

# Cruz ready to run — but it's not with Oregon

By Allan Lazo  
Of the Emerald

It's not very often that the Oregon track team has the opportunity to have an Olympic gold medalist competing, and this season won't be one of them.

Olympic 800 meter gold medalist Joaquim Cruz has decided to forego the Oregon track season this year in hopes of making his mark on the international circuit. Cruz was a major factor in the Ducks' capturing the NCAA national track crown last year as he won both the 800 and 1500 meter titles.

"Next year, I'm going to have a long season, and my most important race is going to be in September. So, I'm going to have to start later this year," Cruz said as he explained his reasons for leaving. "I have to compete less and prepare myself better for September."

"If I was going to run for Oregon, I would have to compete in the dual meets plus the Pac-10's and the NCAA's. So that is the biggest reason I'm not going to run for Oregon anymore, this year."

Cruz feels the length of Oregon's track season has been detrimental to his international career. Cruz was to have run in the European circuit after the Olympics, but left early due to his failing health.

"Last year, I competed for Oregon and started working out in October. I made my peak for the Olympics," said Cruz. "But after the Olympics, I started getting tired and I wasn't supposed to get tired," explained the runner who won a gold medal for Brazil.

"So I went to Europe, and I was supposed to run ten times there and I couldn't," said Cruz who only ran four races. "I was too tired to compete."

While his post-Olympic success may have been stifled by his health, Cruz found the strength he needed to become the best 800 runner in the world in Los Angeles. Heavily favored to repeat his NCAA double in the Olympics, Cruz was unable to compete in the 1500 meter competition after qualifying for the semi-finals because of an illness. Cruz felt the illness was caused by the living conditions in the Olympic Village.

During his four days of competition for the 800, Cruz was living with four other athletes in his room along with another four in an adjacent room in a house. After being weakened by little rest, Cruz may have contracted a virus from one of his roommates.

"I had two days rest between the 800 and the 1500. I thought I would get enough sleep in the two days, but I didn't."

Aside from the 1500 meter competition, Cruz could not have been happier with his performance. Cruz aced out Great Britain's Sebastian Coe and the United States' Earl Jones in the finals to capture the coveted gold.

"When I won the gold medal, it happened normally because it was in my mind since I started working out last year," said Cruz. "When I won, I felt great because my dream came true, but I didn't feel what I was supposed to feel, what everyone feels."

Cruz has the Olympic sensation now.

"Sometimes, I think back and get bumps," said the elated

Cruz.

While Cruz enjoys ecstasy these days, Oregon track coach Bill Dellinger may be feeling a

little anguish over his star's departure.

"We're certainly not bitter

over it," said Dellinger. "I had a rare opportunity to have him run for me for two years."



Photo by Orlando Brito

After winning a gold medal in the 800 meters this summer, Joaquim Cruz decided not to run for the Oregon track team this coming season.

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