

# Growing rowing

**When Iran's national anthem played at this year's World Rowing Under 23 Championships, people took notice. The anthem had never been heard before at a World Rowing event. Winner of the men's lightweight single, Moshen Shadi Naghadeh was the cause.**

Last year, single sculler Homa Hosseini became the first woman to represent Iran in rowing at the Olympics. Rowing in a headscarf and sleeveless apron over a long sleeved tee-shirt, people took notice of Hosseini.

Rowing in Iran has arrived.

In 2007 Iran took its first major steps towards the establishment of rowing. They hired Romanian coach Nick Gioga and former Romanian national team member Monica Stan to head the Iranian team. The rowing push began with a talent identification programme.

Hengameh Ahadpour, who worked for the Iranian Canoe and Rowing Federation, was part of the early identification programme. "Rowing came to Iran about four years ago and right from the start we

used talent identification," says Ahadpour. "At first we just had a few rowing boats and about three ergometers. They started to find tall young girls and boys from schools and invite them to Tehran."

The programme scouted for youths under the age of 18 requiring the girls to be a minimum of 175cm and the boys over 185cm tall. The focus was on lightweight rowers.

With the impetus coming from Iran's rowing federation president Mr. Donyamali and the support of Tehran's mayor Seyyed Mohammad Ayazi, a national training centre was established in Iran's capital city. Using a lake that has existed since the 1970s at the Azadi Sports Training Complex, a rowing base was established. The training lake, which is just 1300m long, backs onto the famous Azadi football stadium. Football is Iran's biggest sport and the stadium seats 100,000 people.

Ahadpour estimates about 300 people now row in the country, spread around three different cities with the national training centre in Tehran. "The national team travels to different cities as the lake is small so they don't stay for a long time in Tehran. The best place to row, says Ahadpour, is in >

# in Iran



Homa Hosseini of Iran, the first Iranian woman to compete in rowing at the Olympic Games, pictured before the start of her heat in the Women's Single Sculls at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China.

## > Growing rowing in Iran

> Guilan province in the city of Bandar Anzali and also in the Golestan province.

Current head coach of the Tehran Rowing Club Afshin Farzam says the national team athletes are at the centre for just some of the year. At present he has 20 national team rowers training with him as part of their sweep rowing programme; half of them are full-time athletes. Farzam came to rowing four years ago when he attended the first FISA coaching course in Iran. Previously he was a member of the kayak and canoe polo national team. Now rowing is Farzam's focus.

Farzam says rowing is far from well-known in Iran. This is despite the success of Naghadeh who at 21 already is an under-23 World Champion. Naghadeh also took a silver medal at the World Rowing Under 23 Championships in 2008 after just 10 months in the sport. Naghadeh attributes his strength to his farming background and gave him the nickname 'strong as a bullock.' He has already competed, along with Hosseini, at the Olympic Games and, if Farzam's hopes become

reality, Naghadeh will be one of three medals for Iran internationally in 2010.

Apart from its lack of visibility, rowing in Iran is also hindered by the lack of places to row and, like other sports in the country, it also faces the restrictions imposed by the Islamic government.

After the Iranian Revolution of 1979 women were not able to compete in international sports competitions as having male judges and spectators made it impossible. But this changed in the early 1990s when there was some relaxation of dress codes. Although initially Iranian women stuck to sports with limited movement like archery and shooting, sports like rowing are possible as long as there is dress code compliance.

Being at the very early stages of development, there is every indication that rowing in Iran will continue to grow.

■ M.S.B.

Mohsen Shadi Naghadeh of Iran, after winning silver in the lightweight men's single sculls at the 2008 World Rowing Under 23 Championships in Brandenburg, Germany.

Mohsen Shadi Naghadeh holding Iran's first international gold medal in rowing at the 2009 World Rowing U23 Championships in Racice, Czech Republic.