

SPORTING LEGENDS: VICTOR DAVIS

SPORT: SWIMMING

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1980 - 1989

Victor Davis was a Canadian Olympic and World champion swimmer.

As a boy, Davis learned how to swim in the lakes in the area around his home, then joined the Guelph Marlin Aquatic Club at the age of 12.

A dedicated sportsman, he had a fierce passion to win that saw him become one of Canada's most prominent international swimming stars

As of 2009, Davis is still the most successful breaststroke swimmer Canada has ever produced. Though his Canadian National Records have now been surpassed by the likes of Morgan Knabe and Michael Brown - the new generation of Canadian male breaststrokers are still yet to match his Gold Medal achievements.

In recognition of his accomplishments, Victor Davis was named Swimming Canada's Athlete of the Year three times - and the Canadian government made him a member of the Order of Canada. He was also voted into Canada's Sports Hall Of Fame in 1990.



Victor Davis (February 10, 1964 – November 13, 1989)

A True Champion ...

SPORTING LEGENDS: VICTOR DAVIS

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

During his career, Davis held several world records as the winner of 29 national titles and 16 medals in international competition.

1982 World Championships – Guayaquil, Ecuador

Gold Medal . 200m Breaststroke (sets World Record at 2:14.77 secs)

Silver Medal . 100m Breaststroke

1982 Commonwealth Games . Brisbane, Australia

Gold Medal . 200m Breaststroke

Gold Medal . 4 x 100m Medley Relay

Silver Medal . 100m Breaststroke

1984 Olympics . Los Angeles, United States

Gold Medal . 200m Breaststroke (sets World Record at 2:13.34 secs)

Silver Medal . 100m Breaststroke

Silver Medal . 4x100m Medley Relay



Victor Davis was arguably the world's best Breaststroke swimmer of the 1980s.

SPORTING LEGENDS: VICTOR DAVIS

1986 Commonwealth Games – Edinburgh, Scotland

Gold Medal . 4x100m Medley Relay

Gold Medal . 100m Breaststroke

Silver Medal . 200m Breaststroke

1986 World Championships – Madrid, Spain

Gold Medal . 100m Breaststroke (he awarded this medal to A. Moorhouse)

Silver Medal . 200m Breaststroke

1987 Pan-Pacific Championships – Brisbane, Australia

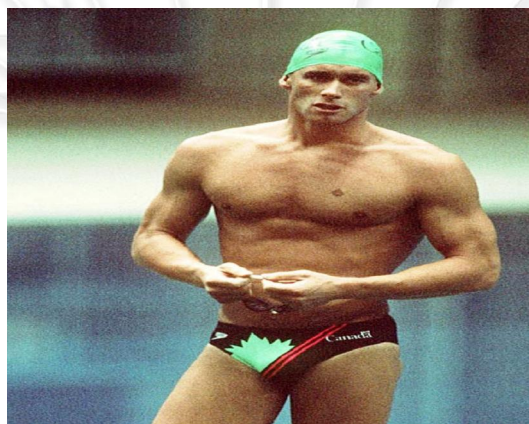
Gold Medal . 100m Breaststroke

Silver Medal . 4 x 100m Medley Relay

Bronze Medal . 200m Breaststroke

1988 Olympics – Seoul, South Korea

Silver Medal . 4x100m Medley Relay (1.00.90 secs Breaststroke split)



Victor Davis - preparing for battle at the 1988 Seoul Korea Olympic Games.

He recorded the then-fastest 100m Breaststroke Relay Split in history (1.00.90 secs).

SPORTING LEGENDS: VICTOR DAVIS

Perhaps the most enduring memories of Victor Davis's career arise from his arch-rivalry with **Adrian Moorhouse** (GBR). It is very rare in competitive swimming to witness an exciting rivalry that lasts for years between two world-class swimmers, but theirs was possibly the best of all

Encounter 1: Brisbane '82 (Commonwealth Games)

Victor Davis first encountered Adrian Moorhouse at the 1982 Commonwealth Games (Brisbane), with Davis taking gold in the 200m breaststroke, whilst Moorhouse took the gold in the 100m breaststroke. Both races were nail-bitingly close, and set the scene for some epic breaststroke encounters to come in the years ahead

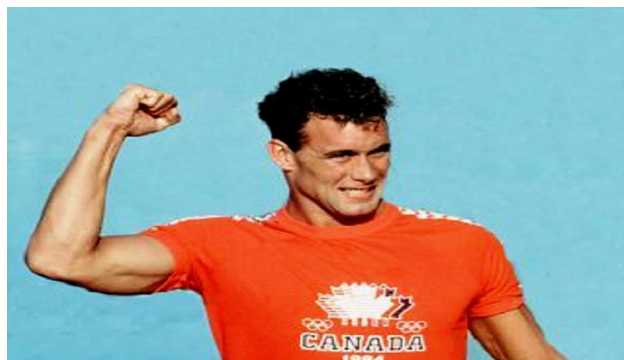
Encounter 2: Guayaquil '82 (World Championships)

They met again later at the 1982 World Championships (Guayaquil), but this time . Davis had the upper hand in both events, taking the gold in the 200m and silver in the 100m. Moorhouse, also in his first World Championships, only managed to finish 5th in the 100m, and 7th in the 200m

Encounter 3: Los Angeles '84 (Olympic Games)

Their next encounter was at the 1984 Olympics (Los Angeles), and it seemed that both their chances were enhanced by the voluntary boycotts of both East Germany and the Soviet Union. L.A. '84 was perhaps Victor Davis's finest competition, as he took gold in the 200m and silver in the 100m.

Meanwhile, Moorhouse suffered badly. Having had severe tonsillitis just days before the start of the Games, he finished 4th in the 100m and 6th in the 200m. Davis, now at the pinnacle of his career, was voted into the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame in 1985



Victor Davis - savouring his Gold-Medal victory at the 1984 Olympics.

SPORTING LEGENDS: VICTOR DAVIS

Encounter 4: Edinburgh '86 (Commonwealth Games)

At the time of the 1986 Commonwealth Games (Edinburgh), Victor Davis was universally recognised as the finest breastroker in the world. He reaffirmed that recognition by taking gold in the 100m event

However, Adrian Moorhouse was improving rapidly. Now the European Champion, he surprised Davis by sneaking the gold in the 200m event

Encounter 5: Madrid '86 (World Championships)

By the time of the 1986 World Championships (Madrid), the world swimming media were hyping up the 100m breastroke event as the event of the championships knowing that it would inevitably prove to be another great battle between Victor Davis and Adrian Moorhouse

The media and crowd were not to be disappointed. Moorhouse was in great shape, and getting faster all the time. Davis couldn't contain Moorhouse over the final 25m, and Moorhouse took the 100m gold in a new European Record of 1.02.01 secs

Davis took the silver in 1.02.71 secs, and looked disgusted with himself as he climbed out of the pool. However, the controversy was soon about to begin

The officials decided to disqualify Moorhouse for an illegal turn stating that he had used a butterfly kicking action during the underwater phase of the 50m turn

TV crews from around the world began to analyse the footage of the illegal turn from all conceivable angles, but each time it looked perfectly sound



Davis hated Moorhouse in the pool - but had great respect for him outside of it.

SPORTING LEGENDS: VICTOR DAVIS

The British camp tried to appeal against the decision, but the call of the turn judge was upheld and Victor Davis was awarded the gold medal, leaving Moorhouse with absolutely nothing.

Davis received his gold medal on the rostrum looking decidedly dejected. He was the ultimate perfectionist, and didn't feel as if he had truly won this race against his closest rival. He also knew Moorhouse well, and was aware that it had taken more than just an illegal turn for him to beat Davis by more than half a second.

After the medal ceremony was over, Davis walked over to where the British swimmers were camped out and signalled for Moorhouse to come over to him. Davis then made the ultimate gesture, by shaking Moorhouse by the hand and then placing the gold medal around his neck.

Davis honestly believed that Moorhouse had beaten him fair and square, and I thought that this gesture demonstrated both the honour and integrity of the man brilliantly. Yes, Victor had a bad-boy image, although I think part of that was overblown and part of it was reality. The overblown part was the 1982 Commonwealth Games, when he kicked a chair in front of the Queen. But he had character. You want athletes who strive to achieve excellence and will sacrifice things to try and be the best in the world.

Later in the same championships, Davis went on to take silver in the 200m breaststroke, beaten by the emerging Hungarian swimmer, Josef Szabo. Meanwhile, Moorhouse withdrew from the 200m event with a strained adductor muscle.



Victor by name, Victor by nature. Winning meant absolutely **everything** to Davis.

SPORTING LEGENDS: VICTOR DAVIS

Encounter 6: Seoul '88 (Olympic Games)

The final encounter between Davis and Moorhouse at the 1988 Olympic Games (Games) also proved to be Davis's final international competition. Both of them had announced before the Games that the 100m event was to be their main priority.

Davis had performed poorly at the Canadian Olympic Trials, and had surprisingly not made the team in the 200m breaststroke whilst Moorhouse was now in the form of his life. He was ranked no.1 in the world, and his lifetime best of 1.01.78 secs was now very close to the world record (1.01.65 secs).

Davis, still the Canadian Record Holder at 1.01.99 secs, was only ranked 6th in the world going into the 1988 Olympics and no-one really knew what kind of shape he was going to be in.

In the morning heats, Davis looked very impressive. He led the field from the start, and easily won his heat in a time of 1.02.48 secs. Only Moorhouse was able to qualify in a faster time, winning his heat in a superb time of 1.02.19 secs.

In the anticipation before the final, many people believed that Moorhouse was the slight favourite, but some pundits still had the feeling that Davis had one more great swim left up his sleeve. After one false start, Moorhouse looked the more nervous of the two behind the starting blocks. Meanwhile, Davis looked very cool and calm he was now vastly experienced, and ready to deliver the ultimate performance.

The gun sounded, and the race was underway at the second time of asking. Both Davis and Volkov made strong starts, leaving Moorhouse slightly trailing. As the first 50m unfolded, Volkov powered into an incredible 2-metre lead, whilst Davis was now being matched stroke for stroke by Moorhouse.

Volkov touched first at the 50m mark in 28.12 secs, and the audience gasped in disbelief as this set a new world record for the 50m breaststroke! Moorhouse turned 6th in 29.42 secs, whilst Davis turned 7th in 29.46 secs. Volkov made an amazing turn, and extended his lead over the field even more. As Volkov reached the 75m mark, he looked a certainty for the gold medal. He was 3-4 metres ahead of Moorhouse, Davis and Guttler, but he was tiring fast.

It was at this point of the race where Davis and Moorhouse usually made their move and it was no different this time. They closed in on Volkov, and as the swimmers entered the final 5 metres, it was difficult to tell where the medals were going to go. They all lunged into the electronic timing pads together, and looked back towards the electronic scoreboard simultaneously.

SPORTING LEGENDS: VICTOR DAVIS

It was an extremely close finish, but Moorhouse had taken the gold in 1.02.04 secs, just ahead of Guttler's time of 1.02.05 secs – only one one-hundredth of a second separating the two of them. The bronze medal was won by Volkov, in a time of 1.02.20 secs – leaving Victor Davis in 4th place, with a time of 1.02.38 secs –

Moorhouse was understandably delighted, whilst Davis was not pleased at all –

However, later in the 1988 Olympic programme, Victor Davis swam a memorable breaststroke leg as part of the Canadian 4 x 100m Medley Relay team that took the silver medal behind the USA –

Davis relay split of 1.00.90 secs was the fastest recorded 100m breaststroke relay split of all-time up to that point in history – proving that he was still one of the best in the world –

A star of Canada's national swim team for nine years, he retired from competitive swimming in July of 1989 –

Tragedy

Only a few months after his retirement, on November 11th 1989, while outside a nightclub in the Montreal suburb of Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Quebec, Victor Davis was struck by an automobile whose driver fled the scene.

Two days later, the 25 year-old died of his injuries in hospital. His parents fulfilled his express wish that his organs be donated to help save the lives of others.

Each year since his passing, awards are made by The Victor Davis Memorial Fund to help young Canadian swimmers continue their education while training in pursuit of excellence at the international level of competition.



Victor Davis gave his all in every race he swam - and winning for Canada meant so much.

SPORTING LEGENDS: VICTOR DAVIS



Scott Burton's Final Thought

There is no doubt in my mind that Victor Davis was a true sporting legend – his achievements inspired not only a generation of Canadian swimmers - but also a generation of swimmers all around the world – including myself.

Although my preferred swimming events have always been the Individual Medley, I believe that breaststroke is my favourite individual stroke.

During the Davis-Moorhouse era of 1982-1989, my best friend in swimming was a guy named Adam March. We met at a very young age, and were fiercely competitive in both training and race events.

As we matured and became faster, our races also became more intense. When out of the pool, we were the best of pals, but when inside the pool . we hated each other – guts – and would give anything to beat each other in races.

We were also keen fans of Victor Davis and Adrian Moorhouse, and were always pretending that our rivalry compared to the intensity of theirs! Childish games indeed they may have been, but pretending to be our heroes had the most positive effect on not only our rivalry in the pool, but also our friendship outside of it.

Naturally, being British, we always wanted Moorhouse to win, but in the final analysis, they were both warriors and we were truly inspired by both of them. One of our dreams came true in 1989, when we were selected for the Great Britain Junior Squad. I was selected for the 200m and 400m Individual Medley events, whilst Adam was picked for the 100m Breaststroke –

That same year, we were fortunate enough in April 1989 to attend one of Victor Davis's training camps in Montreal, Canada. It was only a 4-day camp, but what a fantastic experience it was. Now up close and personal to a true hero of ours, both Adam and I just watched in awe as he demonstrated starts, turns and technique that were just perfect in every way –

After listening to one of his swimming technique lectures, each of the youngsters was allowed to ask Victor Davis a question. Most of the others seemed really shy, and didn't seem to have anything to say – but I was determined to put my question to him. I asked him why he felt compelled to hand his 1986 World Championship Gold Medal to Adrian Moorhouse, when he didn't have to.

SPORTING LEGENDS: VICTOR DAVIS

He said that, all throughout his swimming career, he was striving for excellence and attempting to swim the perfect race. He believed that his performance of 1.02.71 secs was poor by his own standards, and felt that by keeping that gold medal, he would always look upon it as one that he won by default and not one that he had earned.

Everything Victor Davis said that day made sense and we all respected him for his honesty. When we learned of his passing in November 1989, both Adam and I couldn't believe it. We felt lucky to have met him, and equally blessed that we had been given the chance to learn from a true, sporting legend like Victor Davis.

Victor Davis's enormous popularity with Canadians was perhaps due as much to his cocky flamboyance as to his astonishing talent. In a country noted for its reserve, and a sport where most of a swimmer's life is spent with his face in the water, Victor Davis was always different and never dull. He was an inspiration to every Canadian and an exciting challenge to every swimmer.

Victor Davis led a great life. He gave himself over to his goals and passions without reservation or doubt, without questioning whether he might do better with a more conventional life. He pursued the Olympics not because his countrymen wanted him to, but because it was right for him.

I remember Davis as he was at that Montreal training camp, his earnest Canadian Maple Leaf tattoo above his heart, his body cutting through the water like a speed-boat. I remember him at the height of his personal glory, doing what he loved best and succeeding. It was not his success that made him great, but his spirit which led him to it.



When asked what it took to achieve his amazing successes in swimming, Davis said,

%Skill, Drive & Hard God-damn work that was my recipe +



Victor Davis Memorial Fund

The **Victor Davis Memorial Fund** was established in 1990 to remember Victor, his contribution to competitive swimming in Canada, and to encourage other young Canadians toward excellence.

Each year awards may be made from the Fund to promising, high performance Canadian amateur swimmers to assist them to continue their training, education, and pursuit of medals at the international level of competition.

Since its inception, the Victor Davis Memorial Fund has awarded over 55 athletes with \$1000 bursaries to aid in their training costs.

A great percentage of these athletes have gone on to become members of Canada's National team, with many of them going on to represent Canada at the Olympics and other International events.

Victor Davis
1964-1989

