

# Qatar – new rowing territory

**Qatar is seeking to increase its presence in the international world of sports. Host of the Asian Games in 2006, it is now bidding for global events such as the 2020 Olympic Games and 2022 Soccer World Cup. But Qatar has also been looking to develop sport nationally among the Qatari people.**

Rowing is a very young sport in Qatar, with the Qatar Sailing & Rowing Federation being one of the newest members of the FISA family, having joined in 2002. Despite the novelty of the sport, the Qataris are aiming to widen their rowing talent base and are working towards performing internationally.

“The Qatar Olympic Committee is financing the development of rowing in Qatar,” says Ali Nasser Telfat, Secretary General of the Qatar Sailing & Rowing Federation. “With each passing year interest in this sport is increasing amongst the locals.”

Talent identification is carried out in schools, mainly using ergometer tests. To increase the exposure of young people to rowing, the federation has begun to organise competitions in schools.

“Inter-school indoor rowing competitions have been

introduced and will be included in our Schools Olympic Programme by next year,” says Assistant Secretary General of the Qatari federation, Hassan Abdulla Mohsin. The next step, he says, will be to organize on-water rowing competitions.

In 2009, Qatar saw its first international success, with rowers taking part in a World Rowing event for the first time. The event was the World Rowing Junior Championships in Brive-la-Gaillarde, France, and the competitors were Ali Jumah Jallouf and Abdel Fawaz Aldous, who raced in the junior men’s double sculls. Although they did not score the best results, it was not a disappointment as their expectations had been low. “For them it was a learning experience,” says Telfat. “They learned a lot from Brive. They were happy to see what the competition was like at the real standard and enjoyed being with other rowers.”

Qazi M. Amjad, a former international athlete from Pakistan and FISA-trained coach, was hired by the federation in 2005 to

help develop rowing in Qatar. The training he gave Jallouf and Aldous in preparation for Brive included four to five weekly sessions lasting two hours each and involved training on the water, on the erg and in the gym. In the month leading up to the Junior Championships, the number of weekly sessions was increased to eight.

Doha, Qatar’s capital city, does not have any 2,000m regatta course, but there are plans to build one. During the 2006 Asian Games, rowing competitions took place on a 1,000m, four-lane course near the city centre. Now, rowers currently train in Doha harbour “early in the morning or in the evening,” explains Amjad, “and when there is no problem on the sea. But rowers spend part of the time in Singapore or China (Shanghai) for training camps.”

In view of training new coaches, FISA is sending experts to Qatar to give level 1 and 2 coaching courses within the frame of the Olympic Solidarity Programme.

“FISA is excited to see how rowing will develop in Qatar in the future, as there is more and more rowing activity in the region and Qatar with its hosting of major sporting events seems to be ready to take a lead,” says FISA Development Manager Sheila Stephens-Desbans. “With the climate in the winter months it may also provide an interesting venue for winter training camps in the future if a full course is constructed.”

■ D.M.-F. with the kind contribution of Marc Ventouillac, member of FISA’s media commission

A rowing competitor during the 2006 Asian Games in Doha, Qatar.