

# MAKING Waves

*Manchester Metropolitan is now home to a National Performance Centre for swimming. Met Magazine spoke with the athletes and coaches who are leaving others in their wake*

**W**hat does it take to make it to the top? Grit, determination, dedication? A willingness to go above and beyond? Overcoming the odds?

For generations of Manchester swimmers this hard work is a given. If you want to reach the top, you've got to put the hard laps in.

Today's bunch are no different – rising at the crack of dawn to complete gruelling training sessions in the international-standard Aquatics Centre, while the rest of us are firmly in the sandman's gentle embrace.

It's a tradition of toughness and excellence that stretches back to 1906. Something in the water, you might say.

At the original London Olympics, hosted in 1906, a 21-year-old Greater Manchester man made quite a splash, becoming Britain's greatest-ever amateur swimmer of the era.

Henry Taylor returned home a triple gold Olympian – a record for medals won by a single person in a single games, not equalled by a British athlete until cyclist Sir Chris Hoy won his third gold in Beijing in 2008.

Taylor's training methods catch the eye too: plunging into the freezing canals of Oldham to learn to swim, or heading to Chadderton swimming baths on 'dirty water day'.

The city was to build on this swimming success and later in the same year Victoria Baths – “the most splendid municipal bathing institution in the country” – opened in Manchester to improve

the health and wellbeing of the ordinary people of Manchester.

The first British woman to swim the English Channel, Sunny Lowry, learned to swim at the baths and went on to devote her life to swimming in Manchester as an instructor.

These are just two of the examples of the city's passion and tradition for swimming, and how Manchester can coach and inspire young swimmers to become tomorrow's stars of the pool.

Manchester Metropolitan is dedicated to carrying on this rich tradition, making the dreams come true for aspiring swimmers with a new national centre of excellence.

And while the facilities, training techniques and equipment are thoroughly 21st century, the requirements remain much the same as they were for Henry Taylor in 1906: grit, determination and dedication.

## Professional partnerships

The very heart of swimming in Manchester lies within the close partnership between Manchester Metropolitan, the City of Manchester Aquatics Swim Team (CoMAST) and Manchester City Council.

The partnership was formed to provide a pathway for athletes looking to combine studying with a professional training programme. It gives students access to world-class swimming facilities and coaching and reflects the ambitions of Manchester to attract and retain sporting excellence.

But, from what started as three local, likeminded institutions pulling together to improve the city's swimming offer, this partnership has recently expanded. It now stands apart from the current crop, making Manchester Metropolitan the host of one of only five National Swimming Performance Centres as chosen by Swim England, the national governing body for swimming.

It stands as an extension to the already established partnership in Manchester, but will enhance the opportunity to identify and develop athletes for English and British pathways and allow them to perform to the highest standards whilst also achieving academic excellence.

The University's role within the partnership touches on all areas: research, teaching, and elite and grassroots sport. To give elite athletes the best chance in their dual career, the University offers these students a place to study through the sports scholarship, which offers a bespoke package of financial and lifestyle support and education, including nutritional advice, physiotherapy, strength and conditioning support and a financial contributions towards fees – all run by MMU Sport.

The partnership is headed by former international swimmer and national swim coach Mark Rose.

He came to Manchester after the Beijing Olympics in 2008 to help fulfil Manchester City Council's aspirations to make sport more available in the city. As Manchester Metropolitan shared the same ambition for

sport, the University quickly became a valued partner in helping to lead the way. Rose is now the Head of Performance Coaching and Strategic Aquatics Lead for Manchester City Council and the Swim England Performance Centre, and head coach of CoMAST's elite group, the Beacon Squad.

“We've put in the region of 100 athletes on British teams within the last ten years,” said Rose as he looked out onto the Olympic-sized, international-standard swimming pool at the Manchester Aquatics Centre – the training ground for Manchester Metropolitan athletes.

“And that has been slowly increasing year by year, particularly since the start of this forever-growing and evolving partnership we have with Manchester Metropolitan.

“In the last twelve months, we've turned Manchester into a super power within swimming in Britain and even throughout the world in some events.

“It's an extremely unique partnership we have in Manchester

“**The environment within Manchester is positioned to help swimmers maximise their swimming and academic aspirations**”

with an offer for athletes that you don't see anywhere else in Britain. We were absolutely at the front of the pack when being chosen as a National Performance Centre and we've been left in no doubt about that from our partners.

“There's no other place that you can study at university, train at the best sporting venues, access top-quality, professional support services and live, all within a maximum of a 15-minute walk of each other.”

Neil Hurren, Strategic Lead for Sport at Manchester Metropolitan University, added: “Our swimming partnership with Manchester City Council and CoMAST is really beginning to bear fruit. Our investment into the partnership has significant benefits across various aspects of the University strategy. From student athlete recruitment, and students choosing Manchester Met as a destination of choice for balancing study alongside their swimming development, to enhanced student experience through the fabulous package our student swimmers now receive

on their doorstep in the fantastic Manchester Aquatics Centre.

“The recent announcement that we have been named as one of the Swim England Performance Centres emphasises that this partnership is flourishing and with a top five finish in both the BUCS (British Universities and Colleges Sport) short and long course championships it is an exciting time to be involved in the Manchester Met swim programme.”

The Manchester Partnership was one of five across the country selected to host a Swim England Performance Centre following an application process. The Swim England Talent Team will provide support through funding, coaching, and technical advice and the tight partnership ensures long-term sustainability.

Grant Robins, Swim England Head of Talent – Swimming, said: “The environment within Manchester is positioned to help swimmers maximise their swimming and academic aspirations.”



## How a Performance Centre works

The aim is to combine study and training needs into a seamless pathway to make it easy for students to do both.

The University will tailor course provision to offer:

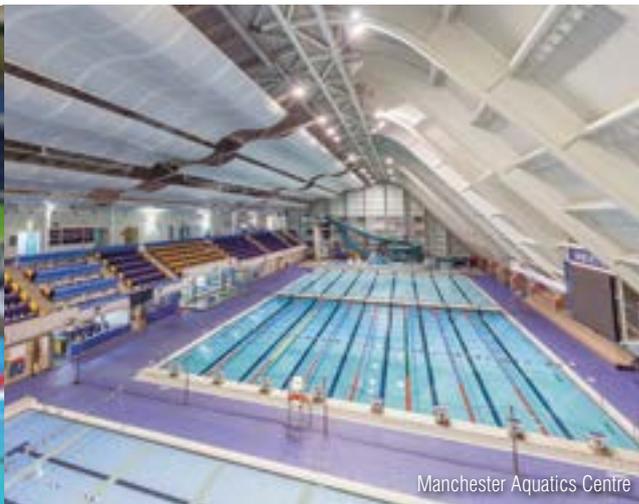
- flexible timetabling
- science and medicine support
- appropriate performance facilities
- professional coaching
- the potential for bursaries and or scholarships

The Swim England Talent Team supports each training partner to ensure the environment is athlete-centred and coaching attitudes are aligned with British Swimming.

“**In the last twelve months, we've turned Manchester into a super power within swimming in Britain and even throughout the world in some events**”



Mark Rose, Head of Performance Coaching and Strategic Aquatics Lead for Manchester City Council



Manchester Aquatics Centre

Tully Kearney also broke two new British records in both of her races. First she broke the 50m and 100m records whilst racing in the 200m freestyle. She then went on to break her own 50m record again en route to the 100m title.

This year, the combined swimming team has climbed from ninth place to fifth in the BUCS swimming league table.

## British Swimming

The University also holds a long-standing partnership with British Para-Swimming and in 2018 entered into a memorandum of understanding.

The formal agreement was made to enhance the support and opportunities in sports education, in research and for students, and help drive forward the University sport initiative – and a year on its impact is being seen.

British Swimming's Chairman Maurice Watkins CBE said: "A year on from the signing of the memorandum of understanding between British Swimming and Manchester Metropolitan University, we have seen the relationship between the two organisations develop. It continues to positively impact the British Para-Swimming world class programme with athletes in Manchester and around the UK benefitting from the unique relationship.

"The partnership has increased provision and support for student athletes, but has created further development opportunities and routes for the broader Manchester Metropolitan population, be it further research within elite level sport or experiential learning through volunteering.

"Examples of such research work include projects on technical race skills and skill acquisition. Practitioners from the University are working closely with programme athletes to identify areas for

improvement and then liaising with coaches to implement them.

"We look forward to continuing this successful working relationship and bearing the fruits of this great work in 2020 and beyond."

**We're already getting to the point where the top performance squad in Manchester, who are heading to world and Olympic trials, are Manchester Met students or graduates**

British Swimming Chairman Maurice Watkins CBE



"The partnership between the club and the University has been seamless. The services and support provided for the swimmers is first class and should give them every opportunity to achieve their potential going forward.

"The Performance Centre only started operating this academic year, so to have seen such positive results at the BUCS Championships is both very encouraging and impressive. We hope this continues in the future."

Rose, who coaches Manchester Metropolitan scholars Chloe Golding and Emma Day in his Beacon Squad at the Aquatics Centre, said: "The scholarship Manchester Met offers is crucial if you want high achievers to come to your university. The University shares the vision that those who are high performers in sport are also high performers academically and in every aspect of life.

"The scholarship at Manchester Met plays a key part in our production line for preparing and getting athletes onto major games teams and we want them all to be wearing MMU Sport's orange t-shirts.

"We want this city to be a leading team, not just in Britain and in Europe, but across the world and to be the go-to place for elite athletes worldwide. Manchester Met play a crucial part in this and we're already getting to the point where the top performance squad in Manchester, who are heading to world and Olympic trials, are Manchester Met students or graduates."

## Swimming for all

Swimming has always been a performance sport at Manchester Metropolitan and offers varying levels and opportunities for everyone – from those who want to train a couple of times a week, to enjoy the social experience and compete for the University, to those individuals who train up to nine times a week and are on the international pathway to success.

The Manchester Metropolitan swim club competes in all BUCS (British Universities and Colleges Sport) competitions – a competition run by the national governing body for higher education sport in the UK. Swimming is one of the biggest individual sports within the league and over the last 12 months Manchester Metropolitan has achieved its best ever results.

The swimmers attended the BUCS Short Course Swimming Championships at Ponds Forge International Swimming Centre in December 2018, where they secured 12 medals and accumulated 104 BUCS points – by far the University's best achievement in a swim competition.

Sports Scholars Golding, Day, Katie Matts, Lewis White, and Ella Cooper-Holmes competed at the three-day event alongside over 1,700 students from 87 different institutions. With six bronze, two silver and four gold medals, Manchester Metropolitan placed fourth overall.

The team continued with this success in the BUCS Nationals tournament in January 2019 – the UK's largest annual multi-sport event.

The swimmers came away with four golds, two silver and three bronze medals.

## Elite athletes

For most, swimming is a mandatory skill learnt as a youngster, but MMU Sport support five sports scholars where swimming isn't just a hobby, but a passion they dream of taking all the way to the Olympic stage.

Many of the swimmers and para-swimmers on the scheme already compete not just for the University, but are on national and international pathways. This includes para-swimmer Tully Kearney who has been part of two world championships, winning several bronze, silver and gold medals, including a gold in the S5 100m freestyle and bronze in the S5 50m freestyle at the World Para-swimming European Championships in Dublin in 2018. She was also the highest medal earner at the competition in 2015.



### Emma Day

Age: 21

Course: Business Management

Event: 400m Individual Medley

Current team: City of Manchester Aquatics Swim Team

Best achievement to date: Winning silver medals at the world and European juniors Championships

**"I don't know what I'd do without the scholarship at Manchester Metropolitan. The partnerships it holds means I have access to the best facilities, allows everything I need to be in one place and gives me greater opportunities."**



### Chloe Golding

Age: 20

Course: Sports Science and Physiology

Event: 200m backstroke

Current team: City of Manchester Aquatics Swim Team

Best achievement to date: Selected for Commonwealth Games in 2018

**"The scholarship helps me balance both sides of academic and athletic life. Doing both is like having a full-time job, but the MMU Sport staff are really supportive, always checking I'm getting on okay and making sure my lecturers are up to speed with my schedule."**

