



June Wright and Brian Coak celebrate Mantas Swimming Club's 40th anniversary at the Hong Kong Football Club. Photo: Franke Tsang

Olympic swimmer Hannah Wilson is ever grateful for the "international exposure" the Mantas Swimming Club gave her at a young age and believes that is what initially spurred her on to excel for Hong Kong on the world stage.

Although retired, Wilson tried to instill that inspiration among the younger audience at the club's 40th anniversary celebration at Hong Kong Football Club last night.

In between her duties as MC, Wilson relived her days as a mere babe in the pool, paying tribute to a club that has for the past four decades kept churning out champions.



Hannah Wilson with the two gold medals she won at the 2009 Summer Universiade World Student

Games in Belgrade. Photo: Ricky Chung

"Having that opportunity to get exposure to international talent, and to experience racing in front of lots of people and being a part of a team, are invaluable from such a young age. This is what I got at Mantas from a young age," said Wilson.

Established in 1975, by the late captain Harry Wright, his wife June Wright and Brian Coak, Mantas Swimming Club aimed to provide young talent with opportunities to compete against other elite swimmers in Asia.

Today, 40 years on, Mantas has more than surpassed its goals, producing a host of champions who have gone on to represent Hong Kong, as well as other countries, at the Olympics.

"I competed in my first ever Mantas home meet when I was seven," said three-time Olympian Wilson. "The team and competition experience got me comfortable standing up on a block in front of crowds, giving me the confidence as I grew older.

"We got to race swimmers from different countries making it an amazing experience against kids the same age from all over Asia enabling us to have a sense of where we stood in terms of our competition," she said.

Mantas Swimming Club germinated from an idea Harry Wright had in 1972 soon after he began to coach the YMCA swimming team in preparation for its regular competition with the Manila YMCA team.

"Having completed a distinguished career with the British Army, Captain Wright began a second career as a swim coach and over the course of nearly 30 years trained hundreds of young Hong Kong children, guiding many into the international arena," said daughter-in-law Beverley Wright.

"The Mantas club was Harry's means of providing a way in which talented swimmers in Hong Kong could aspire to compete locally, regionally and internationally."

Harry Wright died in 1999 from a heart attack while in Britain. He was 67. He is survived by his wife June, who is 82.

Today Harry Wright's name is better known for its association with Harry Wright International, a private coaching company which runs a big learn-to-swim programme starting from babies and right up to competitive swimming.

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BEVERLY WRIGHT

Mantas is a supplementary club run for competitive swimmers - "it's a family club" says Beverley Wright - and heavily supported by HWI.

Run on a non-profit-making basis by a parent committee, Mantas has 70 swimmers who are enrolled from 60 families. The club president is Susan Tan.

Several Mantas swimmers have gone on to represent Hong Kong and other countries at Olympic, Commonwealth and Asian Games, among them Geoffrey Cheah, Alex Fong Lik Sun, Joanna Fergus, Arthur Li Kai-lien, Celeste Hung Cee-kay, Anthony Mosse, Annemarie Munk, Fenella Ng Gar-loc, Karen Robertson, Andrew Rutherford, Duncan Todd, Kathryn Wong and most recently Hannah Wilson.



Geoffrey Cheah competes at the Fina/Mastbank World Cup

at Victoria Park in October 2014. Photo: Unus Alladin