

Dave Hunt and Canada's Senior paddlers strike gold in Germany at World Dragon Boat Championships



Dave Hunt's latest international athletic adventure yielded the longtime Aurora resident four medals at the 17th IDBF World Dragon Boat Racing Championships.

Competing on Team Canada's 60+ Dragon Boat squad, Hunt captured one gold, two silvers, and one bronze in Brandenburg, Germany over a 16-day period in July.

Hunt says he was most pleased with the team's performance in his last race in Germany.

After his Team Canada squad captured the gold, he posted a triumphant update on Facebook: "After nine months of strength and endurance testing, countless time trials on land and one water plus hours of focused water time... what a way to finish my final event at the World Dragon Boat Championships. Gold in the championship event: the 500M Sr. C Open Standard. An incredible performance by our team who absolutely crushed the Aussies, Brits, Germans, Hungarians, Chinese Taipei, Italians, and Americans in the final two races."

In our dinner discussion at Wicked Eats on Sunday evening, the 62-year-old described the most satisfying part of the Gold in the 500M, which is considered the showcase event of Dragon Boat racing.

"It was the coolest feeling seeing the red buoys come up so fast into sight... the boat exploded forward with our efforts. We parceled our energy really well for the final push. We put it all together, especially in the second race when we beat the Aussies by three seconds after losing to them in the first race by one second. In the championship final... our third race... we held everybody off to win."

Hunt described the intense moment of introspection prior to the race and the sweet feeling of hearing the Canadian national anthem on the water before the premier event in Brandenburg.

"We were dealing with the wind and, as a diabetic athlete, I was checking my insulin pump and it was low. I tried to focus on my mental preparation and I settled myself by saying, 'Dave, you're in Germany. It's taken eight years and so much preparation to get here.' So often, we don't take a moment and think about the work it took to get there to clear our minds as athletes. What really motivated us at the end was hearing 'O Canada' playing in the background as one of our teams was back at the top of the podium

and I thought 'This was meant to be'. The whole idea of hearing 'O Canada' playing as we approached the line motivated us in our final race.

Hunt enjoyed the social aspects of the trip and the brotherhood of Dragon Boat racers in Europe.

I enjoyed being with the Singapore team at the airport. I've got a new pen pal now.

He also noted the camaraderie that took place after events and compared it to the brotherhood of rugby.

After winning a race, we were fist pumping with all the athletes on all the teams. Then, on the podium, there were dozens of athletes who were celebrating our successes very intensely. One of the Brits was 78-years-old and he was old enough to have sung 'God Save the King', 'God Save the Queen', and now 'God Save the King' again at the end of his career.

He noted that their competitors - the Brits and the Aussies - had sworn off alcohol to prepare for the championships. The Aussies had an eight-month period of sobriety in their contract. The Brits did the same but on a voluntary basis. Both teams wanted to narrow the gap between us and them after our dominance in Thailand in 2023. The target was on our backs, but we still had amazing results. The beer tent was pretty much filled with only Czechs and Canadians after the events.

After another successful medal haul at the World Championships, Hunt has his sights set on the Nationals in Montreal at the end of August. Winning the Nationals will qualify our team for the World Club Crew Championships in Taiwan in 2026.

After helping to get his club to the Worlds in Taiwan, Hunt will contemplate his retirement from international competition.

It's getting harder on the body and the months of training are taking their toll. This might be a great way to go out - with a gold medal.

Given Hunt's level of international success over the last five years, he'll be able to look back at with a high degree of satisfaction and perhaps give his body a break so he can play more golf with his neighbors.

I might finally have time to rejoin the Senior League on Tuesdays at St. Andrew's Valley. So much of my focus in Germany was on the last race - possibly my last international race for Team Canada. I wanted to perform optimally, despite my blood sugar being down. When we were called, I gulped down a granola bar, some sugar tabs, and a Powerade, overcame the muscle cramps, and I thought of my teammates who were on heart meds and two of our guys who had new hips put in and dealing with that kind of discomfort. We were able to pull it together, overcome our ailments, and hear 'O Canada' playing one more time.

By Jim Stewart