

# Fitness: Diver David Snively proves 57 isn't too old to take a plunge

The Montreal fitness expert realized his dream of being a world champion last month, 37 years after that dream was dashed at the Olympics.

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David Snively (pictured training in 2014) won three world titles at the FINA World Masters Championships in August. "It's a full-time job to keep your body well and stay injury free," he says. *JOHN MAHONEY / MONTREAL GAZETTE FILES*

This is a story of patience, persistence, hard work and reward, featuring a 57-year-old diver whose dream was dashed in 1980, then again in 2014, but was finally realized this summer — 37 years later.

David Snively was scheduled to represent Canada at the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, but the decision by Canada to boycott the Games in response to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan left his dream unfulfilled. Already a Canadian champion, Snively dreamed of earning a world title, something that eluded him in his youth. This summer he won not one, but three world titles, earning gold in the men's one-metre, three-metre and platform events at the FINA World Masters Championships, held in Budapest in August.

"I'll take being called a world champ at any age," said Snively.

The road to gold wasn't easy, even for one of Montreal's leading fitness experts. His plan to make up for 1980 by [taking part in the 2014 World Masters Championships in Montreal](http://www.montrealgazette.com/sports/fitness+never+take+leap+faith/9897747/story.html) (<http://www.montrealgazette.com/sports/fitness+never+take+leap+faith/9897747/story.html>) was dashed by a knee injury just weeks before he was scheduled to compete. He came back from that disappointment only to suffer another injury, and then an emergency appendectomy in January of this year.

While he says he could have used a few more months to perfect some of the hardest dives on his list, he managed to stay healthy during the final push to prepare for the meet last month.

"It took me a few injuries to finally figure just how hard I could push my body," said Snively.

At the pool three to four days a week, Snively now limits himself to a 30-minute warm-up and an hour on the board. While that may seem unremarkable for someone who was preparing for an international competition, it's worth noting that by the time he pulls on his Speedo at 2 p.m., Snively has been up since 4 a.m. and taught several demanding fitness classes. He then goes home to a household with three children, including twin boys who just started kindergarten.

It's not just time in the pool that helped Snively regain his form. Regular visits to a chiropractor, osteopath, athletic therapist and massage specialist, along with a dedicated coach, allowed him to coax his body to perform a dive list with enough difficulty and technical skill to show up the competition.

"It's a full-time job to keep your body well and stay injury free," he said.

Add the challenge of getting on the diving board 48 hours after arriving in Budapest, and he wasn't just battling nerves, but battling jet lag as well.

"I was faced with the challenge of doing an inward 2 1/2 (somersault) on a three-metre board at what felt like 3 a.m. our time, but was 9 a.m. in Budapest," he said. "That's not easy at 57 years of age."

Despite the challenges, Snively says the work to achieve his goal was anything but a chore. And while he often arrived at the pool tired, he never failed to leave elated.

"It was a joy for me," he said of the time spent repeatedly performing his list of dives. "When you're training to make a dream come true, it never really feels like work."

If anything, his love of diving has intensified since the days when he was training for the Olympics more than 30 years ago. And while his journey demanded juggling a business and

family commitments alongside the countless hours of training, it only made the success that much sweeter.

"It's a constant revelation as to what I can do and what I should do," Snively said of his path to gold.

Indeed, science is just now starting to question long-held theories about aging, much of which is sparked by athletes like Snively who refuse to see advancing years as an excuse to slow down. Instead, they see it as an opportunity to combine the wisdom and patience that comes from life experience with a body and spirit that still has some fight left in it.

Snively and his counterparts have taught us that there are very few absolutes when it comes to anticipating the decline in performance that is often associated with aging. In fact, studies of master athletes suggest that slower times and reduced strength and power aren't as much related to age as they are to a reduction in training intensity and volume. This also highlights a question that Snively, and the world's best exercise physiologists, are struggling to answer: how hard is too hard and how often is too often when it comes to preparing the 40-plus crowd for athletic success?

With the growing interest in competitions geared to master athletes and the growing number of master athletes willing to push their bodies beyond conventional training regimes, there's renewed hope for anyone whose dreams of athletic success haven't died with age.

As for Snively, he has no plans to slow down. He's got the USA Masters Diving Spring Nationals in May and the Pan American Masters Championships in June pencilled into his calendar, which means he isn't done with afternoons spent at the pool, nor the potential thrill of bringing home gold medals.

"I want to continue as long as I can," he said.

