

Real Big BK

July 30 / 86

Wood, John



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Silver memories

Ah, how time flies! *Real Big BK*

It doesn't seem more than a mere hop, skip and a jump down memory lane, but it was actually 10 years ago to the day today when Mississauga basked in the silver reflection of an Olympic medal won by a blond-haired athlete.

July 30, 1976. Distant enough to gain a vintage label, but not so far that the fine print on the label would fade away.

Remember John Wood?

Competing against the best in the world at Ile Notre Dame in Montreal, Mississauga canoeist Wood became the first Canadian athlete in nearly a quarter of a century to win an Olympic medal in a sport considered about as Canadian as maple sugar.

Some 30,000 spectators — still the largest crowd ever to watch a canoeing competition in Canada — came to see history in the making at the Olympic Basin and they were not disappointed, as Wood matched the might of the mightiest stroke-for-stroke to claim a silver medal in Canadian single canoeing and put an end to a long and dry 24-year spell. Until Wood's Montreal win in the 500-metre event, Toronto paddler Ken Lane (now an official with the Canadian Canoe Association) was the last athlete to rate a medal, in the Helsinki Olympics back in 1952, when his successor from Mississauga was still crawling around in diapers.

Wood missed becoming Canada's only gold medallist of the Montreal Games by 34/100th of a second, a mere (and very quick) blink of an eye.

The large crowd roared its 30,000-megaton support as Wood, Russian Aleksandre Rogov (the eventual winner) and Yugoslav star Matija Ljubek neared the finish line.

Ten years after the event, Wood still remembers every nerve-wrecking stroke, but swears he never heard the roar. He was too busy concentrating on the job at hand.

"At the starting line, looking down the final's fleet, I realized I had raced against every one of those men in various regattas," Wood said. "I had beaten every single one of them and they had all beaten me at one time or another."

The silversmith of Wood's success, Port Credit high school teacher (now teaching at Glenforest) Mac Hickox, said they went into the Games with a medal in mind. "The only thing we didn't know what color it would be," said Hickox.

For Mississauga, Wood's Olympic medal stood out as the brightest chapter in the city's sports history. For Wood, it was a timely reward for years of dedication, countless lonely training sessions at 5 o'clock in the mornings on the Credit River.

Today, a successful financial consultant on Bay St. in Toronto, Wood still finds time to paddle on the Credit.

He and his former coach, Hickox, have teamed up in tandem and hope to make their mark among the senior paddlers at the Canadian championships.

Just for the fun of it.

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