

ONE SPECIAL DAY

For most of us, the 28th of August 2004 was just another day. However, not for Craig Mottram, for at 9:05pm. on a warm Athens' night, he would take his place on the start line in the Olympic 5000 metre Final against the greatest athletes on the planet. With the world watching on, six years of dedication, perseverance and damn hard work would be put to the ultimate test. Now back home in Australia after seven long months training and racing on the other side of the world, Craig has been good enough to allow us a peak inside the world of an Olympian as he prepares for his 'one special day'.

SATURDAY 28th AUGUST 2004

8:30am. Woke after a very restless night's sleep. I reckon I slept for an hour at the most and I felt my arms sweating most of the night. Kept trying to remind myself that this was going to be just another race but there were too many thoughts running through my mind and I found it very hard to get to sleep unlike the night after the heat and the next night, when I fell asleep easily.

9:00am. Headed over to the dining hall for breakfast. Ate muesli, toast and some fruit – just the usual pre-race food that works for me. Unfortunately, the only coffee in the Olympic Village was very ordinary so had a cup of tea instead. Started drinking my sports drink. Even though the temperature would be fine for my night race, I need to make sure that I'm well hydrated so will be drinking sports drink and water through out the day. For a couple of days after the heat I was drinking Endura Optimiser, a carbohydrate drink to help recovery and aid carbohydrate loading. Now it's the day of the race, I will start using the Endura Electrolyte Mix, as I have been doing for all my races. Will also carry a water bottle around with me during the day.

10:00am. Arrived back at my apartment and tried to relax. Watched some of the morning's events on TV but avoided the athletics as I didn't want to think about running just yet and become too nervous.

11:00am. Went for a very easy 15 minute jog over to the warm-up track, which was only about two minutes from where I was staying, just to get the legs ticking over. Lauren (Hewitt) came with me and she chatted about everything but running to take my mind off tonight's race. I don't have a massage on the day I race so had a shower and tried to relax by reading the book that was made into the movie, "Black Hawk Down". However, I'm not great at sitting down for long periods to read and found it hard to concentrate. Consequently, not too many pages were read.

12:00am. Gave up on reading and borrowed "Crocodile Dundee" from Lauren's room-mates, Jana Pittman, Tamsyn Lewis, Sarah Jamieson and Bronwyn Thompson. This old Paul Hogan movie was just what was needed as it was very funny and it killed a couple of hours. The middle of the day can really drag when you're racing late at night so it was great to find something that took the mind off what lay ahead. Because all the hard training has been completed, waiting to race at the major championships can involve a lot of resting and just hanging around, so it's important to keep the stress levels down by doing things that take your mind off running.

3:00pm. Went back to the dining hall and ate some bread, a banana and a salad – had lots of tomato in the salad, as I love tomatoes.

3:40pm. Nic Bideau arrived in the dining hall and we had a quick chat about the race. However, we have been practising and talking about what needed to be done for the

last twelve months. Obviously, there were minor changes in how the race might go because of who had made the final but basically, my plan is to relax early, follow whatever happens and try to be there with a couple of laps to go. We knew that I could run the last kilometre in 2.24 off 13 minute 5000 metre pace. However, it was unlikely that it would be that quick. We also felt that I could run 1.53 – 1.54 for the last 800 metres, provided I was still there. Obviously, the way Olympic Finals are run, still being there was going to be the difficult part. On race days I might only see Nic for 30 minutes or so and that could be in the warm-up area before the race. For Athens, he had Benita Johnson and Hayley McGregor competing so he needed to see them as well. He was also the Distance Coach for the Australian Team so he was always around if I needed to catch up with him.

4:00pm. Went back to my apartment and had a lie down for 60 minutes although I did not sleep.

5:00pm. Headed back to the dining hall for a snack. My routine is to eat 4 hours before a race. Just had some bread and banana and sports drink. Have stopped having toast as it takes a little longer to digest that plain bread.

5:45pm. Back to the apartment and started organising gear and getting ready.

6:00pm. Had a 15 minute hot and cold shower to invigorate and wake up my body. With so much resting and lounging around, the body can become a little listless and the hot and cold shower flushes out any lactic acid that might still be in the muscles and snaps me back into 'go' mode. However, I only have a brief 10 second blast of cold water so that the cold is not too uncomfortable. Took my time as I did not want to arrive at the Olympic Stadium too soon as there was no shade in the warm-up area.

7:00pm. Caught the bus from the Village to the Olympic Stadium with American 5000 metre finalist, Tim Broe and Nic. A pretty quite trip with not too much talk going on. Arrived 30 minutes later.

7:45pm. Started warming-up. Just the usual routine – an easy 15 minute jog around the warm-up track infield, some light stretches, some drills and only two strides because we were going to be in the call room for 45 minutes and I did not want to leave all my warm-up out on the warm-up track. Also, I wanted to leave myself some things to do in the call room so that I was not just sitting around getting cold.

8:15pm. Went into the first call room, which was situated at the warm-up track, just 200 metres away from the main stadium. The official checks our numbers, bags, confiscates any mobile phones or walkmans (these are given back after the race). Then, all the 5000 metre finalists walk single file down a huge ramp to the second call room under the main stadium, where our spikes are checked. There's a TV on in the corner showing Kelly Holmes winning her second gold medal in the 1500 metres. However, I concentrate on doing a few stretches and staying loose. Can see Bekele and El Guerrouj. Because of their culture, both are very 'touchy feely' type people so they kiss and hug as a greeting. I give them a quick nod from the other side of the room and keep a pretty wide berth. After his fantastic win in the 1500 metres, El Guerrouj is looking pretty relaxed. In fact, the call room before a major middle-distance race is a pretty quiet place. Most athletes give each other a nod or a wry smile, if you can manage one but that's about it. Bekele and his two countrymen, Gebremariam and Berhanu sit quietly together. Will they work as a team like the Ethiopians did in the 10 000 metres? El Guerrouj sits quietly by

himself, occasionally flicking through a small book that I assume is the Koran. It's funny, but most of us look as though we're about to be marched out and shot rather than run a race.

8:45pm. Leave the second call room after only about 5 minutes and we're led under the stadium where there's 70 – 80 metres of athletic track where we complete our warm-ups with a few more strides.

8:55pm. We're led out onto the track for the start of the Olympic 5000 metre final. While the atmosphere is not quite as electric as it was for Sydney, there is still a huge buzz as the crowd erupts. This is it! This is the moment I have been working so hard for over the last six years. As we walk down the back straight, Borzakovski is completing his victory lap after winning the 800 metre final. The crowd is going bananas and Borzakovski looks like he's floating on air. I'm ready to go but there's a victory ceremony for another American gold medal so we have to stand around and wait for that. Fortunately, the officials can see that we're all pretty toey so we're allowed to jog around the start area.

9:05pm. Finally, we're called to the line and the camera pans past each athlete. I give a wave and a smile as I'm introduced to the crowd. This is the most relaxed I've been all day. Once the warm-up starts and I'm moving around, the nerves tend to disappear pretty quickly. This is a situation that I've been in many times before and while I can't control what is about to happen, I'm feeling pretty comfortable. I keep telling myself that this is just another race and that I'm in great shape. It's the days leading up to the Olympic final that the race can be built up into something that it's not. Funnily enough, as the starter called, "take your marks", the strangest thought flashes into my mind. Before I go to the track for any race, I always brush my teeth and tonight I have forgotten to do this. Seconds before the Olympic 5000 metre final, for a brief second, I'm thinking, "#%&#, I've forgotten to brush my teeth!" However, I must stress that forgetting to brush my teeth had absolutely no effect on how I raced. Anyway, the gun fires and we're off. The first 200 metres passes in a tick over 32 seconds then the pace drops rapidly and we're jogging, going through the next two laps in 74 and 72 seconds. We pass one kilometre in 2.58 and even though it's really slow, it's hard to fully relax because I'm on edge, waiting for something to happen and someone to pick up the pace. There are even a few little chuckles coming from the group as the American guy, Tim Broe says, "Come on guys, this is the Olympic Final, they'll be booing us soon!" Obviously, because the top guys could win off a fast pace or a sprint finish, they are not too keen to do all the early leading. However, the pace soon picks up and we're now rolling out laps of 62, 61, 62. I'm feeling comfortable, I'm positioned really well, just behind Bekele and El Guerrouj, the athletes that are going to be there at the finish. If I can relax in behind them, when the race gets serious, I will be already involved. El Guerrouj sits nicely tucked in behind the leaders and looks really comfortable. He's a real 'Rolls Royce' and always looks so smooth. In fact, he's one of those runners who never seems to be breathing heavily. Bekele too looks smooth although he runs with a choppy style and his short legs seem to go at a million miles an hour. It's interesting the way the different athletes prepare for a big race. Between the 5000 metre heat and tonight's final I just did a couple of easy 30 minute runs and some relaxed, rhythm 200's in about 30 seconds so that I don't accumulate any lactate acid. On the other hand, Bekele and the other Ethiopians were still running hard one kilometre reps after the 10 000 metre final and hard 600 metre reps between the 5000 metre heats and tonight's final. We reach 3000

metres in just over 8.10 and I'm still feeling pretty good. We're about to enter the business end of the race. As we reach the fourth kilometre we're now in single file, a sure sign that the pace is starting to take a toll. I'm now starting to struggle and a couple of athletes pass me. A few doubts start to creep into my mind as the elastic band starts to slowly stretch and stretch. This is where I've got to hang on! For the last three laps I run 63, 64, 61. Unfortunately for me, Bekele and El Guerrouj run 61, 60 and 53, so the final 800 metres is pretty tough. They were kicking it down and still fighting for the gold, while I was dropping off with no chance to fight for a medal. In the Olympic heat, I was able to run 54 seconds for the last lap. When I ran 12.55 in London, I was able to run 55 seconds for the last lap so still being involved in the race up front can make a huge difference to your finishing laps. Initially, as I cross the line I'm not sure of my finishing position but I look up at the screen and I'm relatively happy with my 8th place. We were hoping for top five and even though the race did not pan out the way I'd hoped for, I ran as well as I could on the night. However, if I had come 8th and was two seconds behind the winner, I would have been a lot happier than I am now finishing 8th but unable to keep up after the fourth kilometre.

9:25pm. I leave the track and pass through the media. Chat to Maurie Plant, who was working with the BBC, then Pat Welsh from Channel 7. Everyone seems pretty excited about my run, even though I'm still not sure what to think. Going over the race, the first three guys, El Guerrouj, Bekele and Kipchoge, were always going to be pretty tough to beat. However, I reckon that fourth or fifth place was a realistic chance if I ran my best race.

10:00pm. Went for a cool-down run and caught up with Nic. We jogged together for a while and he summed up my race pretty well with, 'don't be too disappointed with your run, but don't be content with the outcome!' Leading up to Athens I had said to Lauren that after the Olympic Final, I didn't want to do any other races for a while but now I've started thinking about the 10 000 metres in Brussels in five days time. Continue my cool-down with Alistair Cragg, Tim Broe and Gebremariam, who also talk about Brussels.

11:30pm. Went back to the Olympic Village and had McDonalds, an ice-cream and a few drinks for the first time in ages. Normally, I'm really strict on my diet but after each major championship, I like to do 'normal' things for a week as a way to unwind.

2:00am. Went to bed thinking that I have no regrets: the last twelve months has been uninterrupted as far as training and racing goes, each race was a progression, my preparation was fantastic, my Olympic heat went perfectly and the final was solid and a great learning experience.

9:30am. Went for a solo 65 minute 'Commitment Run'. Ran at a very easy pace. A great chance to think over the last night's race.

RESULTS 2004 OLYMPIC 5000 METRE FINAL

1	El Guerrouj Hicham	MAR	13:14.39
2	Bekele Kenenisa	ETH	13:14.59
3	Kipchoge Eliud	KEN	13:15.10
4	Gebremariam Gebre-egziabher	ETH	13:15.35
5	Berhanu Dejene	ETH	13:16.92
6	Kibowen John	KEN	13:18.24
7	Tadesse Zersenay	ERI	13:24.31

8	Mottram Craig	AUS	13:25.70
9	Bellani Hicham	MAR	13:31.81
10	Saïdi-Sief Ali	ALG	13:32.57
11	Broe Tim	USA	13:33.06
12	Cragg Alistair Ian	IRL	13:43.06
13	Goumri Abderrahim	MAR	13:47.27
14	Moussaoui Samir	ALG	14:02.01
	Chebii Abraham	KEN	DNF

SPLITS / LEADER

1000m	Gebremariam Gebre-egziabher	2:58.46
2000m	Kipchoge Eliud	5:35.99
3000m	Bekele Kenenisa	8:10.89
4000m	Kipchoge Eliud	10:48.6