

Paul Bigg. Bk.

John Wood's life is still competitive

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Canoeist John Wood, seen shortly after winning a silver medal at the 1976 Olympics.

During the summer of 1976, Mississaugan John Wood:

Won the silver medal for the 500-metre race in single canoe competition at the Montreal Olympics, a showing that only three other Canadians have matched and none surpassed.

Reached the finals in canoe doubles competition at the Olympics with Mississauga Canoe Club partner Gregg Smith.

All in all, during those late summer days nearly six years ago, Wood turned in what likely still stands as the finest-ever performance by a Mississauga athlete.

Not surprisingly, then, Wood — a member of the city's Sports Hall of Fame, twice named Mississauga's Amateur Athlete of the Year — says the experience left him with a "long-lasting sense of satisfaction."

"I have to say that was probably one of the highlights of my life," he told The Mississauga News recently. "primarily because I was one of the lucky ones to walk away with a medal."

He had in fact come within a hair's breadth of taking the gold, finishing a fraction of a second behind a Soviet athlete. He shrugs off the achievement:

what are they doing now?

Paul Bigg
Snippet

"That's the nature of that race," he says. "They're always that close."

Wood, a canoeist since childhood, had previously competed with Canada's canoe team at the two previous Olympics in Mexico and West Germany, but "it was really during 1974, '75, '76 that we started getting good enough to compete internationally," he recalls.

The '68 showing had been dismal and the '72 performance, though an improvement, was still "nothing to brag about."

"We were really just learning in '68," he explains. "Canada had sort of been out of the international competition arena since the '56 Olympics."

Ironically, he says, this most Canadian of all Olympic events — introduced to the

Games by this country in 1924 and still so strongly identified with Canada that Europeans refer to it as "Canadian" competition — is now more popular in Europe and Eastern-bloc countries.

Regularly recognized and stopped by fans abroad, even at the height of his celebrity Wood went all but unnoticed in his home town.

He went on to win a second silver medal at an international competition in Sofia, Bulgaria, the next year. As it turned out, it was his swan song.

"I had a life to lead, and that (canoeing) had been a part of it up to that time, but I was married and I was 27, and I had to get a career started. There wasn't any pain; I just knew that was the end."

Now a stockbroker with Gardiner Watson Ltd. in Toronto, Wood confesses to missing full-time canoeing, but stays active at a club near his home in Oakville.

And the years of training, with their legacy of discipline, will always be with him, he says.

"The thing that athletics gave me was a capacity to work, which I feel has given me an advantage in my business, which is a competitive one."

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WOOD, John