

Nikolai Pimenov

Nikolai was one of the most successful Russian rowers of recent years. More than that though, he was not only generous in his friendship but also talented: Nik's mystical paintings were sought after by many rowers, while his company, was valued, both by the rowers in the Soviet and later Russian teams, as well as by many of his contemporaries in the West.

Nik won the lion's share of his World Championship medals stroking a coxless pair, with his brother behind him. The hallmark of his races was a devastating burst of pace. Usually, this came in the first 500m of a race, though Nik could surprise opponents by throwing in a 'killer' burst in the middle 1000m.

Nik crowned his Olympic Silver in the pairs of 1980 by winning his first World Championship Gold in Munich the following year. The margin of victory was overwhelming. But in the next three years, different challenges were to follow. Nik tried to win Gold in a coxless four in 1982 but had to settle for Silver then and in the following year, after they were just rowed down on the line by the German crew. He returned to the pair in 1984, only to be denied certain Gold by the Soviet boycott of the Los Angeles Games.

He showed how tough he was, the following year, when he rowed himself to exhaustion to win the pairs title again by 0.08 second. In fact, Nikolai had to be taken to hospital to recover and so missed the medal ceremony. But he and his brother were back again to retain the title the following year.

Throughout his long and distinguished career, which spanned eighteen years between 1978 and 1995, even outlasting that of his brother he was always to show those same fighting qualities. As an athlete, he was always generous to his opponents, whether in victory, or defeat and would often spring a surprise on those he was racing by taking a mischievous drag or two on a cigarette when he was out during the evening.

It was perhaps the qualities of the artist in him which drew so many of his contemporaries towards him. Nik would always turn up at Championships with a sheaf of watercolour studies to complete for some larger oil canvas he was working on. His work borrowed heavily from the mystical Russian tradition and in 1992 was given an acclaimed international accolade by winning the Olympic Cultural Prize for Art.

But for all that, Nik always kept his feet firmly planted on the ground. He was still winning Gold medals at the end of his career in 1995, when he was part of the Russian eight which won at Lucerne that year: Truly a man for all seasons. He was awarded the Thomas Keller medal in 1996.