

John Allan Doms (“Jack”); January 22, 1927 - January 22, 2018

For a while there, Hamilton man Jack Doms was a forgotten hero of NZ swimming. Not that it worried the gold medallist all that much.

Modest, and busy man that he was, Jack was never unhappy with the fact his triumph at the Commonwealth Games in 1954 was overlooked for much of his life.

After all, around town, he was better known for his golf and marathon running – he took up the latter sport after a chance meeting with Arthur Lydiard on the golf course, where, for a time, he had an enviable three handicap.

Whatever Lydiard said to Jack, it must have had a powerful effect. Starting at age 55, Jack ran more than 80 marathons (he finished his 80th marathon in his 80th year), and "countless" half marathons. He was a stalwart and life member of Hamilton's Marathon Clinic.

All this while never missing his round at St Andrews where he was a long-standing member of some 70 years of the Hamilton Golf Club, having first "played" there as a young lad earning 2/6d as a caddie.

But it is worth remembering Jack's gold medal triumph in the pool was no small feat – he was the first New Zealand swimmer to bring home an individual gold medal from the Empire and Commonwealth Games.

In the 220 yards breaststroke race in Vancouver in 1954. English champion Peter Jervis and Jack touched together at 2 mins 52.6. It took the seven judges 18 minutes to come back with the result.

In addition, he won silver in the men's 330-yards medley relay with teammates Lincoln Hurring and Buddy Lucas. (For those who may query the formation of a three person relay, butterfly had yet to be "invented" as a competitive swimming stroke.)

Past president of New Zealand Swimming, and close family friend Don Stanley says that, through decades of friendship, Jack's medals "never, ever" came up in conversation, and were not displayed in his home.

"Yet he probably did more for swimming by example than most people realise because of his modest approach and the way he encouraged everyone," Don said.

Jack won his place in the Games team as a Category B selection, meaning although he had not made the qualifying time, he could go, as long as he paid his own way.

There was no way that recently married Jack, who had spent two years in Japan on J-Force and then started work as a painter decorator, could afford the trip to Vancouver.

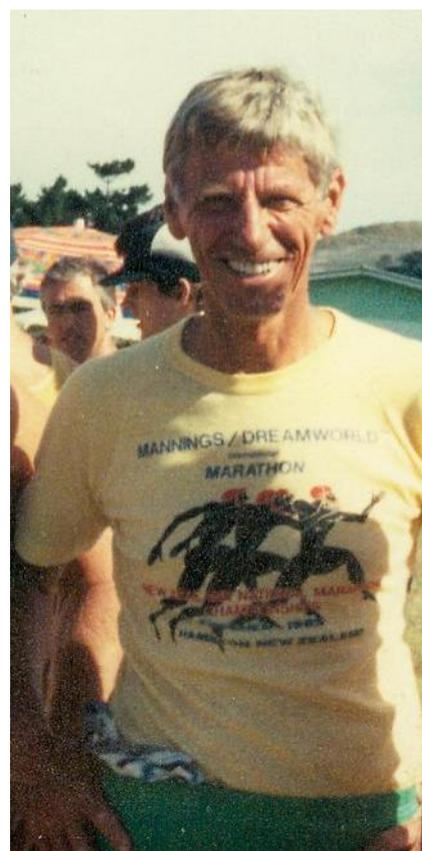
Jack's boss Jock McLintock, from paint merchants. Booth, and Chapman, and Waikato Swimming Association President Eric Grocott, got the ball rolling by setting up a fundraising committee. The appeal was broadcast over Hamilton's radio station and, within a day, the money raised.

"I won gold for the people of Waikato," Jack told Times journalist Mary Anne Gill some years ago. "For the kids who put their last pennies in.

On his return, Hamilton mayor Roderick Braithwaite hosted a civic reception for Jack and Mercer's gold-medal rowing pair, Reg Douglas and Bob Parker.

Not bad for a man who trained in the municipal pools at the bottom of Victoria Street.

Jack swam competitively at the national championships in 1958, but then retired to concentrate on Swimming administration. In all, he won eight New Zealand national swimming titles, including both the 100-yards and 220-yards breaststroke titles regularly from 1952 to 1955.



Many in the Waikato and beyond will remember Jack volunteering for more than a decade as an assistant starter for most events held in Hamilton; “He dealt with hundreds of kids, knew them all, encouraged them all, related to them all. I never heard anyone question him,” Don said.

His time as a volunteer was recognised when he received a service award from the NZ Amateur Swimming Association for his work at the poolside.

Born in Claudelands, Jack left school to join Pollock and Milne at age 14. The early departure from education, was not a surprise to the family, as Jack did not really have time for school as often, from an early age, he would cycle to Cambridge to caddie two rounds.

He represented Hamilton for a long time in basketball and in 1983, when, well into his 50s, joined the Hamilton Harrier Club and competed in harriers and track and field for Frankton Athletic Club. Somewhere in the mix he was capped for playing 100 games with South Auckland Rugby League Club.

The story has it that, in a simpler age, Jack chose to focus on swimming when his future mother-in-law recognised his talent and promised him a pair of swimming trunks if he would just concentrate on one sport.

Romance between Jack and his wife, Maureen Holman, blossomed in the swimming pool, which was unsurprising really, given she was a 440 yards New Zealand Ladies Champion. Together they were to share a lifelong love of sport.

After marrying in 1952, Susan arrived, then Jennifer, and finally, Kathryn, to complete their family.

They lived in Hamilton, Huntly, Te Awamutu, then back to Hamilton, where Jack managed commercial painting companies.

Jack’s daughters remember him as determined and independent, and as someone who was always there for them. However, sometimes being “there” could prove a tad embarrassing, as on the occasion when, despite being asked to wait in the car at a school dance, he was discovered boogieing down the back of the hall when the lights went up.

Jack had a sweet tooth and his girls remember that, after being picked up after swimming lessons, he would always get them a milk toffee bar – usually because he wanted one too, and always with the instruction to “don’t tell your mother”.

At home he loved a practical joke, and was a fan of plastic flies, vomit, and poo. He enjoyed doing the family ironing and, as in sport, he was good at it. He ironed everything – including underpants and nylon petticoats.

In later years, Jack’s runs and walks could take longer than average. However, this was not because he was slowing down. Rather, Jack knew so many people about town that a half-hour walk could take an hour as he would bump into someone. To avoid embarrassment on such occasions, he developed the habit of calling everyone Tiger, and thus could claim he never forgot a name.

Despite his lifelong modesty and avoidance of the limelight, Jack’s long association with sport was recognised in 2000, when he was one of about 300 New Zealanders who carried the Olympic torch during the New Zealand leg of the 2000 Summer Olympics torch relay.

And this year’s Commonwealth Games team featured Jack’s gold medal win on their Facebook page, leading up to the Winter Olympics in South Korea.

Jack would have smiled at the recognition of a 64-year-old triumph. Turns out, swimmers have not forgotten their first individual gold medallist.

Golfer, runner, swimmer: Jack died in Cambridge, aged 91, on his birthday.

Like his race in Vancouver, it was a neatly timed last lap.