

# Wood provided hope for future generations of paddlers

Peel Brief.

Wood, John

3.

By Iain Colpitts

@IainMissiNews

MN July 29, 2016

If you ask Mac Hickox about John Wood, he'll say the Mississauga paddler did much more than win a silver medal at the 1976 Olympics. He'll say that performance – Canada's first medal in canoe/kayak since 1952 – kickstarted Canada's run of success in the sport.

As Wood's former coach, it may seem like Hickox's point of view is a bit biased, but he says the proof is in the pudding.

"When John put on this legendary performance, it was a breakthrough for canoeing in Canada, so what followed?" said Hickox.

"Larry Cain won the gold medal in '84 and then there's Carol Brunet and Steve Giles – the list goes on and on and on to Adam van Koeverden and Mark Oldershaw. It's been a steady march to the podium ever since."

Hickox went on to explain that American kayaker Greg Barton won two gold medals at the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, Korea and later told Hickox that he was in Montreal to see Wood's race, and it inspired him to pursue Olympic gold.



John Wood won a silver medal at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal on July 30 of that year.

The same could be said for Cain, a double medalist (gold and silver) at the '84 Games in Los Angeles.

Because Mississauga was incorporated as a city in 1974, Wood became the city's first athlete to medal at the Olympics.

It happened almost 40 years ago on July 30 and came during a time where systematic doping resulted in athletes from Eastern Bloc countries dominating the Olympic medal count.

Wood, who went on to be successful in the financial industry, struggled with depression in his later years and died of suicide in 2013 at the age of 63.

The '76 Games was his third and final Olympics. Wood often finished just shy of the podium at major events in the early '70s, and after finishing fifth at the 1973 World Championships, he asked Hickox to be his coach.

They were both part of the Mississauga Canoe Club back then and had become good friends, so Hickox said to him, "I'll be your mirror."

However, Wood was able to train as a fulltime athlete while Hickox had to juggle his duties of coaching and teaching at Port Credit Secondary School.

So together, they approached Mike Toth, then sports editor of The Mississauga News about writing a column urging Sport Canada to provide funding so people like Hickox could coach full time leading up to the Olympics.

Sport Canada obliged and Hickox was granted a leave of absence from Jan. 1, 1976 to the end of the Olympics.

Hickox believed Wood had an "insatiable appetite for training" and Toth agreed.

"He was punishing himself, let's put it that way," Toth said. "But then again, you have to when you get to that stage. I became very proud of him."

While Wood had built up momentum from winning various international events leading up to the Olympics, the atmosphere at the Olympic Village was a whole different animal.

Hickox described it as party central and because it could be distracting, he sent Wood home for a few days so he could focus on training on the Credit River.

The final race came down to a photo finish, with Wood missing out on gold by what Toth calls "a blink of an eye," 34 one hundredths behind Aleksandr Rogov of the Soviet Union.

With about 50 metres to go, Rogov, just slipped through him and he just held on. He told Toth he literally couldn't remember the last six strokes.

But Toth and Dick Loek of the Toronto Star captured his perfect form and his near miss.



Mac Hickox