

# SPORTS MINISTER PRAISES EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

British Sports Minister Richard Caborn praised the programme of building sporting ties between Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom known as the Sports Memorandum of Understanding describing these as "one of the golden threads" in our relationship. This programme was set up in 1987 and covers the playing of matches, the holding of training camps, the development of administrative and refereeing skills, and education for sports coaches, doctors, physiotherapists and nutritionists.

"The programme is a critical piece of the complex jigsaw that goes to make up the relationship between the two Kingdoms, a relationship based on full partnership" commented Richard Caborn, who visited Saudi Arabia in December.

"The academic institutions of our two countries work closely together and in my opinion Britain provides some of the best sports education programmes in the world. In this way, the expertise of individuals can be developed into the building blocks of sporting excellence for generations to come."

The MoU governing sports exchange between the countries was signed in 1987 by HRH the late Prince Faisal bin Fahd and then British sports Minister David Mellor. BAE Systems administers the agreement, working in conjunction with the General Presidency for Youth Welfare in Riyadh and various sports bodies and universities in the UK.

In 2006, it is expected that there will be 65 different



events and activities ranging from coaching to the playing of matches. These are carried out in both countries. Major sports such as football, athletics, swimming, tennis, cycling, volleyball and basketball have been supported, but so have comparatively minor sports, many of which are new to the Kingdom such as triathlons, karate, fencing, water polo and squash among many others. Sports for those with special needs have been long on the agenda.

Training those who support the development of others have been long recognised as vital for the long term development of sporting excellence in Saudi Arabia. Over the years the UK's National Coaching Qualifications have been extended to Saudi coaches with, so far, 900 having passed the Level One qualification, and nearly 200 obtaining a Level Two pass. Today, Level One courses are run in Arabic in Saudi Arabia.

Some 18 medical practitioners have qualified with post-graduate degrees in sports medicine as a result of the programme, and a number of others are at various stages of their studies. These sports medicine courses are run between Prince Faisal Sports Medicine Hospital in Riyadh and Manchester Metropolitan and Loughborough universities.



Above: The dramatic photo, came out of the UK Saudi Sports Exchange programme last year. The shot is of a young Saudi helping to crew the sailing vessel HMS Lord Nelson, a traditionally-rigged ship specially equipped to be sailed by people who are handicapped. Each year a number of Saudis get the experience of a lifetime to join the crew of HMS Nelson as its sails around the coast of Britain.

Left: Standing, UK Sports Minister Richard Caborn, left, with Professor Ron Maughan; kneeling Dr Susan Shirreffs and Peter Waddell, the BAE Systems manager responsible for the Saudi-British sports exchange programme. Professor Maughan and Dr Shirreffs are sports nutrition specialists from Loughborough University.