

Can American Miler, Leo “the lion” Manzano, Win Carlsbad?

Doug Padilla was the last American male to win the Carlsbad 5000 back in 1990. That was 23 years ago. Thankfully American Miler, Leo “the lion” Manzano is going to do his very best to end the American drought this coming Sunday. As the surprise silver medalist in the 2012 Olympic 1500 meter final, Manzano earned the right to be considered a threat in every race he enters. Even though this is his debut at 5000 meters (road or track), Manzano has had a career in which pulling off surprise performances has become his trademark.

Here are a few reasons why it’s very likely that Manzano will win in Carlsbad:

Reason #1 Steve Scott – This great American Miler, possibly the greatest miler in American history, won this race on its inception in 1986 and went on to repeat the feat two more times, in 1987 and 1988. In a side by side comparison, Manzano nearly matches and/or surpasses Scott’s personal bests at 800 meters (1:44.56 to 1:45.05), 1500 meters (3:32.37 to 3:31.76) and 1-mile (3:50.64 to 3:47.69). If one great American Miler can do it, why can’t another?

Reason #2 Bernard Lagat – Manzano has had success against top 5000 meter competition outkicking distance running legend, Bernard Lagat, on multiple occasions in both the 1500 meters and the mile. Lagat is the current American record at 5000 meters at 12:53.60 and former World Champion at the distance, winning gold in Osaka in 2007. Lagat is the second fastest 1500 meter runner of all-time with a personal best of 3:26.34. Manzano pedigree as a miler and success against one of the greatest milers of all-time provides a strong case for his potential as a threat at 5000 meters.

Reason #3 A Proven Tactician – If there’s one quality every distance runner should strive to hone it’s the ability to race tactically. Manzano is one of the best race tacticians in the world. He has an uncanny knack for putting himself in the right position at the start of nearly every race. And he holds and/or even improves upon that position throughout the race to be within striking distance of a win when it’s time to unleash his unbeatable finishing kick.

Reason #4 Leo is full of surprises – Manzano came out of nowhere to win his first NCAA outdoor crown in 2005 as a freshmen. In 2008, he became the first University of Texas athlete to make the U.S Olympic team in the 1500 meters. In 2012, he pulled off an even bigger surprise by coming from 6th place at the top of the homestretch to finish 2nd in the 2012 Olympic 1500 meter final, becoming only the 2nd American to win a silver medal at the distance since Jim Ryun in 1968 at the Mexico City Games. This surprise finish ended a 44-year drought for U.S. male middle distance running. Manzano has shown throughout his career he knows how to pull off the unexpected.

Reason #5 He’s the “King of the Jungle” – If his nick name is any indication, Manzano was meant to be a king. With the nick name “the lion” Manzano is meant to do one thing when he races and that’s find his way to victory lane wear the victors crown awaits him.

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In a career with countless highlights, Manzano’s continued improvement, year after year, indicates that he still has a plenty of surprises left up his sleeve. Will one of those surprises be a victory over current two-time winner, Dejen Gebremeskel this Sunday? In my eyes, it’s a very strong possibility.