

Matthew Centrowitz

by Jon Hendershott

Top-rated U.S. miler Matthew Centrowitz is in his second full pro season, now training with Alberto Salazar's elite group in Portland.

The 23-year-old Maryland native is the son of '76 Olympian Matt Centrowitz, who also made the '80 team and set a 5K AR in '82. The family also includes mother Beverly, a 400-800 runner at Hunter College and older sister Lauren, who ran collegiately at Stanford.

But Oregon alum Matthew, the '11 World Champs bronze medalist, definitely is his own man—and not because he has bettered his dad's family bests in both the 1500 and the mile.

He shared some thoughts with us fresh off the plane from a 1000-meter PR in Sweden:

T&FN: Galen Rupp is part of the group in Portland, but did you train with him any when you both were at Oregon?

Centrowitz: No, we didn't. We hopped in for a workout here and there, but overall we weren't training partners at all.

He was a long distance guy and I was a miler, but the funny thing is, for the majority of this winter, we have been training partners. Even though he's a distance guy, he did drop down to the mile indoors this year.

So he might add an extra interval workout here and there, but we have done a lot of workouts pretty much the same.

It's definitely pushed me to limits in the last year that I probably didn't think I'd actually get to, or at least reach this soon. So he's been great for me in terms of making me think like a world-class runner on a daily basis.

In college, it was a thing where so much happened and I was kind of overwhelmed and surprised by it all. But it's been a couple of years now since my bronze medal and then joining Alberto's group with guys like Galen and Mo [Farah] and Dathan [Ritzenhein], it's more like I belong at this level.

T&FN: In fact, was it a tough adjustment to go from the college atmosphere in '11 right into the pro scene for an Olympic year and at age 21?

Centrowitz: As soon as I made the decision to go pro, [coach Andy Powell] and I knew it would be the best decision for me. There were a lot of exciting things about being a pro that presented themselves throughout last year that

were going to be better for me in the long run.

In '11, I did the same dual meets, invitationals and nationals as in the past. So it was a new, fresh thing for me going into the Olympic year not to have team things plus those usual meets. That helped me a lot. I think that how we went about it in '12 was smart and it wasn't like we were gambling in the transition to being a pro.

T&FN: But '13 really is the first season you will train for the Worlds per se.

Centrowitz: In college I had the NCAAs and invitationals that were important, as well as dual meets and conference, meets that are important to the college program. But with our training group now, there's nothing more important than the Worlds and Olympics.

And last year, I was hurt in the months of March and April. It was a freak thing: I banged my knee on a chair and pretty soon I couldn't go even a mile on a long run.

I found out I had some plica bands that were irritated. So I had a scope and it showed inflamed plica bands right up against the kneecap. Luckily, it was a minor surgery and I was able to get back on my feet quickly.

But not being on a college team or in the NCAA, there wasn't a rush to get back. So I was able to work my system around the Trials and Games as opposed to other meets earlier in the year.

T&FN: In your miles this winter, your last quarters were 55.27 and 55.61. Do those times tell you anything about how your training is going?

Centrowitz: It's interesting that you mention those specific splits of 55-point. A lot of the work I did this winter with Galen, like the last quarters at the end of a ladder, were right around 55.

Outdoors we will get significantly faster than that, but there definitely is a correlation between the work done in practice and the maxed-out race effort you make. It's just a testament to how a lot of the work that we do translates to what we're capable of doing in a race.

Alberto called 3:50 for both of us this winter and Galen ran 3:50 and I was 3:51. Alberto has always been aware and had a good sense of where we are in our training. So I know I'm much stronger and faster than I was at this

time last year. Going into the outdoor season, that's all you can ask for.

T&FN: You obviously have good finishing speed. Alberto also has said that he would like to see your 800 get faster. Your PR is 1:47.72 so do you expect doing more work in that area this year?

Centrowitz: Yes, Alberto has talked about that. You have to do both under-distance and over. Our training always will have the long-distance aspects; the long runs and the volume of work. But I think that racing the shorter distance stuff will help my 1500 and mile rather than the longer distances.

But since most races come down to a last-lap kick, it's going to be important to have that speed. Most of the guys in the Olympic final had 1:45 speed or much faster.

Many guys are a few seconds faster than me over 800, so to be vying for medals year after year, I have to drop my 800 PR down a lot. It's definitely possible for me to run 1:45; I should be able to do that this year to be able to compete for another medal.

T&FN: It seems that championship 1500s have evolved into a big last-lap kick. Everybody seems to feel he can close in 50-flat. Is that the most effective tactic?

Centrowitz: It definitely depends on how the race develops. It's always going to come down to who has the best kick and doesn't matter what the pace is. Whoever can close that last lap the fastest should win.

But I do think it comes down to that because no one will take the lead.

Everyone in the 1500 is confident in his kick; everyone thinks he has the best kick in the field. If you're a serious 1500 runner, you work on that a lot and when you work on something like that so much, you're obviously confident in it.

Another thing is that you don't want to be in the lead. You're cutting the wind for everyone and you're using more energy than someone just sitting

Centro In A Nutshell

•**Personal:** Matthew Gerald Centrowitz was born October 18, 1989, in Beltsville, Maryland; 5-9/134 (1.76/61)

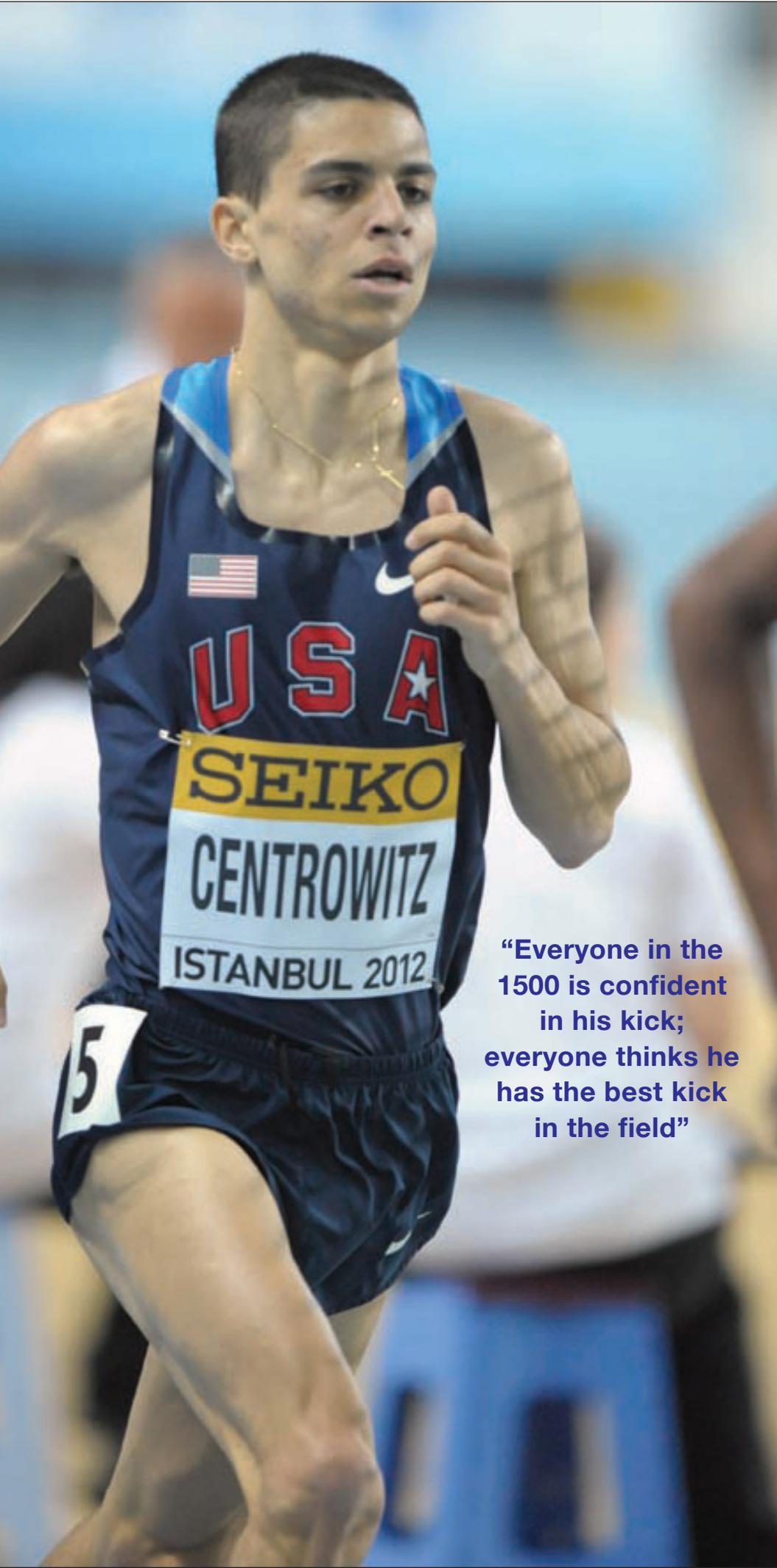
•**PRs:** 800—1:47.72 ('12); 1000—2:19.56i ('13); 1500—3:31.96 ('12); mile—3:51.34i ('13); 3000—8:10.3 ('07) (7:46.19i '12); 2M—8:41.55 ('07); 5000—13:47.73 ('10)

•**Schools:** Broadneck (Annapolis, Maryland) HS '07; Oregon '11; now represents Nike

•**Coaches:** Dana Dobbs (HS), Andy Powell (Oregon, pro), Alberto Salazar (pro)

•**Major Meets:** 1500/Mile—2) USJ, 1)PAJ '07; 6)NCI, 9h) NCAA '09; 3)NC, 5)US '10; 1) NC, 1)US, 3)WC '11; 2)USI, 7) WCi, 2)OT, 4)OG '12. 3000—12) USi '08; 12)NCi '09; 4)NCi '11. 5000—1)USJr, 11)WJ '08

•**World/U.S. Rankings:** 1500/Mile—8/1 '11; 5/1 '12



“Everyone in the 1500 is confident in his kick; everyone thinks he has the best kick in the field”

on you. It doesn't have to be a super-slow race, but I think it comes down to those fast last laps because no one wants to run an honest pace in the early laps and then get left out to dry when it comes down to the kick.

T&FN: You seem to have a sharp racing sense; you're always in a great position as the race unfolds. Is it something you learned over time, or has it just been a part of your racing-DNA or what?

Centrowitz: My dad says it's something you can't coach. I've had it for a while, but I think it has developed over time with all the racing I've done. I love racing. I definitely see myself as a better racer than a time-trial runner. I love competing. So any time I get an opportunity to race, I'm going to jump at it.

"I always look at every race as a learning experience, whether I win or finish last. You can always get something from each race. When you race a lot, you're always kind of perfecting things. Since I do it so much, that's pretty much led me to where I am now.

T&FN: Is it also a "sense" that you develop as a racer? And the more top-level races you run, the more you learn?

Centrowitz: Yes. The more races you can get, the more experience you will get. I go into a race expecting it to play out in a certain way and I'm usually not too far off. I just want to be ready for anything that my competitors throw at me.

You can't go into a race having one set plan—you have to be able to adjust throughout the race because a lot of times things don't go according to plan. You really do have to think on your feet and things can change in an instant and the race can slip through your fingers in a moment.

T&FN: Since your dad moved up to the 5000 and set an AR, have you considered that yet? Or are you just concentrating on the here and now as a 1500 runner?

Centrowitz: For sure I don't see myself moving up in the next four years. I definitely see myself as a 1500 guy right now, although eventually I will move up to the 5K.

Even though I had more success in high school in the 2-mile, that didn't mean that I had to move up to the 5K. It just seems like it will take longer than I had thought. As long as I continue to improve every year in the mile, I'll probably stay there.

T&FN: Have you had a "defining moment" in your career yet?

Centrowitz: I think that everything has been like stepping stones. Winning the NCAA in '11, it was like getting the monkey off my back. In '09, I had a bunch of top times going into the NCAA but then I got a stress fracture. That was my race to win. Then in '10 I had a stress reaction and I came close [3rd]. So winning the NCs was like looming over me.

But once I won the NCAA in '11, my confidence skyrocketed. I carried that over

Centrowitz — continued:

to the USAs two weeks later. I just approached it like another meet and then when I won that, I felt on top of the world. My confidence couldn't have gotten any higher. I was definitely overdosed on confidence.

But it wasn't winning the USAs in '11 or the Worlds medal. Winning the NCAA gave me confidence at the USAs and then winning there gave me the confidence that ultimately got me bronze at the Worlds.

T&FN: So that explains the throat-slashing gesture at the NCAA finish: it wasn't directed at any runner behind you but at the idea of winning that title. "OK, that's taken care of." So last year you made the team, then got a dreaded 4th at the Games, 0.04 out of 3rd.

Centrowitz: It definitely was frustrating. If you had asked me last spring when I was getting surgery if I would be satisfied with 4th in the Olympics, I'd have said yes. But as things happen, you get a little more greedy and want more.

Still, the Games were a great experience. Everyone was running fast that year. I could definitely take a lot of positives from last year, things I did right. I ran the race I wanted to run. It was hard for me to look back and try to find some things to change.

Honestly, I did everything I thought I could do. So it was tough to accept that, on that day, I was fourth-best. It's not that I was so close, but that my best wasn't good enough for a medal. That was the hardest part for me.

Following In Dad's Footsteps

Matthew Centrowitz admits that comparisons with his dad have been a part of his life almost from the time he began running:

"I got comparisons from when I was maybe a sophomore in high school. I got it so many times, for so many years, it just eventually went in one ear and out the other. I've never been one to put pressure on myself and that's helped me.

"My dad and I ran in different eras. I'm a different type of runner than him, so it's silly to compare the two. I've never looked at it as having to live up to the name or that I have to accomplish what he did. I'm out to do what I want to do and I'm sure he had different goals for himself than I have for myself.

"We're just two different people. I was always brought up as Matthew, at least partly to differentiate us. But he was like 6-foot in middle school and I haven't come close to being 6-feet. .

"You could say I'm more a speed guy, while he was a strength guy. He said that I have the gears he never had. I have the acceleration.

"He always said that I am a quick learner and can catch on quickly to things. Even before high school, sometimes I jumped into some of my dad's practices. Hanging around like that, I could see

But in this sport, I'm sure the guy who was 4th behind me in Daegu probably thought the same thing. So every year, someone has to finish 4th and unfortunately last year it was me. That's the way the sport goes—but you just hope that you don't do it again.

even make it out of the rounds. I always find motivation anywhere: you finish 1st so you look to repeat that. You always keep looking to better yourself and find ways to do that. Finishing 4th yes, that's the first spot out of a medal. But I wouldn't approach this season any differently

HRIBY/LEIN/IMAGE OF SPORT



Centro's international breakthrough came with a bronze in the World Champs in Daegu

T&FN: Do you use that as motivation for '13 and beyond?

Centrowitz: I'd be lying if I said I wouldn't be motivated whether I finished 2nd or didn't

if I had finished 5th or 12th.

So it definitely serves as motivation because I was pissed at myself and getting 4th left a bad taste in my mouth. But I also have moved on and I had to do that last year with all the races left after London.

T&FN: Do you have any specific time goals for the 1500 and mile, both for this year and in your career? Or will you just let things play out?

Centrowitz: I'm definitely going to let things play out. Each year is going to be different depending on my health, how training is going and being in the right races. That's a huge part of it: having the opportunity to chase a fast time.

But I don't mind sharing goals. It's pretty obvious that eventually in my career I'd like to go after a lot of the American Records.

Seeing Galen firsthand take the 3K record from Bernard in Stockholm definitely is motivation and I definitely want to be in that position myself. Galen is on another level right now, but I'd eventually like to be on the same level as him where I'm going after American Records as well. □