast. I just sat on him. I had this big strategy you see. I was going to sit back 30 yards behind him and let him go out fast and let him come back to me. But after that first 65, I tucked in behind him and next thing I know we're doing 63s.

T&FN: What if you had just dropped back of the pace then and waited for him. Wouldn't he have come back?

Geis: Yeah, probably, but by then I didn't see any reason to drop back. Hey! I haven't even been able to work out this week. I've been sorta dead meat. Mentally dead. I'm not alive any more.

T&FN: Anyhow, let's do a Paul Geis interview.

Geis: What are you going to say about me?

T&FN: Nothing. You're going to do the talking.

Geis: Just don't make any of those Pre comparisons. I'm so fed up with that bullshit around here. I'm just getting tired of it.

Old Pre's gonna set the American Record this weekend. He's tired of all the hype I've been getting. He's been training his butt off for the last two weeks for this six. He won't run me in the mile. I wanted to run him in the mile because he's a

natural rabbit. I prefer to sit back—not that I have that good speed, but against him it'd be fun.

T&FN: Will he break 27:00?

Geis: Probably. He's going to have to set an AR.

T&FN: He must have been surprised with your 12:55.

Geis: Ha-ha-ha. I know, I know. I dug it. We probably won't race until this summer over in Europe, unless he decides to run in the AAU. I want to run in the AAU for sure.

T&FN: Do you want to run in the US-USSR meet?

Geis: I don't know about the Russians. Originally I was going to, but then Pre was telling me about Durham—90° heat and 95% humidity. It sounds like a shaft to wait two weeks for the meet, but of course the AAU has its moratorium on travel permits.

I really don't want to travel with the AAU. I did that last summer and I was the little bastard of the tour. I really was. A troublemaker.

T&FN: What originally prompted you to go to Oregon?

Geis: I came out here for the NCAA and FOT and I really dug the running atmosphere. But I remember at the time I thought, "This is a drag." We couldn't find anything to do. I wasn't old enough to go into the bars.

I went back home and I just realized that there was no running atmosphere in Houston. Like zero. I just split. It was really bad. My father was mad at me, he didn't want me to give up my scholarship at Rice. He took my car away from me. But then he gave me another one, so what the hell. Hey! Are you going to make me look ridiculous in this article?

T&FN: No, just "telling it like it is."

Geis: I don't know if you've noticed, but I've gone out of my way to try and get rid of this Pre image for the press. I'm acting real modest and all that. Have you noticed?

T&FN: Yeah, sure.

Geis: I'm really getting sick of all this crap about, "Pre ran this at this age and you're running such and such," or, "When are you gonna beat him?" you know. I'll tell you what. Make me look real modest in this article. Why don't you do that? I don't want to come across as an egotistical bastard.

T&FN: Personally, what do you think of Pre?

Geis: Is this for print?

T&FN: No.

Geis: Well, . . .

T&FN: Well, what do you think of him for print?

Geis: He's a great runner. Don't say great, just say really good. He's alright.

T&FN: Does he work out with you?

Geis: Hardly at all any more. I don't work out *that* hard. Every once in a while I try to burn and it just burns me out. Last year, I'd just sit on him in workouts. He'd do all the work and he'd pull me through all these great 1320 workouts. So this year he hasn't been.

I'm gonna have to talk him into doing some workouts together: "OK rabbit—let's do 1320s, 65, 64, 63, 62." I bet you thought Ngeno was going to beat me.

T&FN: No, not me.

Geis: Wait a minute, let me get my T&FN. Here it is—*Baby The Reign Must Fall*: "Smooth Ngeno, unless he decides to win the three-mile instead."

T&FN: How about that.

Geis: I got off on it. Really got me psyched up. I got my magazine just in time to read it before the race. I underlined it.

You're crazy to pick me over Hartnett. Hartnett's a really good runner. He has closing speed—that's what track's all about. You gotta be able to come back hard. Even if you go out hard.

Hey, wait a minute. Let's get this thing organized. Why don't you ask me some straight questions and I'll give you some straight answers. □



"I couldn't stop grinning," admitted cocky Paul Geis. "I knew I had the race won." As he revealed to photog Jeff Johnson afterwards, he stepped out from behind John Ngeno with less than a lap left so Johnson would have a clear shot of him.