

# Running commentary

By Charlie Kanzig  
Correspondent

The Olympics have been a highlight of my summer, and I went all out to be able to watch as much live through online streaming as possible. That says a lot for a guy that does not typically watch sports on the screen, but when it comes to track and field and a bunch of athletes with ties to Oregon, I was not about to miss any action.

Of course, I did get chastised by my sister Shawn who regretted that I twice posted results that she was waiting to watch during prime time. What was I to do but celebrate when former Oregon runner Matthew Centrowitz controlled the 1,500 from start to finish and became the first American to win that Olympic race in 108 years, which is only eight years shy of the start of the modern Olympics themselves?

I had a particular fondness for “Centro” because his father’s career at the University of Oregon overlapped with my time there as a student. He was an Olympian, which is why his son has a tattoo across

his chest that reads “Like father, like son.” I witnessed Matthew being interviewed during the Olympic Trials and now wished I had asked him a couple of questions myself in the media mixed zone while I had the chance. I remember being struck by his poise and the passion he expressed about his goals and became a fan. As he held off all challengers in last Saturday’s finals, I, for the first time in my life, was standing in front of my television cheering vigorously, willing him to the finish.

Other former Ducks and athletes with ties to our state brought home medals as well, which made watching the Games more captivating than normal for me, especially after seeing them up close at the Olympic Trials in Eugene. For Galen Rupp, who grew up in Portland, to take home a bronze medal in the marathon was stirring. My thread of connection to him goes back to my own high school days, when his mother was a standout runner at La Salle High School in Milwaukie and she would toe the line for the 3,000 meters in Capital Conference track meets along with the boys, most of whom she

could beat.

Rupp’s coach, Alberto Salazar, also a University of Oregon runner during my era in Eugene and Olympic qualifier in the 10,000 (1980) and marathon (1984), had quite an Olympics as his other star student, Mo Farah, defended both his 5,000- and 10,000-meter titles, earning his third and fourth gold medals. It must be satisfying as a coach to see your athletes achieve such heights.

Tate Metcalf can certainly attest to that as he watched his former champion athlete at Mountain View High School, Ashton Eaton, win his second consecutive gold medal in the decathlon. Metcalf spent over a week in Rio and took in as much as he could manage. A full article on his exploits should be in next week’s *Nugget*.

Eaton’s wife, Brienne Theisen-Eaton, picked up a medal of her own, bronze, in the heptathlon representing her native Canada. Other athletes with Oregon ties winning medals included former Ducks Phyllis Francis (gold — 4x400 relay) and English Gardner (gold — 4x100 relay), Evan Jaeger, Bowerman track club (silver — 3,000 steeplechase) and



PHOTO BY CHARLIE KANZIG

Matthew Centrowitz at the Olympic Trials in Eugene.

Paul Chelimo, U.S. Army-Portland (silver — 5,000 meters) among others.

It was the best showing for American distance runners in recent history after nearly complete dominance by runners from East Africa. In the marathon, three women placed in the top 10 and two men finished in the top six. One woman and one man medaled in the steeplechase and the 1,500, and many others made the finals. It’s cool that a majority of the runners represented base their training in Oregon through the Oregon Track

Club, the Bowerman Track Club, and the Oregon Project.

In an age in which doping allegations and suspensions are commonplace for track and field athletes, I am keeping my fingers crossed that the American distance runners are competing cleanly and fairly. All the inspiration that I felt from these Games will come crashing into the trash bin if it is later discovered that cheating ruled Rio 2016. I want to keep my enthusiasm for the sport alive. It’s only four more years until Tokyo 2020 after all.

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