

Shannon Rowbury

by Sieg Lindstrom

Neither a winter cold nor a wedding 6 weeks ahead on her calendar could stop Shannon Rowbury from her appointed 24 laps round the track at the USATF Indoor—a mile/2M double that brought the third and fourth national indoor titles of the 30-year-old Californian's pro career.

This winter triumph, following on her '14 title at 3000, her first since '08, underscored a year of great progress—outdoor PRs at 1500, 3000, 2-mile and 5000 in '14—in the Nike Oregon Project group directed by Alberto Salazar.

Their collaboration—including a near-miss in the '14 USATF outdoor 5000, which she lost to AR holder Molly Huddle by just 0.15—has heightened future hopes for the athlete whose 6th-place London finish is still the Olympic highest-ever by a U.S. woman 1500 runner.

Rowbury spoke with T&FN by phone from her Beaverton, Oregon, training base, chatting about big seasons past and future as her massage therapist worked kinks out of her muscles.

T&FN: Congratulations. You're off to a great start in your second year working with Alberto Salazar. After 6 years with coach John Cook, was

I was able to move up to [the Portland area] and just instantly kind of fit in with what we're doing and hit the ground running, and a little over a year later it feels like a second home. So it's been a really pleasant experience.

T&FN: Were the biggest adjustments training challenges?

Rowbury: The relocation wasn't too bad. I went to Duke for college; that was all the way across the country so Portland from San Francisco was a really easy transition.

The main thing was with coach Cook I would say there were about 5 medium-to-high-intensity days per week leading to recovery days, but with Alberto there are 3 hard days but those hard days are really hard—much higher in volume and intensity. So workouts are less frequent but when we have them they are just all-out efforts. That was a big shift for me.

Also, I'd done weightlifting in the past but this program that we have with Alberto just takes weightlifting to an even higher level and it's even more integrated into the training.

T&FN: What about overall volume?

Rowbury: Mileage volume is higher. It's not too significantly higher but the first 6 months I was with the group it was just more the combination of all of these variables. No single one was that overwhelming or challenging but the combination made it tough.

I developed some bursitis in my hip and I got a little beat up, but from that we were able to learn what my limits are, make some adjustments and ever since then it's been relatively smooth sailing where I've been able to keep building gradually. From consistent training is how you find improvement so that's been a key.

T&FN: That led to some big PRs last summer.

Rowbury: Yeah, that was exciting. Most of my competitors were focusing on just a singular event but it was fun for me to get back and race the 15, the 3K and the 5K, test myself in a bunch of different areas.

That's something I've done since high school so I really valued that opportunity—especially in an off year—to see, “OK, what are my new benchmarks that I've set for myself?” Now I know this new baseline from which I can strive for even better.

T&FN: The Oregon Project is a powerful group. Do you mix in with Treniere Moser, Jordan Hasay and Mary Cain in training?

Rowbury: Yeah, Alberto does a great job in trying to set up workouts so we can all help each other and it's nice because I think all four of us have unique strengths and all have our own weaknesses.

Mary has great speed but she's younger so she's still building that aerobic strength. At the

Rowbury In A Nutshell

•**Personal:** Shannon Nicole Rowbury was born September 19, 1984, in San Francisco, California; 5-5/115 (165/52)

•**PRs:** 800—2:00.47 ('10); 1500—3:59.49 ('14) (5, x A); Mile—4:20.34 ('08) (2, 6 A); 3000—8:29.93 ('14) (3, 5 A); 2M—9:20.25 ('14) (2, 2 A); 5000—14:48.68 ('14) (4, 8 A)

•**Schools:** Sacred Heart Cathedral (San Francisco) HS '02; Duke '07; now represents the Nike Oregon Project

•**Coaches:** Andy Chan (Sacred Heart); Kevin Jermy (Duke); John Cook (pro); Alberto Salazar (pro)

•**Major Meets:**

1500/M—10h)NCi '03; 8)NCi, 11h)NC '04; 2)NCi, 9)NC '05; 6)US '06; 1)NCi '07; 1)OT, 7)OG '08; 1)US, 3)WC '09; 2)USi, 3)US '10; 3)US, 12sf)WC '11; 2)OT, 6)OG '12; 4)US '13; 1)USi '15;

3000—2)NCi '07; 1)USi '08; 3)USi '10; 1)USi, 8)WCi '14; 1)USi '15;

5000—3)US, 7)WC '13; 2)US '14

•**World/U.S. Rankings:**

1500—x/9 '06; 6/1 '08; 3/1 '09; 7/1 '10; x/3 '11; 5/1 '12; 8/2 '13; 4/2 '14; 5000—9/2 '14

that transition easy or difficult?

Rowbury: Yeah, in some ways it was both. It's been a much easier transition than I expected. The first 6 months were a little challenging, just adjusting to a new coaching style. There were a lot of similarities in what Alberto does to what my old coach had done, but the differences were pretty significant.

That being said, I was prepared for just this really big shift in my life and everything's been so easy.



Rowbury scored a pair of victories at the USATF Indoor

other end of the spectrum, Jordan has great speed but her strong point is definitely her aerobic strength, and Treniere and I are kind of in the middle—we're really good at those mid-range intervals.

That's not to say that any one of us isn't good at the other areas but I think as a result we're able to do sessions where we can each pull our own weight in a different way and the collective benefit is really high.

T&FN: Did you buy a house up in Portland?

Rowbury: I got a little condo near the Nike campus. I sort of think of my time in Beaverton as running graduates school. I wanted to put myself in an environment that was most conducive for success. I live less than a mile from Nike, I can run out my door.

T&FN: This was arguably your most serious indoor season ever. Alberto makes no secret of favoring a 2-peak training and racing approach.

Rowbury: I'm so glad that's the approach Alberto takes. College was a 3-season system and I would do great through two and the third would be too much. With coach Cook it was a 1-peak system and I would do some indoor races but they were just kind of buried in the regular training.

I found in college that with two seasons it would keep me fresh, keep me learning about myself, and I find that to be the case with Alberto as well. I feel I was able to build off my outdoor success during indoors and I'm hopeful I'll be able to do that as well now during the outdoor season.

These peaks are close enough together that you can still have some continuity between the seasons before and after but they are well-spaced enough that you can take a break and do a buildup and properly approach each peak.

T&FN: You have another peak event planned this spring between the seasons.

Rowbury: An off-the-track event. My fiancé [Mexican miler Pablo Solares] and I have our wedding in San Francisco on April 11. We're doing a church ceremony and then the following weekend we're going to have more of a party with friends and family. It should be a really exciting month.

T&FN: The recent press suggests Pablo is a busy

No Early Pro Thoughts

Mary Cain is a huge story in Shannon Rowbury's group, and along with Treniere Moser and Jordan Hasay a training partner. If turning pro had been an option for Rowbury in high school, would she have considered it?

"First of all, my personal bests, while they were very competitive and very good when I was coming out of college, they definitely were not the same PRs that Mary has put out there, so she has earned her right to be a professional runner," she says.

"I had no idea professional running existed, truthfully, when I was going into college. I only thought that running would be a way for me to get a scholarship. My focus was on academics. I picked Duke because it was a high-level school where I could also get a scholarship.

"So it wasn't until I was a junior in college that my coach presented the option of professional running to me. I don't know that I would have gone the professional route but I feel Mary made a smart decision."

man: "retired" from running yet he ran a solo 3:56 mile this winter, and he's also a painter/muralist and an investment adviser?

Rowbury: It's been a tough last few years for him with running. He was less than a second off the standard to make the Olympic team in London and then the World team in Moscow.

He had some really painful near-misses over the last couple years and about fall of 2013 he was ready to be done with running.

But then we moved up to Portland and it's hard not to love sport and love running when you live right next to the Nike campus. So he would run to help me out with workouts when I was injured during indoors last year and leading up to outdoors.

In the fall he was 2nd at the Central American Championships and set himself a goal to try to run the standard for World Indoors when it's in Portland next year. I was really excited for him to see it come together for him in this race at the Armory which he basically did by himself.

His biggest problem has been injuries and he's finally getting some consistent training blocks. He's still unsponsored but he puts in the work and the talent is definitely there.

T&FN: What about his painterly vocation?

Rowbury: That was actually one of the things that attracted me to him in the first place. We met through running but I'd studied film in college and I loved the fact that he was an artist as well as an athlete. I think it's a great balance to such a physical pursuit as running.

Rowbury — continued

So we kind of bonded over that and now over the past year he's been slowly getting more and more exhibits and commissions and he's actually working on three separate murals that are coming along really nicely: two that are going to be at the Oregon State campus, a new building that they built, the Cesar Chavez Cultural Center.

The third mural is in Portland, at a building called the Portland Mercado, which is a space that will have a farmers' market/community center where they'd have different crafts and foods and whatever from the area. He is collaborating on a mural for the front.

T&FN: Will you train right through the wedding?

Rowbury: I think I may take a day or two off as I see fit but we're going to save our honeymoon for the fall. We love to travel, both of us do, and usually the fall is our chance to go on a nice trip. So we did that since the beginning of our relationship. So we're going to go for the fall when we can really relax and let loose and really enjoy being on break.

T&FN: On the track, a big question is 1500 or 5000 for you going forward?

Rowbury: The goal for me is to run as fast as I can in both and make it a difficult decision when it comes time. For the 1500 my time is much closer to the highest level so I think we want to work on my 800s and see how fast I can get to make sure I have what it

takes if it's a tactical race to close with the best.

In the 5K even though I got a big PR in Monaco I'm still 20 seconds off being really competitive at the world level—so if I want to do the 5K I need to run faster. I'm going to

T&FN: On an unpleasant note, the 1500 has manifestly been affected by doping. A huge doping scandal is unfolding in Russia, which has long been a women's middle distance power. Do you spend much time thinking about competitors who cheat?

Rowbury: When I do think about it, it infuriates me, I guess mostly because I try to live my life with honor and integrity and anyone who cheats has none of that. To see that it's not just individuals but federations that are supporting cheating.

I can't even process that. It's just something totally beyond my mental capacity. So if I do let myself think about it, it's very disappointing, but I can only control what I do.

When I think of all the people that I've beaten who have come out to be cheaters, that gives me even more confidence that if I can do the right things, if I can live a healthy life and just train smart, push my limits, I can still be competitive at the most elite level.

I can't change these people who have no morals but I can control the effort that I put in.

I try to give myself the best opportunity to succeed. I try to work on my weaknesses and strengthen my attributes, and also, at the end of the day, for a championship race you have to just bring your A game. So I try to train my mind as well, and hopefully right will win out in the end.

T&FN: What do you like to do off the track, to provide some balance in your life?

Rowbury: I try to break my life into phases and give myself periods where I can be less intense and pursue other interests and activities. Then the intensity slowly increases to the point where when it's racing season I have a singular focus: the task at hand, which is running and racing. I think for me it helps just to chop things up into sections.

I also just try to incorporate things into my life that I'm passionate about. I'm involved with the PAUSATF Foundation. I'm on the board of directors for that.

We have a non-profit that Pablo and I started that promotes arts and athletics amongst young women. Neither of those are huge time commitments but they are things that I'm passionate about and areas that I hope to eventually expand on when I'm done competing. It gives me a nice outlet so it's not always just about running.

Running can be very self-centered, necessarily so but it's nice to have outlets that are more philanthropic. □



Rowbury's big pro breakthrough came when she won the '08 Oly Trials 1500

VICTOR SALTEN/PHOTO RUN

keep trying to do that.

The goal is to enter myself in the event where I have the best chance of medaling and using the next few months of races to see where that is.

translate those skills into the next phase of my life but also have a creative element to it.

"Between [husband-to-be Pablo Solares] being a painter and my own experience with film—and I also have some experience working with NBC just in basic roles as a spotter and things like that at the Olympic Trials and staff—I love that.

"Before I even knew professional running existed I was a spotter at the 2004 Olympic Trials for the decathlon. Then I was a finishline puller at the NCAA in, I want to say 2007.

"I got to do little odd jobs here and there because I thought I would pursue journalism or production or something like that. I definitely have a passion for that and would love to be able to continue in that sphere."

What's Up Down The Road?

Eyeing years ahead, Shannon Rowbury says she would love another opportunity to race a championship in London's Olympic Stadium, at the '17 Worlds. That will likely lead to retirement. And what next?

"Now that the next phase is on the horizon I've been thinking about it," she says. "For my graduate degree the emphasis was film studies and women's studies so I would love to do something that has a women's focus but also involving either entertainment or, for instance, these women's races that Nike puts on—being involved with something like that.

"Something where I could use my experience as a high-achieving woman in track & field and