

Canadian Olympic Champion Graduates from CMCC

LOOKING FORWARD TO NEW PRACTICE AND ... SYDNEY

Editorial Staff

A student graduating from a chiropractic college is hardly news, but there are many interesting, individual stories of how chiropractic students have come to pursue a career in chiropractic and the road to that accomplishment.

If you noticed Derek Porter walking on the CMCC campus, you'd see a taller than average athletic-looking guy. If you spoke with him, you'd note his easygoing manner, his sense of humor and his confident yet modest demeanor. Then someone would tell you who Derek Porter was and you'd be surprised. "Really, an Olympic gold medalist?"

Derek's story is that of the student athlete, juggling the demands of chiropractic studies with the intense physical schedule required to compete at the world-class level.

Rowing Was "Just Another Sport"

Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Derek and his family moved to Victoria, British Columbia when he was two. In 1986, while studying kinesiology at the University of Victoria, Derek decided to take up rowing, an activity he considered "just another sport." Soon, he was a member of the school's varsity rowing team, and within two years was rowing for the Canadian national team as a member of the men's heavyweight eights (an eight-man sweep rowing team).

It was his association with the Canadian national team that sparked Derek's interest in chiropractic. At the time, the team's assistant coach recommended that rowers visit his personal chiropractor, Dr. Michael Murray. Derek was one of the first rowers on the team to receive a chiropractic adjustment, and it was through Dr. Murray's care that Derek developed an interest in pursuing a career in chiropractic.

"It's the far-reaching effects that chiropractic has on the body that excites me," Derek explained. "If your body is not getting the right neural input, it's not going to function at 100 percent, and that's what high performance athletics is all about."

In 1992, Derek was part of the eight-man crew that won the gold medal for Canada at the Summer Olympics in Barcelona. The following year, Derek made headlines when he won a gold medal in the men's single sculls event at the world championships in the Czech Republic. No man had ever won gold medals in both men's heavyweight eights and single sculls. The feat was all the more remarkable because the two events require entirely different rowing techniques. "The win was a surprise to everyone," Derek said, "including me."

While amateur athletes look to sign hefty deals to play for professional teams, Derek knew that he wasn't going to make a living from the sport, nor could his career continue for long. Two days after winning the world title, Derek began his studies at the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College, with an eye on competing in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

So began a grueling schedule for his first two years as a chiropractic student, often spending eight or more hours in class, returning home for another five hours of rowing or working out, and then studying until two or three in the morning.

Predictably, the long hours of classes and studies began to take a toll on his competitive rowing. While he won a gold medal in the Commonwealth Games in 1994, later that year he slipped to an eighth-place finish in the World Championships, and a seventh-place finish in the 1995 World Championships.

It was a disheartening for Derek to fall so quickly from being ranked as the top rower in the world. Clearly, he could not divide his time between studying and training and hope to win at the top level of his sport. Knowing that his competitive career would come to a close if he didn't rededicate himself to the sport, Derek decided to take a year off from his chiropractic studies to focus solely on rowing and preparing for the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta.

Going for More Gold

Within a few months, Derek had regained the conditioning and form that had made him an Olympic champion. In May, 1996, Derek showed the rowing world that he was back, winning the gold medal in men's single sculls at the Rotsee Regatta in Lucerne, Switzerland.

Two months later, Derek was in Atlanta competing in the Olympics Games again. He swept through the qualifying and semi-final heats with relative ease. In the finals, he encountered his biggest challenge yet in Switzerland's Xeno Mueller. Although Derek rowed valiantly and led for three-quarters of the race, Mueller edged Derek by less than three seconds to win the gold medal.

Derek made no excuses: "I gave it everything I could and it was a good race. On this day, I couldn't have beaten Xeno, so on that basis I'm happy to have the silver medal." Despite the loss to Mueller in the finals, Derek's second-place finish was the best ever by a Canadian in the men's single sculls event.

With a second Olympics behind him, Derek returned to CMCC in the fall of 1996 to resume chiropractic studies. Less than two years later, on May 1, 1998, Derek and dozens of other students gathered at the University of Toronto's Convocation Hall to receive their doctor of chiropractic diplomas.

Derek will be able to offer his patients the insight of experiencing chiropractic as a patient and now as a doctor. "I've been there," Derek said. "I've pushed my body to its limits and I understand the workings of the body from the patient's perspective. When races are won in the hundredths of a second, it's the small cogs in the machine that make the difference," Derek observed. "Chiropractic care can help make those cogs work to their best potential."

Sydney Calling

So, Derek Porter, DC, 30, embarks on a new life. But wait, the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games are just around the corner. Derek is looking to compete in Sydney. "I've just started to reach my maximum potential," he asserts.

Brian Richardson, Canada's head coach and Porter's personal coach, agrees. "He's at the right age where ... he could be right in there in whatever event he chooses to go for. I think he could do fantastically well in 2000. He's a great athlete."

"It's a pretty short life," Derek said in a philosophical mood. "I think to use it as productively as

possible is important. I'm sure there is a higher purpose to civilization on this planet. I think a lot if it is to find out what that is and to further contribute to it or be the best you can be in life."

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