

CRAIG MOTTRAM – “THE BIG MAZUNGO”

To much of the world, he's known as “Buster”. But the Kenyans call him, “The Big Mazungo” (“The Big White Man”). Craig Mottram has gained the hard-earned respect of the formidable Africans through his confident manner, his fearless racing style, his results and his belief that he can challenge and beat them. The morning, after his emphatic victory over the highly credentialed Kenyan, Boniface Songok at 5000 metres in the Melbourne Track Classic, I spoke to Craig at the Book Talk Café in Richmond about the last twelve months and his plans for the future.

N.M. Craig, congratulations on your win last night. At this stage of the year, were you happy with how the race went and how you ran? (Ed. Off a muddling first 4 kms. Craig won in 13:32.67, running the last 600 metres in 1:24, (despite surging at 550 metres) the last 400 metres in 54 seconds and the last 200 metres in 26 seconds. Boniface Songok was second in 13:36.67)

C.M. Yes, the race was good last night. We just wanted to win first and foremost and to get through it without falling over. I'm probably not as fit as I have been but I'm certainly getting better at certain things that need to be improved for this year.

N.M. Obviously, against the very best you need to be able to race to your strengths but also be able cope with what the best might throw at you. What tactics and strategies are needed to beat the best Africans?

C.M. There are a lot of ways to beat them. If you are good enough, you can wait and wait, then out kick them or you can surprise them and try to establish a gap. However, you have to do it in certain ways. Last night I went with 550 to go, then again with 220 to go. The initial surge at 550 established a gap that Boniface was able to close but he wasn't able to respond when I went again at 220. In some races I might need to go at 900 out or 1100 metres out or maybe even further. In last year's Commonwealth Games 5000 metres I tried to go from about 1 km. out but then it was more of a wind-up rather than really wacking-in a hard surge. The gradual wind-up didn't work against Choge, so maybe, a more sudden change of pace is needed. I've got pretty good speed endurance, and while it might take a little longer for me to get up to top speed, I can hold it for a good distance, which a lot of the Africans don't like.

N.M. Do you practice these change of pace tactics in training?

C.M. No, it's something that has just developed. I haven't done anything much on the track since the World Cup except for the two indoor races in Boston and New York and the 3000 metres in Sydney a couple of weeks ago. We don't tend to do much on the track. Instead, I did the Quarters Session at Falls Creek last week, and I suppose that is a change of pace session in that you have to stop, turn and pick up the pace again at the end of the aqueduct turn-around points. The ability to change pace just comes from the strength derived from lots of the right sort of training.

(Ed. However, at the appropriate time, Craig will go to the track to rehearse tactics or strategies that may be used in upcoming races, as can be seen in the following excerpt from Nic Bideau's enlightening paper, “Coaching Middle and Long Distance Runners: A Commentary” Modern Athlete and Coach Volume 44 Number 3 July 2006.

“Closer to the big race, these type of workouts (interval or repetition training on the track) often mimic planned strategies due to be employed in a race whilst surrounding it with volume to ensure aerobic fitness is still maintained. Before the Melbourne Commonwealth Games 5000 metres, Mottram ran a series of 3 x 1600 metres. The first one was done in 4.20 (basically what we felt was around 10 000 metre race pace for him or more specifically, the slowest we could imagine the Commonwealth 5000 metres race being run at inside the last 2km.) The 2nd rep was to practice the tactic, which we hoped could take him clear of the Kenyans in the Melbourne 5000m. His training partner, England's Mo Farah, ran the first lap in 65 seconds before Mottram went to the lead, running the second lap faster, the 3rd lap faster again and once more increasing the pace on the last lap. He ran those last three laps in 59, 58 and 57 seconds for a final 1600 metre time of 3.59. He then eased back to 4.20 again for the 3rd rep and finished the workout by cruising 4 x 200 metres at 1500 metre race tempo with an easy 200 metre jog recovery. We felt he was ready for Ben Limo, and he was. But unfortunately for us, Augustine Choge had something else.”)

N.M. Talking of Falls Creek, straight after your Sydney 3000 metres, you went up there.

C.M. Yes, I had nine days at Falls Creek.

N.M. And what did you do to prepare for the Melbourne Track Classic 5000 metres?

C.M. Just normal stuff, nothing too complicated. I did kilometre reps on the Tuesday - 8 x 1000 metres, Quarters on the Thursday and a longer threshold effort at Fitzzy's Hut on the Saturday. Then I did a long run on Sunday and backed-off on Monday and Tuesday. I drove back to Melbourne on Tuesday night. We didn't want to do too much because, firstly, I had to recover from the Sydney race, and doing that at altitude is more difficult, and I had to be right for the race in Melbourne, so we had to be careful and not overdo things. Also, I haven't been to altitude since the middle of December because of the bushfires. Usually, I spend 10 -

12 weeks at altitude over the Australian summer and this summer it has only been four weeks. But I'll go to altitude in America in May and the year will continue on from there.

N.M. The last time I was at Falls Creek you held the unofficial record for the Quarters session. What is the record now?

C.M. A lot faster than it was back then! It's 14.30 now.

N.M. At altitude and with the stop - start on each end, that's pretty impressive.

C.M. Yeah it's good going. I could probably run it quicker but that's not the point of the session. I was running the 400's in about 65 seconds and the 'floats' around 43 - 44 seconds. If you wanted to run the quarters in 66 and keep the 'floats' at 38 you'd run the session much quicker but the point of the session is to run the 400 metre sections 'fast', keep moving, then accelerating up to speed out of the bends. It's also about accumulating some lactic acid, which you don't often get at Falls Creek because of the altitude and varied terrain.

N.M. You've had many stints at altitude now, both at Falls Creek and overseas. Do you think that over time the body adjusts more quickly and that the benefits are accumulative?

C.M. I don't find any problems going to Falls Creek. I puff hard and whatever but I can run 1 km. reps in 2.40 and quarters in 65 seconds. The only difference is that the recovery time is a little longer at Falls Creek. Running 1 km. reps at altitude I might have a minute recovery, whereas down here, I'm ready to go after 30 seconds. But I'm getting better and better. I've been to St. Moritz, which is 1800 metres above sea level, and Laguna, which is the same height. Falls Creek is the lower end of altitude training at about 1600 metres but the difficult terrain at Falls Creek makes up for that as it's so much more challenging than anywhere else in the world. But Falls Creek is still the best place in the world to train.

N.M. And it's so relaxing up there?

C.M. Yes, it's very quiet – probably too quiet sometimes but it allows you to train hard, recover well and get the job done. The people up there are also so friendly and it's only four hours from Melbourne. It's not as far as many people think.

N.M. There are the traditional Falls Creek sessions such as Fitzy's Hut, Langford's Gap, the Pretty Valley long run etc. but have you developed any sessions that are Mottram - esque, like a Mottram's Hut or Buster's Bash?

C.M. No, there's not a Mottram's Hut but we do a variation of Fitzy's Hut. We go along the aqueduct, up the normal way then come back down Marms Point because the hill is not on the bluestone, then we continue back along the aqueduct at pace for 15 minutes. So we get 5 minutes up the hill, 8 minutes across the snow plain, about 6 - 7 minutes of downhill, then 15 minutes along the aqueduct. Including the warm-up, the run takes about 70 minutes. 68 minutes is the record for that run. That course is much more conducive to the type of running I'm doing than trying to negotiate the down hill on the blue stone near the start of Spion Kopje. There is another run that I'm keen on where you go along the aqueduct, surge up Marms Point continue across the top of the snow plain, jog down from Fitzy's Hut to the aqueduct and then you have about 23 minutes of pace running along the bottom. At Falls Creek the important thing is that the Saturday run is made up of 30 minutes of easy running followed by 30 - 40 minutes of solid pace running.

N.M. Do you use your heart rate monitor at Falls Creek to control the effort?

C.M. Oh yeah no higher than 180 beats per minute ever at Falls Creek. My heart rate can go well over 200 beats per minute – I've had it as high as 211, but there's no point in doing that as it would take too much out of you. So my Falls Creek maximum is 180, but I do most of my Falls Creek harder training at 165 – 175 beats per minute.

N.M. What is your resting heart rate?

C.M. Probably about 35 beats per minute first thing in the morning.

N.M. You say you haven't been doing any track sessions and that your fast finishes are due to the great strength you have developed, but are you still doing the regular sprint drills and fast / relaxed strides session?

C.M. Yes, every Monday and Friday night, we do those to keep the fast twitch fibres ticking over. At Falls Creek we do them along the aqueduct above the village but wherever I am in the world, I do that session twice a week. At Falls Creek the distance would be maybe 80 metres but the important thing is to regularly get the legs turning over quickly with good form. In fact, the drills are probably more important than the strides as they are emphasising good sprinting form and biomechanics. You have to practice it because, as you saw last night, at some point in a race, you need to be able to run fast.

N.M. If all else is equal, the fastest runner wins the race.

C.M. That's right, but you also need strength at the end and really believe that you can win.

N.M. Have you raced Boniface Songok before?

C.M. Yes, I beat him after the World Championships in 2005 in Sheffield over 2 miles. Last year he beat me twice – once in London and once in Monte Carlo.

N.M. Let's go back twelve months to the Melbourne Commonwealth Games. Competing in front of 80 000 supporters must have been a huge thrill?

C.M. Yes, and one of the scariest things I have ever done!

N.M. Was the roar from the crowd spine - tingling?

C.M. Oh yeah it was. But I was quite relaxed as I stood on the starting line because I knew I was ready to go. In training I had done a few things that surprised me and surprised Nic, so we knew I was in great shape and the Kenyans couldn't get rid of me, it was just a case of whether my race plan and how I carried it out was good enough to win. And I did that pretty well. It was just that one guy was too good on the night. But it was a fantastic experience. The final call room was under the stadium in the Richmond Football Club change rooms, and when we walked up onto the MCG, you could hardly see the sky, it was that packed with people in the massive stands. I was actually really looking forward to being introduced to the crowd, because there was a hush in the crowd just beforehand, then the huge roar and it was an indication of the support for me. And as I said, I was really calm and relaxed then, because I thought, 'Well I've done the work, I've run 5k before, I'm quite good at it and all I have to do is do what I know I can do and let it happen'. And I did. And I tried my arse off but ?

N.M. The look on your face just after you crossed the line seemed to say ... "that's as good as I could do tonight – Augustine Choge was just too good". Would that be a fair summation of your thoughts? (Ed. Kenya's Augustine Choge won in 12:56.41. Craig was second in 12:58.19, running the last 1000 metres in an eye - popping 2:28)

C.M. 100% correct. He just blew me away. Even if I had been with him in the home straight he was accelerating all the way to the finish. He ran a great race and he's a really nice guy. I'd love to say that if had raced differently that night I could have won, but I truly believe that no matter what, he would have won on that night. But that's not to say that I won't beat him next time!

N.M. Let's go to the 1500 metres. What were your plans?

C.M. My plans were pretty common knowledge. We wanted 60 seconds for the first lap, 58 seconds for the second lap, then with 700 metres left, I was going to go. And everybody knew that at some stage I was going to take off because Nick Willis of New Zealand was the main person I was concerned about and if it came down to the last 300 metres off a slower pace, he would be dangerous. So, I was going to do something similar to last night pour it on pour it on pour it on, and break him. And I knew in my heart and mind that if I could get to the front at that point without a problem, that he would struggle to keep up. But, I just never got that chance, which was very frustrating. The actual fall was not any one person's fault, it was more a comedy of errors that started initially because the pace was not on. The first lap was 61, then a 60 meant that the field was banked up from the slow pace, waiting for me to go. Also, people on the rails didn't want to be there when I went, so there was pushing and shoving to get out. Eventually, a couple of runners at the rear pushed Kevin Sullivan, who tripped Andrew Baddeley, who fell onto me. Unfortunately, Andrew Baddeley has been seen as the villain but he was unlucky as I was.

N.M. Sounds like the domino theory?

C.M. Exactly. Looking back, it's kind of funny, but it wasn't funny then!

N.M. Straight after the race, I thought you handled a very difficult situation perfectly by disappearing into the change rooms to collect your thoughts. Obviously you were very hot under the collar, but if there was a film crew inside the change rooms, what would we have seen?

C.M. First of all, many people asked me why I got back up and started chasing and finished the race, but all I knew was that I was there to run 1500 metres the best I could, and that thought was all I took onto the track. Also, there wasn't an exit where I fell, so I guess that wasn't really an option. Anyway, I finished the race and sought out the winner, Nick Willis. He seemed to be kneeling on the track, praying and I said, 'well done' to him, then quickly disappeared inside. And I was angry. I think I bashed a fridge and kicked a chair, I couldn't get my spikes off as my hands were shaking so much. A doctor came over to help with the spikes but I told him to go away. Understandably, I was not happy, but you can't show those emotions in front of all those people. So I let off a bit of steam, quickly got changed, then went back out and spoke to everybody who was out there.

N.M. I'm sure you won a lot of admirers for going back out.

C.M. Yes, I suppose. I could have done the interview straight after finishing but I was still unsure of what had really occurred so the interview might have been me just shaking my head in a state of disbelief.

N.M. And, perhaps you may have said something that you'd later regret?

C.M. Possibly, but I'm generally OK in those situations, although that was certainly one of the more difficult situations to handle. In the end, I thought I was able to deal with it all right.

N.M. There's an old sporting saying that goes: "You win with class and you lose with dignity", and you certainly did that at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in both your races.

C.M. After the 5000 metres I received a letter from John Howard saying that he was there for the 5000 metres and that it was a fantastic race and that I ran a great race yadda, yadda, yadda. Then after the 1500 I got another letter from John Howard saying that I'd run a fantastic 5k but the way I'd handled myself after the 1500 was one of the greatest things I'll ever do in my career. That was great. It didn't give me the gold medal, but it was nice to hear that from the Prime Minister. Anyway, I've let it go and have moved on.

N.M. After running a sub 13 minute 5000 metres in a race described by Steve Ovett as the greatest Championship 5000 metres he had witnessed, how did you back up for the 1500 metre heat three days later?

C.M. In the heat of the 1500 I felt unstoppable, I was flying and I wish the final was that day! I ran 3.37 and felt like I was jogging, it was that easy. It was fun and I felt so relaxed and it felt so, so easy. In the final of the 1500 it was difficult to say how I had recovered as the first two laps were slow and nothing had really happened. Had I taken off and there was nothing there well, that might have happened, but I don't think so, as I was confident and in really good shape. After the 5000 metres I went home, had dinner, got up next morning and went for a jog and ended up at the Kerford Road Pier. I went walking in the water to help the recovery and a couple of policemen turned up. They were patrolling the waterfront but there was absolutely nothing going on down there, so they said they'd watch my shoes for 10 minutes while I was in the water, even though there was not a person within kilometres of my shoes. And then when I walked over to the track, the police stopped the Punt Road traffic so I could walk straight across – it was amazing the buzz and hype surrounding the Melbourne Commonwealth Games and I'm sure that attention won't happen again in my career.

N.M. You did a session at the Llanberris Track in Ballarat a few weeks before the Commonwealth Games. Apparently, you had been feeling a little weary in training, but on this day, everything seemed to fall into place. I understand you ran a 1000 metre time-trial, followed by 5 x 300 metres and 1 x 200 metres. Can you remember the session?

C.M. It was two weeks before the Commonwealth Games and just before the Melbourne Meet where I ran 2000 metres. The main thing I remember about the session was running the 200 with England's Mo Farah to finish and we ran through in 24 high and I was cruising, just chatting to Mo as we ran, and I knew then that I was on and ready to go. Then, two days later, I ran 4:50 for 2000 metres at Olympic Park to break the Australian Record, running 56, 56 for the last two laps. In fact, that 2000 metres was probably my greatest ever run - 4:50 is not mucking around. (Ed. Craig ran 4:50.76 to smash Simon Doyle's 12 year old Australian Record by 10 seconds)

N.M. And even though you were 'flying', you didn't look ragged. You looked as though you were working hard but under control?

C.M. Yeah, that's the way it felt. I really started to work the last 120 because I went really hard with two laps to go, but I was relaxed, I was tall, I was strong, I was smooth, but you need to fight like hell over the last 120 in every race.

N.M. In hindsight, did the emotional build-up for the Commonwealth Games and the need to be in top form in March flatten you for three or four months afterwards?

C.M. Yeah, perhaps? I went to World Cross but did not run very well there. (Ed. Craig ran the 4 km. Short Course Race and finished 11th) I got sick after the Commonwealth Games. After the 1500 metre fall, I went out and partied, then jumped on a plane the next day to fly to Japan. Basically, I had not been to bed for three days but still, six days after the Commonwealth Games, I was lining up to race the World Cross - Country. Looking back, I wasn't really into it and at that level, you have to be 100% mentally switched on. I really wanted to run this year's World Cross-Country in Mombasa, Kenya in March because I wanted to atone for the run in Japan but, when Nic and I had thought about the situation and the pros and cons, it was not the best option. Once I had my couple of months of just jogging around in London, physically I was alright, and mentally, I was getting better and better and I was able to come up for the last couple of races of the European summer.

N.M. After a couple of disappointing races in Monaco and Brussels, where you close to 'pulling the pin' on running the 3000 metres at the World Cup in Athens? (Ed. on August 20 Craig ran the 3000m. in Monaco, finishing 15th in 7:47.88 behind Abraham Chebii - 7:33.42. On August 25 at the Van Damme Memorial Meet in Brussels, Craig finished 17th over 1500m. in 3:38.75, behind Mehdi Baala - 3:32.01)

C.M. The last few months leading up to the World Cup were tough. I was on and off. I'd had a few bad sessions and didn't really know if I wanted to go to Athens and run because I wasn't sure that I'd get a good result. Also, I really struggled in the Monaco and Brussels races. In those races I thought I was going all right and then you're really trying to go and you can't! It was very frustrating because the results didn't make much sense to me at the time. Mentally, it was really hard because you're just trying to hang on and survive and not make a fool of yourself in front of all those people. Also, when you're running against the best athletes in the world and you're not quite right, you're terribly exposed – you don't want them to see you struggling because it gets into their minds that perhaps you're not super after all. But I didn't want to finish the year on such a bad note after the Brussels race. I was also team captain and defending World Cup champion, so in the end we decided to go to Athens and show everyone that I'm the athlete I want to be. One or two bad races does not make you a bad athlete. Everybody goes through these down periods. What makes you a better athlete is how hard you bounce back. The worst thing to do was to jump on a plane and fly home with your tail between your legs. It would have been much harder to bounce back from that!

N.M. And you just went back to basics in your training?

C.M. Yes. We went to St. Moritz, did the normal sessions in London, not much on the track but plenty of what works for me.

N.M. Nic said that before your winning 3000 metre World Cup race, you tuned-up with some 60 second strides on grass

C.M. Yes, some minute reps on the grass ovals around Bushy Park in London. Actually, I backed-off for the World Cup and a few days before the race, I did a few 200 metre reps in Athens, nice and easy, just rolling 28 - 29 seconds that felt so easy, just like I wasn't trying. You know sometimes in the lead-up to a race when you're ready, and they can throw anything at you, and they would not be able to drop you. It's just a matter of racing smart and making it to the finish line first. And that's a great feeling!

N.M. Bekele was a late entry for the 3000 metres. How did this change your tactics?

C.M. A couple of days before the race we heard that Bekele was switching from the 5000 metres to the 3000 metres. Initially, I was going to retain the same tactics as I used in Madrid for the last World Cup and run from the front. However, with Bekele in the field, Nic and I decided to settle in for four to five laps behind him, see what he did, then unleash whatever I had left with 950 metres to go to run the kick out of Bekele. If the pace was slower, I was hoping for 1.51 for the final 800 metres. Fortunately, Bekele ran a pretty solid pace for the first few kilometres, which dropped the rest of the field. This was what we wanted so it was just the two of us racing. Eventually, I went with 900 metres to go, then we slowed up a bit and I went again with 500 metres to go. Then I felt him on my shoulder and went again and tried to stay alert. I'd learnt at the Commonwealth Games that once you let them get past you, it's hard to get the lead back, so you can't let anyone past. With 200 metres to go I could see on the big screen that I had five metres on him and thought, 'this is unbelievable!' Then I went again around the final bend and knew it was all over. I was then able to really enjoy the final 50 metres.

N.M. After you surged away from him to win the World Cup 3000 metres, did Bekele come up to you and say anything?

C.M. Aaahh he's not the friendliest of fellows.

N.M. Is he shy or has he got a touch of arrogance about him?

C.M. I've got a touch of arrogance about me. Everybody who is good needs a touch of arrogance. No, he's alright, he's just a little misunderstood and doesn't speak English very well. He might well be shy. He did come up and say 'well done', then quickly left. But, he would have been annoyed because he was expecting to win and had a guy stalking him in the early part, then smashing him over the last lap.

N.M. And without his Ethiopian mates, he is more vulnerable.

C.M. Well yeah he may have done better with some other people to assist with the pace, but that's the beauty of those sort of races, where it's athlete versus athlete. It's like last night. You can play with them fast ... slow ... fast ... slow ... let them come past ... run them wide ... move in on them. They hate it ... they hate it ... but they know now that I'm now able to race in a variety of situations and I can take it up to them.

N.M. And after the race, you received an unexpected surprise on the athlete's bus.

C.M. Yes when I boarded the athlete's bus at the stadium to return to the hotel, some of the world's best athletes, including Sanya Richards, (winner of the 200 metres / 400 metres at the World Cup) stood up and gave me a clap and a pat on the back. (Ed. But the plaudits did not stop there. On reaching his hotel, former World Record Holder and Olympic Champion, Steve Ovett sought out Craig to offer his congratulations. And at the World Cup Gala Dinner, Craig was greeted by Lord Sebastian Coe, who stood on his chair and bowed to Craig.)

N.M. You've raced some of the all-time greats in your career – athletes like Haile Gebrselassie, Hicham El Guerrouj and Kenenisa Bekele. How would you sum up each of them?

C.M. I never raced Haile when he was at his absolute best, but he just refuses to give in. He's just one very tough, determined b#@&*%#. In London, when I broke 13 minutes for the first time, he just hung on and hung on, then willed himself past me. I reckon I'd beat him now as I've improved and he's not the runner he once was, but in my eyes he's probably the best-ever. Bekele is great too, unbelievably good, but he just doesn't have the aura that Haile possesses. He's not as friendly as Haile, he's not warming up with everyone, they are not going to make a movie about him like they did with Haile. And El Guerrouj, he's just a really nice guy. And very hard to beat – super fast, super strong. I'd be more worried about El Guerrouj being in my final than anyone else, because, I reckon I could beat Haile now and I reckon that Bekele has 'dogged it' a couple of times when he's been under intense pressure, he can be broken. He's probably one of the greatest ever but Bekele has shown a couple of chinks in his armour. But El Guerrouj is different, even the races when he has been beaten, like the 2000 Sydney Olympic 1500 metre final or the 2003 World Championship 5000 metres, he's fought to the death but he's never exposed himself with a weakness.

N.M. Do you think that it's been a privilege to race in an era with three such great champions?

C.M. For sure. And hopefully, when other athletes finish their careers, they can say that it was a privilege to race against me. I suppose I have looked up to the likes of Gebrselassie, Bekele and El Guerrouj in the past but now that I'm racing them I don't anymore as I believe I'm at their level and they're beatable. But in five years time there's going to be new athletes doing what they're doing and you're going to be doing this

interview with Collis, maybe (Ed. Collis Birmingham) and asking was it a privilege to race some African we haven't heard of or me or whoever? The sport is always changing and new fast guys are always appearing. Sure it's a challenge to race Gebrselassie or Bekele or El Guerrouj but a few years ago it was Daniel Komen.

N.M. One of your stated goals is to hold all the Australian Records from 800 metres up to the marathon. (Ed. These are the current Australian Records)

800 metres	1:44.40	Ralph Doubell	
1000 metres	2:16.61	Grant Cremer	
1500 metres	3:31.96	Simon Doyle	(C.M. 3:33.97)
Mile	3:48.98	Craig Mottram	
2000 metres	4:50.76	Craig Mottram	
3000 metres	7:32.19	Craig Mottram	
5000 metres	12:55.76	Craig Mottram	
10 000 metres	27:31.92	Shaun Creighton	(C.M. 27:50.55)
Half Marathon	60.02	Darren Wilson	
Marathon	2:07.51	Rob de Castella	

N.M. Already you have quite a few of them ticked off.

C.M. Yes, I do and I think the others are gettable too. At the moment I hold National Records in the mile, 2000 metres, 3000 metres, 3000 metres road (Craig's 7:41.70 is also a World Best time), 5000 metres, 5000 metre road and 10 000 metre road. However, I obviously need the opportunity to prepare properly for the different distances, then race them. Simon Doyle holds the Australian Record for the 1500 metres at 3:31 high but I've been through 1500 metres in 3.32 during a mile race.

N.M. Would the 800 metres be the toughest?

C.M. What is the exact time?

N.M. Ralph Doubell's 1:44.40 set at altitude at the Mexico City Olympics?

C.M. That would be tough to get.

N.M. But you have run 1:45.9 in training.

C.M. That's right I'm sure I could run 1:44. It would not be easy, but I could do it.

N.M. What's your P.B. for 400 metres?

C.M. Don't know. Never run one but I reckon I could run 48 high, 49 low. I'll do it this year for you ... how about that! Ha Ha Ha.

N.M. Perhaps you'd better run that past Nic first! When you ran the 1:45.9 in training, what did you go through half-way in?

C.M. Aaah 52 high to 53 seconds, so it was even pacing.

N.M. In a race where you are hoping to run 1:44 or faster, you would need to go through half way faster than 53. Could you cope with that?

C.M. I could cope with 51 high.

N.M. And then come storming home a la Borzakovsky?

C.M. I could do it? When I ran the 1:45.9 in training it was at the end of the session and I'd already run 10 x 200 metres in 28 - 29 seconds with 30 seconds recovery. I then had a reasonable recovery, put the spikes on and ran the 800. However, I did hurt my hamstring a few days after that!

N.M. And what about the marathon?

C.M. Yeah, I'll get that first go.

N.M. You think you can run faster than 2:07.51 first up?

C.M. I reckon I will run 2:06.50 first go. No, not really.

N.M. Have you got one pencilled in?

C.M. No, not yet. Seriously though, the marathon time is a good one. The marathon is a very special race. I've seen some very good runners close to me, who were absolutely flying in training, go to pieces in the marathon. You race the event and that's what makes it tough. I could say I'm going to run 2:06 first up but look at guys like Gebrselassie and Tergat – two great runners and they have at times struggled to get it right in the marathon. It's just a tough, tough event, so it won't be that easy. Fortunately, I've got some great people in my corner: Garry (Henry) knows a lot about the marathon. I reckon that if you gave me six months from today to prepare, I could run 2:08.30 – 2:09.00 but to take another minute off that would be tough. Also, I've got quite a bit of unfinished business at the shorter distances. I've seen a few runners move up in distance and run the marathon only to have great difficulty regaining the running times they once had on the track over the shorter distances. However, one day I'd love to run the marathon – perhaps the 2012 London Olympics would work in well.

N.M. What is your long run at the moment?

C.M. One hour 45 minutes.

N.M. This year you and Nic have decided to back-off the training a little to prepare for Beijing. So what does that mean, training wise?

C.M. A maximum of 170 kilometres a week with a minimum 130 - 140 kilometres. It will be up and down a little depending on whether I'm racing or not, but I'll probably average 150 - 160 kilometres a week, which is not a hell of a lot, but enough to stay injury free and put some kilometres in the bank. Obviously, the World Championships is important this year (Ed. Craig will contest the 5000 metres.) but we want to get through the next twelve months without any setbacks, because I want to win the Olympics in Beijing. At the moment, a lot of people are pushing harder and harder but I'm backing off a little now so that I'm in great shape for later this year and next year. The World Championships in Osaka will be a great 'dress rehearsal' for Beijing in 2008 as it has many similar factors, such as time zones and weather conditions. Osaka will also give us a chance to check-out a final training camp in Asia.

N.M. You mentioned Garry Henry before. What role does he play, because he's almost a constant in your athletic career now?

C.M. Yes, Garry is there every day. I call him the 'goat' but he's great. He keeps me calm, he's great company and he oversees the training I do when Nic is not around, because Nic can't always be with me as he has a family and other athletes. I guess you could say that he's Nic's eyes and ears on the ground. If I'm tired Garry knows me well enough to back off the training. If anything, he holds me back. I just feel more comfortable training with Garry beside me on his bike than running with anybody else. I just seem to be able to find the right rhythm and run at the correct pace, and I think that is so important. I reckon too many athletes get swept up in running too fast at the wrong times in training. People come to train with me from England and Ireland and all over the world, because they think that what I do is going to make them great. When I was developing as an athlete, no one told me how to be great, you have to figure that out for yourself. I can't help people be great. They can watch my work ethic and the way I train and the sessions I do, but that's not enough – it's the mental approach and the belief that can be so hard to pick up.

N.M. And perhaps the confidence in yourself and your program so that you know when it's sensible to back-off the training?

C.M. Yes, and you can feel that. I didn't run on Wednesday evening this week. I drove back from Falls Creek on Tuesday and Nic had on my program to run Tuesday morning / evening and Wednesday morning / evening, but I rang Nic on Wednesday evening and said I wasn't running and Nic said 'good'. I felt tired and didn't feel like a run was going to be of benefit. I know that you can't get fit for a race on Friday by running on Wednesday evening. If you're tired, all you will do is make the tiredness worse. So I went for a walk down to the beach, sat on the sand for 10 minutes, went for a walk in the water, relaxed, went home, went out for coffee, then watched the new 'Rocky' movie, and basically took it easy and had confidence in the training I had already done. Some people, would be out there running, doing strides or drills trying to get fit for a race in two days time – it just doesn't make sense.

N.M. I heard that some of the top Australian junior male athletes went for a run with you after the Zatopek and they couldn't believe how slow you run on some of your easy days?

C.M. Yes, it was at Yarra Flats. And I do run slowly some times. But, the difference is that I know that if they want to push it, I can keep up. However, if I want to push it, they won't keep up. So I don't need to prove anything when I go for a run. I can do the right session for me at the right pace.

N.M. Craig, once again, thank you very much for your time and all the best for the up-coming European summer as you build up for the Osaka World Championships and the Beijing Olympics.

C.M. My pleasure, Neil.

CRAIG MOTTRAM'S 2006 SEASON

March 9	Telstra A Series 2000m. 1 st place 4:50.76 Australian Record. 8 th fastest time in history
March 20	Melbourne Commonwealth Games 5000m. 2 nd place 12:58.19
March 25	Melbourne Commonwealth Games 1500m. 9 th place 3:44.37
April 1	IAAF World Cross-Country Championships 4km. 11 th place 11.10
July 19	Liege, Belgium 3000m. 1 st place 7:32.84 Australian Record
July 28	IAAF Super Grand Prix, London

	5000m.	7 th place	13:08.96
August 18	IAAF Golden League, Zurich 1500m.	5 th place	13:33.97
	Personal Best		
August 20	2006 Super Grand Prix, Monaco 3000m.	15 th place	7:47.88
August 25	IAAF Golden League, Brussels 1500m.	17 th place	3:38.75
September 17	IAAF World Cup, Athens 3000m.	1 st place	7:32.19
	Personal Best / Australian Record / Championship Record / Oceania Record.		
September 30	Newcastle / Gateshead Great North Road Race 3000m.	1 st place	7:41.70
	Personal Best / World Best time. Defeated 2003 World 5000m. Champion Eliud Kipchoge and broke 16 year old World Best time set by Morocco's Brahim Boutayeb (7:49)		