Leo Manzano Signs Shoe Contract With Hoka One One

Olympic silver medalist had no shoe contract since end of 2012.

Leo Manzano, the 2012 Olympic 1500-meter silver medalist, signed a multi-year contract with Hoka One One, which should take him through the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics.

Manzano, a five-time NCAA champion at the University of Texas who has been on every outdoor U.S. Olympic and world championships team since 2007, will help Hoka, a brand associated with well-cushioned “maximalist” shoes and ultra running, develop its first racing flats and spikes.

Manzano said those spikes “could be ready as early as this summer.”

“I’m honored to represent Hoka One One,” Manzano said.

Manzano’s deal with Hoka was negotiated by Hawi Keflezighi of HAWI Management, who has been the Austin-based runner’s agent for just a few weeks. Manzano and Keflezighi, the brother of Olympic marathon silver medalist Meb Keflezighi, met at a RunningUSA conference in San Diego.

“He’s a brilliant guy, very down to earth. He and I really connected,” Manzano said of his new agent.

The news that Manzano was without a shoe contract just months after his medal-winning 1500 at the London Olympics puzzled many followers of world-class track and field. He was previously sponsored by Nike. Despite rumors to the contrary, he said he was getting many offers.

“It was just something that didn’t happen,” said Manzano, who said he received one offer early this year. He didn’t accept the offer because it would have forced the long-time Texas resident to move.
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He calls Hoka "a brand that I can really get behind. The Hoka leaders are runners themselves. They really understood me as a runner and a person. The guys were really big Roger Bannister fans, Sebastian Coe fans," Manzano said. "We just had really similar values. They really understand runners and athletes."

Manzano said he'll run in "whatever shoe fits with whatever I'm doing at the moment," until Hoka comes out with new models.

"Adding Leo to the Hoka family elevates our brand visibility and is a testament to the momentum we are gaining in the highly competitive running industry," Hoka One One brand president Jim Van Dine said. "Leo is not only an Olympian and track-and-field all-star, he's also a person with great integrity and character. We look forward to closely collaborating with Leo on product development—specifically racing spikes and flats."

Hoka One One, founded in 2009 and is now a part of Deckers Outdoor Corporation, has to this point specialized in well-cushioned and stable shoes favored by the ultra-running community. Manzano said he uses their Stinson model for the majority of his road and trail training.

"It was totally different from what I expected. It was super light, it didn't feel bulky at all," Manzano said.

The company has recently expanded its roster of athletes to include 2008 Olympic marathoner Magdalena Lewy Boulet, who now does trail and ultra races, and Michael Rutt, an emerging elite 800-meter runner, who will also switch to whatever spikes Hoka develops.

Although Manzano’s post-Olympic performances were sometimes erratic and subpar, he emphasized that he did have the fastest outdoor U.S. 1500-meter time in 2013, a 3:33.14, and that he finished second to Matthew Centrowitz at the USATF Championships.

"Considering all the odds" — no sponsor, no coach, and for awhile there, even no agent — "I performed to the best of my ability and probably superseded a lot of expectations," he said. "Now that I have this support, I can really focus on what matters, which is my training and getting after it on the track."

The support includes a new coach, former University of Texas distance coach John Hayes.

"He knows when to get people in shape, when you need to really push, when you need to back off," Manzano said of Hayes. "For me, that was perfect. He has a lot of experience to getting people to where they need to go."

Manzano ran a Mike A. Myers Stadium record 1:47.34 for 800 meters at the Texas Relays in March 27. He'll run the B.A.A. Invitational Mile on April 19, and the USA 1 Mile Road Championships in Des Moines three days later. He also run a leg on an American distance medley team at the Penn Relays in Philadelphia.

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