

Aurora's Weston brings home quadruple gold at Indigenous Games



By Jake Courtepatte

Eric Weston is the king of the water at any distance.

The Aurora native won gold in four separate disciplines in the North American Indigenous Games over the weekend, reaching the top of the podium in the 200, 1000, 3000, and 6000-metre races at the under-19 level.

Two seconds split the seasoned paddler from his Ontario teammate Dawson Nootchtai in the 200-metre sprint, while the closest the two competitors came in any of the three longer races was a 38-second split.

"The 200-metre was the most competitive for me," said Weston, who competes with the Richmond Hill Canoe Club.

Just over two minutes separated Weston from Nootchtai in the 6000-metre discipline,

Weston has been with the Club for the past five years, and will be transferring to the Rideau Canoe Club in Ottawa in September when he leaves for college.

"It's important to me to continue to be active in the sport even though I will be in post-secondary school."

At just seventeen years old, Weston is already a well-seasoned veteran of the sport, with a paddle in his hand as far back as he can remember.

"I actually started kayaking as an infant, going out in a recreational kayak with my Dad and then graduating to solo kayaking at age four," said Weston. "I have kayaked competitively for five years in the sprint flat water discipline."

He found success at the provincial level just two years into his competitive tenure, finishing in the top five in the under-17 1000-metre and under-15 500-metre races at the Western Ontario Division Canoe Kayak Trials in 2014, while reaching the top of the podium in the under-15 1000-metre.

No stranger to the waters of Welland, the event was also held at the International Flatwater Centre, the same location as this year's Indigenous Games.

A fifth-place finish at the Western Ontario Division games held in 2015 in the under-17 1000-metre discipline also sent Weston to the national championships at just fifteen years old.

Training for up to eighteen hours per week year-round, Weston's regimen is a strict one, usually consisting of twice-daily sessions at the Club.

Weston, the only athlete to capture four gold medals in kayaking at the Games, was one of around 5,000 athletes at the NAIG held around the greater Toronto Area, with the kayaking events held in Welland.

Weston is a member of the Chippewas of Mnjikaning band near Rama. Adopted by non-Indigenous parents as an infant, this was the first real opportunity he had to explore his Indigenous roots through cultural events with his peers.

"I was interested to see how competitive [the games] would be and intrigued by the idea of competing with other Indigenous people," he said.

The NAIG is one of the largest sporting and cultural gatherings of Indigenous peoples in the world, with Weston competing against athletes from as far south as Florida and as far west as British Columbia.

Ontario finished third in the medal count with 137 medals, including 51 golds, behind just Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Looking ahead to the future, Weston has aspirations of joining the Canadian men's national kayaking team, an elite group with tons of Olympic experience. Former Olympians Sue Holloway, Renn Crichlow, Angus Mortimer, Kristin Gauthier, and Rhys Hill have all trained at the Rideau Canoe Club, and several high-level Canadian athletes call Rideau their current home club.