

## Profile: David Torrence (1,500 Meters)

By Bob Burns

It's the same track, same meet and same runner, right?

Yes, yes, and no.



**David Torrence** —photo courtesy of Image of Sport

The **David Torrence** who made a brief appearance at the 2008 U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials returns to Eugene's Hayward Field this week a runner transformed – a stronger, faster and more confident version of his former self.

When first-round heats in the men's 1,500 meters are held Thursday at the 2012 U.S. Olympic Trials, Torrence will be expected to advance not just to Friday's semifinals, but to Sunday's final. The 26-year-old University of California graduate has come a long way in the last four years – far enough that he's given a fighting chance of finishing in the top three Sunday and qualifying for his first Olympic team.

"I'm definitely excited for the Trials," Torrence said. "I'm in the best shape of my life. I'm anxious, almost, to show off all the hard work I've done."

Torrence had just finished an injury-slowed senior season at Cal when he finished a non-qualifying seventh in his heat at the 2008 Olympic Trials. This time around, arrives in Eugene with a personal best (3:34.25) nearly 10 seconds faster than it was four years ago, along with 2012 bests of 3:35.41 (1,500 meters), 3:52.01 (mile) and 13:16.53 (5,000 meters).

The men's 1,500 figures to be one of the most fiercely contested events of the Olympic Trials. Matt Centrowitz, and Andrew Wheating, ex-Oregon standouts, will have the home crowd behind them, and 2008 Olympian Leonel Manzano is an experienced international

runner. Robbie Andrews, the 2011 NCAA champion in the 800 while at Virginia, has shown great promise, and veterans such as Russell Brown, Garrett Heath and Alan Webb could also be factors.

More often than not, the 1,500 final at the Trials turns into a wait-and-see affair, where a pack of runners sprints furiously on the final lap and positioning is critical. Torrence's 1:45.14 best in the 800 shows he has the speed to handle a tactical race, but he thinks the pace might be fast from the start.

"Some of the guys who hadn't have the (Olympic) 'A' standard might go for it," he said.

Finishing in the top three doesn't guarantee an Olympic berth unless the runner has met the Olympic "A" qualifying standard of 3:35. 50 since May 1, 2011. By clocking 3:35.41 last month at a meet in Los Angeles, Torrence need not worry about his time at the Trials, only his placing.

At last year's U.S. Championships, Torrence finished sixth in a tactical race despite running his last lap in less than 53 seconds.

"I've learned from a lot of past mistakes," Torrence said. "I think I've covered my bases if it's a slow race. I can handle a long, hard drive, or a short sprint."

His journey to world class was anything but short. Torrence attended Loyola High School in Los Angeles, where he clocked 4:11.54 for the 1,600 meters and placed third in the California state meet. At Cal, he was consistent in the 3:43 range in the 1,500 meters but was ineligible for a couple of seasons and never scored a point in the NCAA Championships.

The high point of his collegiate career came in 2007 when he broke Don Bowden's 50-year-old school record in the mile by clocking 3:58.62. Bowden's 3:58.7 in 1957 was the first sub-four-minute mile by an American.

His first post-collegiate season, in 2009, started out well with a victory in the 3,000 meters at the U.S. Indoor Championships. Cal coach Tony Sandoval approached John Cook, a highly regarded coach who guided Abdi Bile to a world 1,500-meter championship while coaching at George Mason University, about working with Torrence. Cook was initially reluctant, but it's turned out to be a good partnership.

"I have to be honest – I never had any expectations like this," Cook said. "But David is very intelligent and coachable and it's been a pleasure. He's a great success story."

Torrence, who is single, lives in the Oakland Hills and continues to do much of his training at Cal. With sponsorship support from Nike, he's able to concentrate on running full-time. After the disappointment of not qualifying for the U.S. team at last year's World Championships, Torrence showcased his range by clocking 13:16.53 at Stanford in late April.

That, too, was an Olympic “A” qualifier, but Torrence chose to stick with the 1,500 for the Trials.

“I think he’d have a great chance to make the (Olympic) team in the 5,000,” Cook said. “He might not want to hear this, but I also think he could run a good 10,000 or even marathon. No matter what happens at the Trials, he has great future in track and field.”

Torrence doesn’t expect nerves to hinder his performance, even though the Trials come around just once every four years.

“I don’t get that nervous,” Torrence said. “This is what I want to do, this is what I enjoy doing. I’ve learned to embrace it and have fun with it.”