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Bronze slips away from Erie's Hart at Paralympics

HONG KONG -- Erie's Rebecca Hart did what she could to secure an equestrian bronze medal at Wednesday's Paralympic Summer Games. It wasn't enough.

By 2.1 percentage points, Germany's Britta Naepel edged Hart for third place in the Grade II individual freestyle. The 24-year old Villa Maria Academy graduate and her gelding, Norteassa, held that spot until the event's final rider trotted into the Hong Kong Equestrian Venue.

That rider, Naepel, claimed the bronze aboard Cherubin. Naepel finished with 70.277 percentage points to Hart's 68.11.

Canada's Lauren Barwick (72.776) won the gold medal and Great Britain's Felicity Coulthard (71.056) the silver.

Hart, in her final Paralympic event, was elated with the outcome despite her near miss.

"I had a definite goal in mind and I met that goal," she said in a United States Equestrian Federation release. "I'm pleased with my horse, it was a great ride. I worked on the expression, got him to settle and got the cadence and elegance back."

Hart's result made up for Monday, when she placed 12th aboard Norteassa in the Grade II individual test. She qualified for the Games because of familial spastic paraplegia, a condition that's caused the muscles and ligaments in her legs to slowly tighten.

The Paralympics, which conclude Sept. 17, won't be Hart's last international competition.

"My ultimate goal is the 2010 World Equestrian Games," she said.