

BUSTER REIGNS IN SPAIN

Craig "Buster" Mottram is back home in Geelong after four and a half months overseas racing the world's best athletes. I was fortunate to catch up with Craig for a bit of a chat about his experiences on the elite European track circuit.

N.M. Craig, welcome home. Twenty weeks overseas training and racing - it must be great to be back home in Geelong?

C.M. Yes, it's very good to be back. I left Australia in the middle of May, just after the Flemington Road Race, spent a few weeks training in San Diego then onto the European season. My trip was pretty up and down. Probably the toughest part of the year was lasting the four and a half months away, so that was an achievement in itself. However, being able to train and race overseas for such an extended period will certainly stand me in good stead for future trips away.

N.M. Last year you became a little homesick and came home a few weeks early. What was the difference this time?

C.M. Probably because I didn't go as well as I would have liked in Europe and I was always looking for the next opportunity to prove myself. Also, the World Cup in Madrid was the last official race for everyone and I really wanted to head back to Australia on a good note. The training I was doing over the last 4 - 6 weeks was really encouraging and that kept me really motivated and focused as well.

N.M. Would you go over for that length of time again?

C.M. If it was needed. Next year I may go over a little later so that I'm not away for so long before the World Championships in Paris. The length of time away is not an issue anymore - I feel like it's my second home now. This time Lauren (Hewitt) was with me as well as my parents for some of the time so that made it all the easier for me.

N.M. Mark Fountain told us all about Lake Laguna and how primitive it was. Your thoughts?

C.M. It was pretty bare and primitive. When I was there I hated it but looking back it was quite an adventure and lots of great stories came out of our stay. Whether it was the greatest place to train, I don't know. However, I got really fit and strong there and it probably made the London stay not so bad because Laguna was such a sh#@ hole. Laguna made us really look forward to London. I'm sure Mark told you lots of interesting stories about Laguna but we also got lots of important training done. As we left Mark, Mike and I thought we'll never come back here again but looking back I think it was beneficial.

N.M. After Mark Fountain and Mike Power went home, who were your training partners overseas?

C.M. Anthony Whiteman, who is part of Alan Storey's group. Sonia O'Sullivan also ran with me and Nick Bideau rode his bike while I did some of the longer runs and faster sessions. Also, Benita Johnson was living just up the road with her husband, Cam so I trained with her sometimes. There was no shortage of people to run with. It was a really good set-up. We would do our training, then I would go home and catch up with Lauren. Later, all the group would then catch up at a pub for a few laughs so it was a really good environment.

N.M. Did you do some of Alan Storey's sessions this time?

C.M. Yes. I'm not sure if you know but Scivo and I are no longer working together and Nick Bideau is now coaching me. Since Manchester I have been doing Nick and Alan Storey's training sessions. I was training with Alan's group on Tuesday nights and Alan and Nick would organize my other sessions depending on what races I had coming up. As for the change in coaching, I just think I need an environment where everyone's single focus is on my performance rather than conflicts distracting me from being the best runner I can be, whether that be the best in the world or top ten in the world. At times, I have shown the potential to be the best in the world and I want to give it a 100% crack at getting there. If that means staying in Geelong and training hard, I'll do it. If it means going over to London and training there, I'll do it. Scivo and I have come a long way in the last five years and tasted many successes. Unfortunately, a decision had to be made because, in the end, no one was happy with the working situation.

N.M. The Commonwealth Games. All the time spent in the Village waiting for your race. Did you find it hard to cope?

C.M. Didn't cope with it at all. I've done the Olympics, World Championships, the World Indoors, the World Cross-Country - I've done all the major events but this was the first time I've gone to a major event thinking that I could win or at least get a medal. But they cancelled our semi-final and I was left in the Village just waiting for the third last event on the last day. Everyone else had either got a medal or had gone home or were partying and the pressure on me was building up. I was just sitting there going over the event in my mind and the more I thought about my race, the harder it sounded and the bigger the hole I dug for myself. Finally, when I did get out there it wasn't just running anymore - it was more like life and death and I wasn't able to deal with it. The funny thing was that all I had to do was stand on the start line and run twelve and a half laps the best I could and I was not able to do that! Basically, I over-complicated a pretty simple task. For me the best way to approach a race is to be pretty relaxed in the lead-up, then start to focus when I

begin warming up. Sure, there's a place for visualization but if you're doing it for 24 hours a day for over a week, it can overwhelm you.

N.M. When you were standing on the starting line, did you think, 'I'm going to struggle here?'

C.M. I knew I was having trouble coping but actually when I walked out on the track I was more relaxed than I had been for over a week in the Village because it was me out there doing what I do best. I even had a bit of a joke on the starting line with John Mayock, the British guy, so I was pretty relaxed. I almost thought I could turn it around. I did what we had discussed and went off with the Kenyans and ran between them so there would not be three of them dictating the pace. Then at about 7 - 8 laps in I got a bit tired. This was the time to really dig deep and commit 100% and I was not able to do it. And at that level, if you let even a small gap appear or a small doubt enter your head, they're gone. You can't let them go for a few seconds, then say OK, I'll work hard now and get back on - it just doesn't happen. If I had given the race 100% and was beaten you can't do anything about that but the most disappointing thing for me was that I feel that I didn't give it everything I had because I let circumstances that were within my control get to me.

N.M. With the 1500 metres and the 5000 metres being the last events on most Championship schedules, it will be something that you will have to learn to come to grips with.

C.M. That's right. Every Golden League Meet I have been to my race has been one of the premier events, not because of me but because of guys like El Geurrouj. With these races you fly in the day before, there's not much talk until you arrive at the meet hotel, you don't have to arrive at the track until the last minute so everything is really relaxed. But at the Championships you are eating and living with your competition for day after day.

N.M. It must have been tough seeing Youcef Abdi winning a bronze medal in the 1500 metres, an event you could have contested?

C.M. Yes and no. I was almost a little bit jealous but I think that's normal. Since then I have got to know Youcef a lot better and he's a really good guy and really deserves his successes. I also feel a bit disappointed that Youcef hasn't got the recognition he deserves. We have Said Aouita coming to Australia as Head Distance Coach and all I hear him saying is that I'm doing the wrong event - I should be doing the 1500 metres instead of the 5000 metres. He should be looking at a guy like Youcef who is a great talent and has run 3:36 this year. Youcef is also a real threat in slower, tactical Championship races because he's got a fast finish. He's a bit like Kris McCarthy. I was sitting in the stands watching Kris McCarthy's Commonwealth Games race and after a slowish first lap I knew he would be dangerous because he comes home like a train.

N.M. Post Games - how did you bounce back?

C.M. I went to Scotland with Lauren and her parents for a few days - we had a little shack up in the hills so that was a pretty quiet, out of the way place. Lauren had done pretty well at the Games so she was pretty chirpy and wanted to live it up a bit while I was wanting to find a hole to crawl into so I could forget about my race. But with her encouragement and a couple of easy days training up there, I was ready to go once we got back to London. I spoke to Nick about the race and he gave me a bit of a kick in the backside and said, "people will very quickly forget about Manchester if you can regroup in the next few weeks and then win the World Cup." Funnily, ever since I've been back everyone has said, "Well done on your great World Cup win" but no one ever mentions the Commonwealth Games. However, it's something I still have bad memories of - my disappointing effort at Manchester, even though I learnt a lot from the experience. I guess, like a lot of sports, in the public's eye, we are only as good as our last run.

N.M. You also spent some time at St. Moritz.

C.M. Yes. I spent five days there checking out the training facilities. St. Moritz is without doubt, the best place I have ever been to train. It's completely different to Falls Creek. It's at a higher altitude (1850 metres), there's a lake, there's a city with shops and lots of things to do, a four lane synthetic track, a gymnasium, a 50 metre indoor swimming pool. It's been set up as a training camp for the Swiss Institute of Sport so there's everything a runner could want. I will go back there next year.

N.M. Will you use it as a training base before next year's World Championships?

C.M. Yes. I will go back, maybe in June and spend three or four weeks there, then go back to London and base myself there for four weeks and do some races, then go back to St. Moritz for ten or twelve days altitude training leading into the World Championships. Even though I only spent 5 days at St. Moritz, I reckon it was beneficial in that I probably got a slight altitude training effect and I was able to check things out for next year.

N.M. Did you see Viktor?

C.M. No. I sent him an e-mail but didn't get a response. He lives not far from St. Moritz but there are towns everywhere up in the mountains. It's a different world. When we drove in there I was feeling a little sick and I thought I was car-sick. Then we drove over a rise and saw a sign that said we were at 2980 metres, which is almost twice the altitude of Falls Creek. When I went for my first run at St. Moritz I really struggled even though it's only a couple of hundred metres higher than Falls Creek. Another difference is that the trails are all man-made so the footing is much easier than the rough trails at Falls.

N.M. Let's go onto the World Cup in Madrid. I understand that Paul Bitok of Kenya had a bit of a chat with you in the call-room before the race?

C.M. Yes, he wished me good luck and then said that I was the man to beat. He knew that I had not run as well as I'd hoped and that most of the other guys were pretty tired from a long season. I was tired too but I wanted to finish on a high note and to walk off that track satisfied. As soon as he said that I knew that everyone was expecting a slow race and they don't want to have to work too hard. There was a lot of money up for grabs as well as the prestige and many of these guys had been making good money throughout the year while I was back in the field just trying to hang on. So this was a great opportunity for me to race against quality runners who weren't ready and committed for a fast pace.

N.M. So your tactics were set?

C.M. Yes, two weeks before the race Nick told me that this was the way to run the World Cup so we structured my training around what I would do. In a lot of the training sessions I led the pack and made sure I was running 61 - 62 second laps so that I knew what it felt like. I also knew what it felt like to run a 58 second lap then go back to 61 - 62 seconds. However, I did feel a little pressure because in the back of my mind I was thinking, what if I can't drop them? But then I thought that if I run 61 second laps for seven and a half laps, out the front in the gusting wind, then no matter what the result, I will walk off the track happy.

N.M. How windy was it?

C.M. It was gusty but I have run some of my best races in the wind. One of the things Nick said before the race was to treat it like a cross-country race and make it hard for the others.

N.M. Tell me about the 'commitment run' after your World Cup win?

C.M. How did you find out about that?

N.M. I have my spies!

C.M. It's something Chris Wardlaw said to me after the Sydney Olympics. The morning after my race he came into my room and got me out of bed and said, "you've got to do the commitment run, a run to test if you're really serious about the sport". The length of the commitment run isn't that important - it's getting out there, usually after a 'big night', that's important. I was doing it this time because I didn't want to get stiff and sore on the plane trip home. Actually, Mona once told me not to run more than an hour before getting on a plane because you pull up really tight after getting off the plane. I even got Youcef Abdi and Peter Nowill, the steeple-chaser to come with me on the commitment run. I ran the whole hour with a smile on my face and I didn't shut up. We had been out celebrating after my race and I got to bed at about 4:30 am. and the run was at 9:00 am. so I didn't have a lot of sleep. However, even though I'd done a bit of dancing, I didn't have anything to drink because I was emotionally drained from my race and the long European season.

N.M. The US\$30 000 prize money for first in the World Cup was also a nice way to finish your European season.

C.M. Yeah. As you know, Neil, I have just bought a house in Geelong and the money was sure handy. I don't run for the money but after struggling a bit this year in the money races it was a huge incentive. Money wise, I would have been happy with US\$7 000 for running in the top 3. However, I don't know how long it will take for me to get the money.

N.M. You haven't got the money yet?

C.M. No, I will have to wait for all the drug tests to clear and that might take three or four months. But when it does arrive it will pay for the furniture and the first five years of mortgage repayments if needed so that takes a lot of pressure off me financially. That way I can come home relaxed and just concentrate on running well rather than worrying about how I'm going to survive. For example, in two weeks time I'm running the Burnie 10 kilometre road race and before the World Cup win I might have been desperate to win the \$3000 first prize to help pay a few bills. Now I can just go down there and use it as a training race where the prize money is a bonus rather than a necessity. That way I'm doing things to better my running career rather than just trying to make ends meet.

N.M. So, have you been shopping for furniture in the last few days?

C.M. Yes, I have bought most of the major stuff although I still have lots of bits and pieces to add, the sort of stuff that makes a house a home but that will come over time. But I didn't want to go overboard to start. This is my first home and half the fun is gradually buying things that you really like. Lauren and I had a lot of fun picking things out.

N.M. Did you buy a big-screen TV and the recliner rocker for relaxing after a hard training session?

C.M. No - I've got a 70 cm. flat screen TV and a DVD player, so that's pretty good. I also got an L - shaped suede couch which is really comfortable. It's not really a huge place so there's not room for too much furniture.

N.M. And you're overlooking beautiful Queens Park.

C.M. Yes, a great place to train. I can walk out my front door and begin running. We also felt that it was a great investment. When I'm in Europe I can rent it out and hopefully it will be increasing in value.

N.M. What are you doing recovery wise after a tough European season?

C.M. I'll have a couple of easy weeks. Since I've been back I have run every day. I probably ran over a 100 kilometres last week just plodding around with no runs over one hour. A couple of times I ran twice a day. Basically, I run how I feel. If I wake up and feel like McDonalds, I'll eat McDonalds - if I feel like going for a run, I'll go for a run. It's more a mental break than a physical rest but my body tends to get sore if I have a few days off, then try to start running again. I won't be back on the track until the middle of November because the track is so structured with timed laps and it can create pressure and performance feedback that I don't need at this stage of the year.

N.M. I understand that you're doing your first quality session this afternoon?

C.M. Yeah. I'm doing a fartlek involving 6 or 7 three minute efforts, no quicker than three minute kilometre pace. I'm in really good shape at the moment so I don't want to let myself go. As I mentioned before, I'm going down to Burnie and I don't want to run like an idiot.

N.M. I suppose that because the European and Australian seasons overlap, you can't afford to take too much time off?

C.M. Yeah. One of the hard things the Australian athletes have to deal with is achieving performance standards so that we can be selected in teams and receive funding to travel overseas. But I look forward to competing in Australia because I've got a lot of mates on the Australian circuit and I enjoy travelling interstate to meets. Luckily, I have achieved many of the performance standards on the European circuit so now I can do the races here and enjoy them without have to run a certain time. That means that I can use our summer as a training base to set me up for another European season. For the last few years I have just followed the summer sun around the world. I suppose it sounds like a pretty good life style?

N.M. Eighteen months ago you were running about 140 kilometres in an average week. What are you doing now?

C.M. In that time I have become a lot stronger physically even though I'm not running much more than 140 km. most weeks. In San Diego earlier this year I was running 155 - 165 kilometres a week but that's a bit of an exception. Now I'm able to back up week in, week out much better whereas eighteen months ago I would run a couple of 140 km. weeks, then would have to back it off to 110 - 120 kilometres to recover. Now I can crank out 150 kilometre weeks and feel strong in all the sessions which means I'm now so much stronger. I also haven't had any niggles to my knee and my achilles for a long time which is another sign that I'm coping with the workload.

N.M. I've noticed that your easy runs are now at a quicker tempo. Have you made a conscience effort to train at a faster pace?

C.M. No, I reckon that I'm just so much stronger and fitter now. I don't find the runs any harder even though many of the guys I run with have mentioned that I'm running quicker. If I can run a little faster but not work any harder, why not? Nick has mentioned to me that if I'm feeling good in the last 10 - 15 minutes of a run and I think I can pick it up without really exerting myself, do it. Sometimes I actually feel better running a bit faster rather than slowing down. It's certainly an area where I think I can improve - running a little quicker on the easy runs and picking it up for the middle section of my longer runs will hopefully make me a bit stronger.

N.M. You were talking before about the Grand Prix races and Hicham El Guerrouj. Has he got everyone bluffed or is he that much better than everyone else?

C.M. I reckon he's pretty good. He's a fair bit better than I am at the moment. I was speaking to Steve Ovett in Oslo and he said someone needed to get in front of him, to pressure him. But it's easier said than done. He's running 51 - 52 seconds for the first lap so I would have to run a 400 metre P.B. to be in front after one lap and that would be just stupid. But for people like Lagat who are hanging on until the final 200 then falling away because El Guerrouj is stronger, I can't see why they don't try something else with a lap to go, try putting some pressure on him. But I can't see anybody beating him off a fast pace at the moment, especially when there are pace-makers. Quite often in other races, when a pace-maker drops out, the pace drops off slightly for a while but with El Guerrouj that is the sign for him to take off and all of a sudden he's got 5 metres and he's gone. That's something that Nick and I have been working on, being ready for the crucial stage of the race where the break may occur. Unfortunately, at the moment, I'm 'stuffed' and just hanging on when the big guys like El Guerrouj put the foot down.

N.M. And he's got fantastic rhythm.

C.M. Yes, he's very smooth to run I was going to say with but I should say behind. He's not a big guy and he's got pretty stocky legs but when he's running he has a beautiful long stride very much like Morcelli. And he always seems to be relaxed. You only see him straining when he's under pressure in the last 30 - 40 metres of a world record attempt.

N.M. What do you think he'd run for the 3000 and 5000 metres if he had a serious attempt?

C.M. I think he's run 7.23 or 7.24 for the 3 k. a few years ago so I think he's capable of going close to Komen's record now. With the 5 k. I reckon he can run under 13 minutes first up. However, I'm not sure he can get the record as it's pretty outrageous (Gebreselassie's 5000 metres World Record is an amazing 12.39.36)

N.M. Apparently he trains incredibly hard.

C.M. I'm not exactly sure what he does but I'm told that apart from his training partners who help with pace, he doesn't like to have others on the track with him. He also doesn't run longer than about 70 minutes but the pace is pretty quick. They start off reasonably slow but the pace soon picks up. Actually, he's a really nice guy. In fact, he's invited me to go to Morocco to train.

N.M. Are you going to take him up on his offer?

C.M. No, I'm not going to Morocco. John Mayock went to Morocco but wasn't allowed to train with El Guerrouj. He trained in the same area but didn't see the 'great man' train.

N.M. Are you going to run the Zatopek this year?

C.M. Yes..... There's one other option just before the Zatopek but at this stage I won't say too much about that. At the moment I'm down to run the Zatopek. I plan to do two weeks at Falls Creek in the lead-up. Apparently, Creighton, Letherby and Troopy all want have a crack at the Australian 10 km. record so it would be stupid to miss out on a chance like that.

N.M. Hopefully the weather will be a bit more helpful than last year?

C.M. Yeah, it couldn't be any worse. The Zatopek's a great race with a lot of history behind it so I'm keen to have another go at it.

N.M. What's happened to the bike shorts?

C.M. Actually, I'm undefeated in bike shorts. I should bring them back out.

N.M. You're the only winner of the Zatopek who has worn bike shorts and racing flats.

C.M. Yep, that's right. I still train in them sometimes because they're very comfortable. However, they weren't a great look in Europe so I put them away for races. Also, I'm not going well enough at the moment to start a fashion trend like that.

N.M. Said Aouita is the new Head Coach of Distance Running in Australia. Have you spoken to him as yet?

C.M. No, not at all, although I hear he keeps talking about me. Apparently, he is going to fly down to Melbourne so we can talk over a few things. It will be really interesting to hear what he suggests we do. It's also good that he's here because it gives distance running a high profile. We have a lot of talent coming through in Geelong and Australia at the moment, people like Benita Johnston, Susie and Michael Power, Youcef Abdi, Peter Nowill, Ritchie Jeremiah, Mark Fountain, the list goes on with people who could represent Australia in the next few years and become top international athletes. I think Athletics Australia has recognised this and that's why they've brought out Said so he can structure a program that will help us take the next step from being good in Geelong to being good in Victoria to being good in Australia to then going overseas. Aouita will also be great because he's been there and done it all. He knows what it's like to be at lap 10 on World Record pace in a 5 km. race. He knows what it's like to win an Olympic Gold. I'm really looking forward to running a few ideas past him as well as listening to what he's got to say.

N.M. Aouita was an expert in altitude training which should also be of great benefit to you.

C.M. Yeah. I don't think he's been to Falls Creek but it will be interesting to see what he thinks of it. It's probably still my favourite place to train because it's in Australia but it's clearly different to places like St. Moritz.

N.M. Are you having two stints at Falls Creek, one before and one after the Zatopek?

C.M. Yes. Before the Zatopek for two weeks and another stint from January 1 to January 25. Then maybe another few weeks at the end of February.

N.M. According to Dick Telford, Aouita would alternate two and a half weeks at altitude with two and a half weeks at sea level. After doing this three times he would always run super fast, often breaking World Records.

C.M. Yes. The studies show that there's no benefit after three and a half weeks. After that, people just tend to run themselves into the ground and get really fatigued. They also reckon you can compete really well a day or two off the mountain, or days 7 - 8 or days 18 - 21. They're the times for peak performance off the mountain.

N.M. Aouita would race 18 - 21 days after training at altitude.

C.M. When I ran a 3.52 mile in Oslo this year I raced 20 days after altitude training in San Diego. For that race I felt awesome and was kicking myself that I didn't go with El Guerrouj. I also raced the London Grand Prix two days after training at St. Moritz and felt really good. I haven't done the week yet but the Zatopek will probably be a week after getting back from Falls Creek so I can test it out there. That's what we need to do - work out what works best for me.

N.M. The black spikes you wore at the World Cup. What's the story with those.

C.M. They're just Nike's new spikes. I know - they look like footy boots but they feel really light and comfortable.

N.M. Thanks very much for your time, Craig and all the best for the up-coming summer season in Australia.

C.M. My pleasure, Neil.