



## SPORT AND LEISURE

THE UAE HAS ALREADY ESTABLISHED ITSELF well and truly on the international sporting stage, holding many of the world's major events in a wide range of sports, from horse racing to motor racing, golf, tennis, football, rugby, cricket, sailing, powerboat racing and almost every other competitive sport. These events not only attract large numbers of competing and sports enthusiasts from around the globe, they also see some of the country's top sportsmen and women in action. Sports play an increasingly important role in the UAE's efforts to develop tourism and facilities throughout the country are being upgraded or newly constructed. So much so that the country is bidding to host the 2016 Olympic Games.

As part of the US\$5.7 billion Dubailand project, developers are constructing a US\$2 billion Sports City due to open in 2007. Covering an area of 4.65 million square metres, Sports City will be the first integrated purpose-built venue in the world, incorporating a Manchester United soccer school – the first outside Europe – a championship golf course designed by Ernie Els, David Lyons tennis stadium, Butch Harmon golf academy and International Cricket Council. The city will house four main stadiums with seating capacities ranging from 8000 to 25,000, to host major competitions in cricket, football, rugby, athletics and field hockey.

Aside from the international circuit events, the UAE has a healthy indigenous sporting environment with the local community participating in a wide variety of clubs and establishments. The seven emirates regularly compete in national leagues and cups in a multiplicity of sports that are controlled by specialised governing bodies. Top sporting venues (both indoor and outdoor) and an all-year-round good climate ensure that the activities continue throughout the winter season.

With the Arabian Gulf on its western shores and the Indian Ocean along its eastern flanks, the UAE is particularly attractive for watersport fans. The emirates on the Gulf coast are blessed with long stretches of sandy beach where residents take part in sports such as jet-skiing, surfing, swimming and the new craze of kitesurfing. Snorkelling and diving are hugely popular within the region. Many residents and visitors enjoy the UAE's East Coast, which also provides a wealth of exotic fish and coral. Popular locations include 'Snoopy Island' and the area north of Dibba.

Residents are able to take full advantage of the country's parks and recreational grounds where football, basketball and cricket matches are a favourite pastime,

while the desert areas outside the main cities provide rough, rugged terrain for more adventurous pursuits. It would be extremely difficult to pinpoint a sport that is not enjoyed in the UAE as there are always new centres, clubs and associations being established around the region.

## FOOTBALL

Like any other sporting nation, the UAE has a huge interest in football. The UAE FA was first established in 1971 and since then has dedicated its time and effort to promoting the game, organising youth programmes and improving the abilities of not only its players, but of the officials and coaches involved with its regional teams. The UAE team narrowly won the Kirin Cup with a sixty-eighth minute goal against hosts Japan, but campaigns in the Asian Cup Finals, Gulf Cup and World Cup Qualifiers were less successful. A new manager, Dick Advocat, joined the UAE team in July in time for a four-team friendly in Switzerland, in which they beat both Qatar and Kuwait but lost 5–4 on penalties in the final against Egypt.

Despite the disappointment of the national team, football in the UAE has had a successful year. All tournaments for senior and junior teams were completed, and sponsorship deals with Dubai Holding and Emirates airline have been signed. In April, Dubai Holding agreed to provide the national team with Dh20 million (US\$5.45 million) sponsorship money over the next four years. The fund will also go towards developing the sport. However, it was Emirates airline that signed the biggest sponsorship deal in history when they signed a Dh662.2 million (US\$180.4 million) agreement with the English Premiership runners-up, Arsenal in October 2004. The club's new stadium, due to be open at the beginning of the 2006/07 season, will be known as the Emirates Stadium. The 'Fly Emirates' logo will also appear on the Arsenal shirt for the next 15 years. In return, Arsenal will set up a soccer school in the UAE that will develop talent and boost the region's standards.

Abu Dhabi's Al Wahda club took the title in the first division of the National League Championships with a 5–3 win over Al Wasl, and Al Nasr topped the table in the second division. In the President's Cup it was Al Wahda who faced defeat as Al Ain stole victory in a 3–1 win. The Cup was contested in knock-out phases between 29 teams and watched by 60,000 people at the Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi.

At the end of the season, Subait Khater, who plays for Al Ain and the national team, was honoured as the best football player in the UAE, voted for by sports writers, coaches and officials. The player himself, however, was not present to receive his award at the FA's closing ceremony because he was taking part in the Luis Figo Charity Match in Portugal. Khatar was the only Arab player to be involved in the game.



The National Youth Team spent three weeks during the summer of 2005 at a training camp in Budapest in preparation for the AFC Youth Championship Qualifiers in November. Coached by Khalifa Mubarak, the 24-strong squad played six friendly matches and were placed in Group C against Yemen and Palestine for the qualifiers.

## TENNIS

The Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships (part of the APT Tour World Series at the Aviation Club, Dubai) was bigger than ever in 2005 with no less than six of the top-seeded women's players taking centre court, a first time appearance by tennis' golden boy, Andre Agassi, and the return of the celebrated Roger Federer, who was seeking his third title crown, resulting in some dramatic court action. In an unprecedented move, Dubai Duty Free, organisers of the championship, decided to switch the men's tournament to the first week of the competition so that it ran from 21 to 27 February and the women's was played from 28 February to 5 March.

In the men's competition, big names included fourth seed Marat Safin, who returned for his fifth Dubai visit, British number five seed Tim Henman and Canadian born team-mate, Greg Rusedski. But it was the Swiss top-seed Roger Federer and tennis veteran Andre Agassi who confirmed the 2005 event as the strongest line-up to date. Leading up to the tournament, Federer, the current Wimbledon and US Open champion, seemed unbeatable, with 25 major titles under his belt, 16 of those won consecutively. However, with eight Open titles of his own, 36-year-old Agassi was ready for a challenge, sailing through his first three matches in straight-set wins. Henman and Rusedski went head to head in the first round, with a 4-6, 7-6, 6-4 game that saw Henman go on to play a quarter-final match against twenty-second seed, Croatian Ivan Ljubicic. Marat Safin also failed to make it past the first round stage, leaving Agassi and Federer all-out favourites to win the title. As the draw would have it, the two top seeds battled it out at the semi-final stage, with Federer proving to be too strong for Agassi. A brave performance was given by Lujbicic, but the men's final came to a close with a predictable win for Roger Federer.

With so much action in its first week, Dubai's crowds were geared up for a second round of surprise knockouts and gutsy performances. The Russians came *en masse* with number three seed and French Open champion Anatasia Myskina and number five seed and US Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova. Lindsay Davenport, number one seed, took part for the first time ever, both Williams sisters were fit and ready, and Olympic champion Justine Henin-Hardenne promised a show-stopper. Venus Williams took an early exit in the first round, as did Belgian Hardenne. The younger of the Williams clan, Serena, only managed to



make it to the semi-final stage before an injury forced her to retire from the match with unseeded Jelena Jankovic. Beaten by Davenport in the final, Jankovic gave a solid performance, but it was the 28-year-old American who picked up her first ever Dubai crown. The championships, with prize money at US\$1 million, was watched by over 40 million people worldwide.

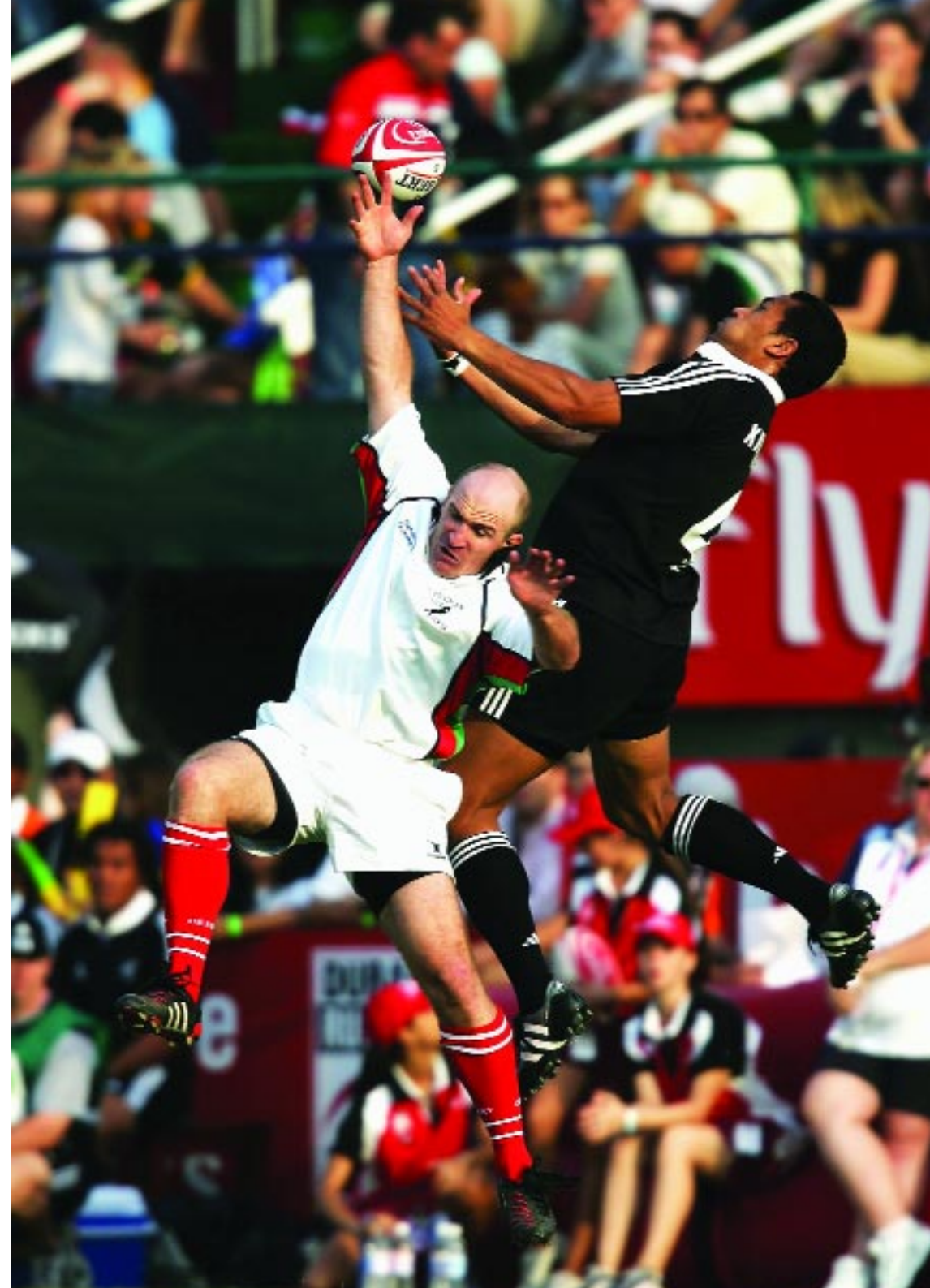
Plans to nurture a UAE champion got under way this year when Tennis Emirates, the governing body for the sport in the UAE, announced that training programmes were in motion to put UAE players on the world map. In the next 10 to 15 years, the UAE hopes to develop players of international standard. Those plans got off to a great start for the Al Nasr tennis squad who claimed the International School Championship in France. The Abu Dhabi International Tennis Complex, which is part of Zayed Sports City, held its first Annual Tennis Championship in March with the aim of seeking out both new and undernourished talent. Men's, women's, mixed and youth tournaments were held with a total of Dh75,000 prize money on offer.

The UAE national team was also in top form this year putting in a commendable performance at the Davies Cup held in Myanmar. Playing in Group A, the UAE were up against strong competition from Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Syria and Bangladesh. The team comprised Mohammed Abdel Aziz Al Nuaimi, Ghanem Al Hassani and Mahmoud Nadar Al Balushi, and was captained by Mahmoud Khalifa Al Balushi. The fifth member, top seed, Omar Behroozian, was celebrating his return to the tennis scene following an eight-month absence. The Davies Cup ran from 23 April to 1 May, with the team making strenuous preparations at the Al Nasr courts. However, three round robin wins were not enough, and the group's top place was secured by Bangladesh.

#### CAMEL RACING

The inhabitants of the Gulf states have enjoyed a long and productive relationship with the camel, which is held in great admiration and respect. Formalising camel racing was one way of maintaining its central role in UAE life. The UAE now has no less than 15 race tracks across the seven emirates. Nad Al Sheba, 10 kilometres outside of Dubai, Al Wathba, 30 kilometres south-east of Abu Dhabi, and Al Ain track, which is 20 kilometres west of Al Ain, are all large, well-equipped camel tracks with high-tech facilities. Two smaller tracks are located in Sharjah, one in Ra's al-Khaimah and one in Umm al-Qaiwain. Others are spread throughout the desert areas.

Through camel racing, the UAE has been able to maintain the symbolic significance of the camel and, by giving a structure to camel racing, has developed it into a professional sport with significant prize money. Camel racing is also a big tourist attraction for those people who visit the UAE throughout the



winter months. The season runs from late October to early April, with races taking place on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturday at 7.30 a.m., and on national holidays.

Even though camel racing has become a popular pastime in the UAE, it has not been without controversy. Despite the fact that it had been outlawed for some time, the use of underage jockeys remained an issue. Particularly reprehensible were allegations that young expatriate jockeys from south Asia and Africa were being kidnapped or, indeed, sold by their parents, and smuggled into the country. In 2005 the UAE took measures to clarify the prohibition on underage jockeys and improve enforcement of the law. Anyone who is caught using a jockey under the age of 18 or a jockey that is less than 45 kilograms in weight will be faced with a hefty Dh50,000 fine or a three year jail sentence, with the penalties being doubled in the case of repeated offences. Prior to the enactment, in a major step to provide protection and support to children involved in camel racing, the UAE Ministry of Interior and UNICEF signed an agreement under which the UAE is providing US\$2.7 million to help in the return and re-integration of child camel jockeys into their families and their home communities. In accordance with the agreement, a social support centre continues to provide protection and support for the ex-jockeys and assists in their repatriation.

As part of the process of replacing the jockeys, on 18 July 2004, the UAE held its first ever camel race featuring robot riders at the Al Wathba race track. Ten robots weighing 15 kilograms each were used as a replacement for young jockeys. The camels and robots were followed by operators, who were able to control them by hand-held radio units. The UAE is the second state in the region to test out the robotic jockeys. The results from the race have reportedly resulted in an order for the robots and US\$1.3 million contract to a Swiss company for further research and development of the concept.

## MOTORSPORTS

### *Dubai Autodrome*

An US\$18 billion development project, the Dubai Autodrome and Business Park will be the first motorsports facility in the UAE that meets FIA standards. Situated 25 minutes outside of central Dubai, the 700-acre Autodrome will offer a range of events, from local to world class. The track is one of the most modern and challenging in the world. At 5.39 kilometres in length, it has six different configurations – the club track, hill handling, international, Grand Prix, national and oval handling, three of which can run simultaneously. Facilities within the grounds are of world-class standard.

The Autodrome also houses a Kartdrome, with a 1.2 kilometre circuit that can be split into two. This has 17 test corners and can accommodate up to 40 cars at one time. The track has over 55 karts made to different specifications, ensuring that karting is on offer to sports fans of all ages. In May 2005 the Kartdrome staged the



'Nivea for Men Oil Control 1000 kilometres', attracting over 18 teams, each with four to ten drivers. The event ended in a tight finish for the winners podium, setting an exciting challenge for the next two legs, which took place later in the year.

In June, the Autodrome also kicked off its Race and Driving School for anyone who wishes to develop their driving skills and techniques. Over the two days, more than 60 people signed up and many more have since followed.

#### *LG Super Racing Weekend*

The Autodrome hosted the LG Super Racing Weekend in October 2004, the first to take place outside Europe. This included the final stages of the FIA GT Championships as well as the FIA European Touring Car Championships and the Formula Renault V Championships. The championships, in their third year, had already attracted a television audience of over 40 million people. The season runs from March to October and, before Dubai, races had taken place in Belgium, Italy, France and Germany.

The FIA European Touring Car Championships, which changed its name to the FIA World Touring Car Championships in 2005, was brought to a close in Dubai. In this event, street cars such as the Honda Civic, Peugeot 307 and Ford Focus, are souped-up and driven on a track. Going into the final round, Dirk Muller had a 12-point lead over Brit Andy Priaulx, with Jorg Muller trailing another five points, but it was Priaulx who somehow managed to bring the race around to his favour. In the FIA GT Championships, competitors took on a three-hour endurance race in road cars that had been adapted for the race circuit. Dubai was not to play host to the grand finale in this event as the season ended in Zhuhai, China. Drivers not only had to compete against each other, there was also the weather to contend with; the heat made for a tough penultimate round. The Formula Renault V6 Championship was still an open race coming to Dubai. Top drivers included Christian Montanari, Jaap von Lagen and Ryan Sharp, with everyone starting on equal ground as the Dubai track was a new experience for all the drivers.

#### *Formula X*

Shown as a side event at the LG Super Racing Weekend, Formula X racing made its debut in the UAE. Currently big in the States, UK and Australia, Formula X enables amateurs to race competitively. For Dh200,000 (US\$54,500) competitors can sign up for an entire season, or a smaller fee for a single race, and everything from the car to the mechanics to the transportation of the vehicle is covered. As part of the European Formula X Sport Series, drivers voted to race at the new Dubai Autodrome instead of taking the challenge to Silverstone in the UK. In all, 15 drivers competed, seven of whom entered from the UAE. In the first heat, Lebanese-born Christophe Hissette, who was competing for the UAE, came third, even though it was his first ever Formula X. In the second heat, another UAE resident, Dutchman Roy van der Weijden, also gained a pole position.

#### *UAE Marlboro Desert Challenge*

In its thirteenth year, the grueling UAE Desert Challenge, which is part of the FIA World Cup for Cross Country Rallies, has become the region's most international sport, attracting more than 42 entries from around the world. From 11 to 15 October 2004, drivers and their cars battled it out over the rough terrain of the Empty Quarter. In the penultimate round, before heading to Argentina, competitors pitted their driving skills against one another in order to be crowned as the FIA World Cross Country Driving Champion. Setting off from Marina Mall in Abu Dhabi drivers faced tough conditions against the burning sun and thick fog, which delayed the action. Colin McRae and Tina Thorner in their Nissan Rally Raid Team were forced out of the competition early on, but teammates Gregoire de Mevius and Jacky Dubois managed to hang on to their second place. Japan's Hiroushi Masouka went on to win the Dubai leg, but it was the UAE's Khalifa Al Mutaiwee, driving a BMW X5 Rally Raid and partnered by Alain Guenhennec, who was unchallenged with an 11-point clear lead at the top of the table, and went on to claim the title. In the FIM Cross Country Rallies World Championship for bikes, Spain's Isidre Esteve, riding a KTM, took the Dubai title, but a third place finish for Norwegian Pal Anders Ullevalseter earned him the bikers' crown.

#### *Other Motorsports*

At the end of the FIA Middle East Rally Championships, although winning the final round in Dubai (1–3 December 2004), Nasser Al Attiyah of Qatar was forced to give up his number one position to the UAE's Khalid Al Qasimi, who snatched overall victory by a clear seven points.

The 1000 Dunes Rally is held over three days and runs in conjunction with the Dubai Shopping Festival. The Rally, comprising a 400-kilometre road race and 400-kilometre desert challenge, begins and ends at Al Murraqabat Street. Known as one of the toughest rallies in the world, the 1000 Dunes is mostly an Emirati affair but recently has attracted a more global field. The 2005 event saw tough competition from Khalifa Al Mutaiwaee, who is the only driver to have won four times, Obaid Al Hathboor and Mohammed Al Shibani, both previous winners, and three-time UAE Rally Champion, Sheikh Abdullah Al Qasimi. Ahmed bin Souqat was the eventual winner.

#### GOLF

Just over 25 years ago, the UAE's golfing enthusiasts could be seen teeing off on oiled, sandy courses and putting on 'browns' rather than on greens. The very first course in the region was the RAF course in Sharjah, popular in the mid-1950s. The Emirates Golf Club in Dubai offered the first championship grass course in the Middle East. Since then the sport has progressed at phenomenal speed as, between them, the seven emirates now boast a wide array of courses

– many of which are PGA championship standard – and a considerable number of new courses are under development.

Immaculate greens, lush fairways, high-tech practice ranges and facility-driven clubhouses make the UAE a world-class destination for golfers (amateur and professional). However, one new golf course that has not succumbed to the penchant for verdant fairways is Al Ghazal Golf Club near Abu Dhabi Airport, an 18-hole, 6487-yard, par-71 sand course where top competitors compete in the Pro-Am World Sand Golf Championships in March each year.

Innovatively-designed clubhouses are outstanding architectural landmarks in their own right, many of the designs being based on traditional aspects of UAE culture. At Abu Dhabi Golf Club, one of the emirate's distinctive golf courses, the clubhouse is in the shape of a falcon swooping down on a golf ball. Emirates Golf Club, although built from thoroughly modern materials such as white concrete and gleaming glass, has managed to create a series of cool, tent-like structures lying low to the ground, redolent of a vanished era. Meanwhile, the clubhouse at Dubai Creek Golf and Yacht Club evokes the gently billowing sails of a stately dhow and that at Jebel Ali Hotel and Golf Resort the prow of a ship overlooking the Arabian Gulf.

For the last 16 years, Dubai has hosted a world-class golfing tournament, the Dubai Desert Classic, bringing with it a host of professional household names and thousands of golfing fans. Usually staged at the Majlis course at the Emirates Golf Club; the high-profile event has spent two years at the Dubai Creek Golf and Yacht Club. The Creek Club, re-opened in early 2005, is now part of a luxury resort that features a Park Hyatt Hotel and a 121-berth marina. As part of the new look, the front nine holes have been completely re-designed by Thomas Bjorn and European Golf Design.

The second phase of Towers Links Golf Club in Ra's al-Khaimah was launched in February 2005 when a further nine holes clubhouse and academy were added to the original nine opened in November 2003. Stretched over a mangroves reserve and at the head of a tidal inlet, the Tower Links course was the first in the UAE to use *Paspallum*, which is a species of grass that is saline tolerant and requires 50 per cent less fertiliser than other grass varieties.

Also in February 2005, the 7691-yard championship Desert Course, an Ian Baker-Finch design in association with Jack Nicklaus, opened at the Arabian Ranches property development in Dubai.

Currently under re-development are the first nine holes at the Nad Al Sheba Club, while the Wadi Course at the Emirates Golf Club is closed until 2006 due to a joint re-design effort from Nick Faldo and IMG Design. A new residential golf development will also be added to the site.

The clubhouse, which will be managed by Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, is taking shape over the ninth and eighteenth holes of the Robert Trent Jones II-



designed course Al Badia Golf Club in Dubai Festival City. The course itself is open for pay-and-play.

Other new developments include Victory Heights, which will be incorporated into the Sports City complex. The 18-hole course, the work of world number two golfer Ernie Els, will be managed by Troon Golf. Troon will also manage Emirates Hills, a Dh2.65 billion (US\$730 million) project in association with EMAAR Properties and designed by Desmond Muirhead, that will, in time, host the Dubai Desert Classic. The course will stretch 7308 yards with a 656-yard eighteenth hole engulfed in water, proving a challenge even for the world's best. However, the biggest development of all will form part of the massive Dubailand project where Golf City is due to house five themed signature courses, a golf academy, hotel, golf community and village.

### *UAE Competitions*

Competitions throughout the region are organised by the UAE Golf Association, which also plays a major role in the development of junior players. More recently another body has been launched. Known as 'Golf in Dubai', or GiD, the new group will act as the international representative for Dubai's golf clubs.

The Dubai Men's Golf Open has been an annual event at the Dubai Country Club since 1976. Open to professionals and amateurs with a handicap of nine or less, players take on the 36-hole Al Awir course over two consecutive days. The 2005 competition heralded a strong field of 90, 61 of whom were amateur players from the UAE, 15 overseas players, 12 professionals and five previous winners. Defending the title was Ross Bain, an Asian Tour player, who went on to win for the second consecutive year.

In the UAE Lexus National Golf Championship played at Emirates Golf Club, it was 15-year-old Khalid Yusuf who walked away with the crown and the record for becoming the youngest ever player to win the event. Yusuf had a six-point lead following the first round, which second-place Abdullah Al Thani could only shorten to five points.

In the tenth edition of the Dubai Duty Free UAE Nationals Cup, which took place on 5 May, Khalid Yusuf once again won the Gross Division title. Abdul Aziz Al Hakim took the top spot in the Stableford competition. The Cup, held at the Desert Course, saw 42 nationals enter the competition. The season finale was played out over the Montgomerie, with Abdullah Al Thani finishing three points ahead of team-mate Saeed Malik.

Once again it was Khalid Yusuf who performed well for the national team at the Pan-Arab Championship in Egypt. With a total of 164 points, Yusuf walked away with the second position in the Silver Division. Even better was Thani Al Thani's 71 points in the Bronze Division, which earned him the top spot.

### *Dubai Desert Classic*

An annual PGA Touring Event, The Dubai Desert Classic is now in its sixteenth year and still attracting the top names of the golfing world. Held from 3 to 6 March on the Majlis course at the Emirates Golf Club, the Classic pays out a total of US\$2.2 million in prize money, its main sponsorship coming from Dubai Aluminium (Dubal). Tiger Woods was missing from the 2005 line-up, but with Colin Montgomerie, Thomas Bjorn, Gregory Havret and Nick Dougherty all in place, the competition was bound to be fierce. Spanish Ryder Cup star Miguel Angel Jimenez got off to a great start with Ernie Els lying in second place. The action was filled with suspense right up to the final hole, with Els needing a birdie just to get a playoff. What followed was probably the most dramatic shot of the event's history as Els hit a blinding six iron from 178 yards, which left just a 22-foot stroke home. Jimenez could only watch in horror as the title slipped through his fingers and gave Els his third Classic victory and third position in the world rankings.

### RUGBY

In the UAE, rugby is played by both men and women and by junior age groups, with the majority of teams made up of expatriate players from New Zealand, South Africa, Australia and the UK. However, more and more nationals are coming through at the younger levels, where programmes are in place for the under 14s, 16s and 19s. Governed by the Arabian Gulf Rugby Football Union, teams from Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ra's al-Khaimah, Bahrain, Muscat, Kuwait, Doha and Saudi Arabia battle it out each season in hope of winning the Arabian Gulf League and Standard Chartered Arabian Gulf Cup. The Arabian Gulf also has a representative team that competes in international tournaments such as the IRB World 7s Series.

After a long and gruelling season, the Arabian Gulf League was won for a second consecutive year by the Dubai Dragons. Two convincing wins over Sharjah Wanderers and Kuwait Nomads secured the title, but it was not to be a double win for the team in the Arabian Gulf Cup. A home victory against Abu Dhabi in the semi-final took the Dragons to their third consecutive final, which took place on 1 April. Pitted against the Dubai Exiles, the game was played in front of 700 supporters and looked set for extra time. It was the Exiles' Andy Gaylor who made the first dent in the scoreboard, but was closely followed by a penalty strike from the Dragons' fly-half, Sebastian Mouchet. Locked at 16-all and with time running out, the Exiles had to dig deep and a last minute dash by Ed Chambers made it a 21-16 triumph.

Both teams went on to more glory later in the season. At the Sharjah 10s, the Dragons romped home, with a hat-trick of tries from captain Paul Austin, to beat the Emirates Flying Muppets 17-0, and in the Beirut 10s, the Exiles contested a

nail-biting final with the hosts, which ended 7–5. The Dubai Hurricanes also had reason to celebrate, gaining a third position in the Arabian League, their highest ever.

The Arabian Gulf Representative Team did not fare so well in the Asian Championships. Drawn in Pool B against Singapore, Kazakhstan and Chinese Taipei, the representatives were looking fresher than ever, captained by Gareth Allum of Muscat. But, without completing a full training session before the start of the championships, it was an organised Singapore side that took the first round win, 32–6. Even though the Gulf players battled hard, they failed to make any headway. A better performance was seen in the match against Kazakhstan, although the team were defeated 19–9. A match against Chinese Taipei saw the Gulf's best result to date with a 30–26 win, and was a welcome boost for the World Cup Championship qualifier against China later on in the year.

UAE rugby officials also made headlines in 2005 with the news that South African referee Steve Scott took charge of two world cup qualifying games, the first being India versus Malaysia and the second, Kazakhstan versus Guam. Both games took place in June.

#### *Emirates Airline Dubai Rugby 7s*

The first round of the IRB 7s World Series is played in Dubai and then follows on in South Africa, New Zealand, USA, Singapore, England and France. Held at Dubai Exiles' Club, the action took place from 1 to 3 December and in 2004 was the biggest event to date. Over 150 teams participated, with a total of 1580 players involved in 353 games. The 7s' weekend sees youth sides, veterans, ladies, local teams, Gulf sides and 16 of the best rugby nations in the world competing for various titles. Alongside the sporting action, fans are treated to a carnival-like atmosphere and a rock concert, which takes place on the final night.

All the big international names turned out in 2004, including South Africa, who were 2003 winners, and runners-up New Zealand. But it was England, basking in the glory of their World Cup success, who took the title, beating Fiji 26–21. Eventual winners of the series were New Zealand with a huge 18-point lead over second place Fiji and 20 points over England.

## WATERSPORTS

### *Sailing*

For both nationals and expatriates, sailing plays a huge part in weekend activities as excellent facilities in all the emirates, including Abu Dhabi International Marine Sports Club (ADIMC), the Dubai Offshore Sailing Club (DOSC), Dubai International Marine Club (DIMC) and Jebel Ali Sailing Club (JASC) enable enthusiasts to take part in numerous activities and competitions. The UAE offers year-round sailing due to its climate and, for a sport that has only officially been around since 2000, boasts a healthy racing season. Established in 1988, DIMC is the main driving force



behind the growth of UAE water sports and was the first Arab organisation to be granted full membership of the *Union Internationale Motonautique* (UIM).

To promote the sport even further, the UAE opened Emirates Sailing School, which is attended by nationals in order to achieve international standard and represent the UAE. Training covers all water sports but mainly focuses on attaining skills in Optimists, Lasers and Toppers. Currently, the UAE team regularly compete in international competitions in countries such as Bahrain, Qatar, Italy and the UK.

#### *Maktoum Offshore Trophy*

In 2004, the Maktoum Trophy turned a new chapter for UAE sports with a seven-race series for cruisers in the 29 to 55 foot range. Starting in December 2004 and finishing in April 2005, the Maktoum Trophy had the backing of the entire sailing community and proved so successful that plans are already under way for forthcoming events. The race was given a new International Racing Certificate and was the first series of its kind to be held on a national level. Entrants for the event were a mix of racing yachts and cruisers, with a handicap system in place to balance out the individual boat capabilities. Crews of international and national level battled it out over a course of 'around the marks' style short races and the 365-nautical mile Dubai to Muscat race (starting on 3 March, ending four days later in the Oman capital), reaching its climax in an 'Around the World' race that took yachts around the man-made group of islands off Dubai.

The Beneteau 36.7 *Horizon FBC*, owned by Sheikh Khalid bin Zayed Al Nahyan and skippered by Frenchman Christophe Vanek, fared well through the entire series, so it came as no surprise to see them lift the trophy as overall winners. However, second and third spots were a close call and a final two days of racing over short courses at DIMC saw *Serdal Dubai*, owned by Sheikh Rashid bin Khalifa Al Maktoum and Mark Feilberg at the helm, make a dramatic last run to move one place ahead of *Sharazad* in the final standings. A greatly-increased fleet has entered for the 2005 trophy.

#### *Powerboat Racing*

First appearing on the Arabian shores in 1989 when the region's initial race took place off the coast of Mina Seyahi, the UAE has since held the UIM Class 1 World Powerboat Championships a staggering seven times. The UAE powerboat *Victory* team is classed as the most successful in the history of UIM World Championships, with driving legend Ali Nasser himself picking up 14 world titles in 13 years. Partnered with Ali Qama, the UAE duo last held the title in 2001, and in 2003, when Nasser retired from the world of powerboats, fans thought that it would never happen again.

However, much to everyone's delight, Nasser stepped out of retirement at the start of the 2004 season and once again entered the fray with Ali Qama. The



World Championships started back in May of 2004 at the Lisbon Grand Prix, ending in Dubai in December. Under the *Victory 7* name, the Ali duo failed to make a podium spot but were happy with their performance. *Victory 77*, comprising Mohammed Al Marri and Jean Marc Sanchez, made their first outing as a driving team in a new 42-foot *Victory V12*-powered catamaran. They came in second behind title holders Bjorn Gjelsten and Steve Curtis, who made up the *Spirit of Norway* team. A second round in Spain saw the holders once again take a win, with *Victory 7* coming in a close second. Third and fourth Grand Prix in the UK and Norway closed the final chapter on the European leg of the series and saw *Victory 7* crowned as European champions after two first-class performances had put them in pole position in the table. With a clear lead of 13 points, *Victory 7* looked set to take the title, but as quickly as they had turned the championship race around, *Spirit of Norway* came back with three consecutive wins that gave them their third consecutive championship crown. *Victory 7* took the second overall spot, followed by *Victory 77*.

The 2005 World Championship kicked off in the UK in July where *Victory 77* held on to second place behind *Qatar 96*. The series moved on to Trondheim in Norway in August, followed by Doha, Qatar in November and Dubai in early December. *Spirit of Norway* moved into second place in August behind *Qatar 96* and in front of *Victory 77*.

In the 2005 UIM Class III (6-litre) World Powerboat Championships, it was Abu Dhabi's Ali Hamil of team ADIMSC who stormed to a convincing victory in the final heat at DIMC. The championship was contested over four heats, all except one being won by team ADIMSC. In the penultimate heat, staged in Abu Dhabi, Hamil failed to complete the six rounds and Kuwaiti brothers Abdullatif Al Omani and Faisal Al Omani took victory. All in all, the ADIMSC had an outstanding season, obtaining the title for the World Jet-Ski Championships, F1 Team Championships and the F2 Presidents Cup.

## EQUESTRIAN SPORTS

Emirates Racing Association is the internationally recognised body overseeing horse racing in the UAE, overlooking rules and regulations, registration of horses and the licensing of trainers, jockeys and officials. Races of thoroughbreds and the legendary purebred Arabians take place in some of the regions top equestrian clubs, including Abu Dhabi Equestrian Club, Ghantoot Racing and Polo Club and Nad Al Sheba. The highlight of the season is the Dubai International Racing Carnival, which is nine weeks of top-class racing concluding with the Dubai World Cup.

Godolphin has been a major contributor to the UAE's racing circuit, offering world-class facilities in Dubai's Al Quoz area. Set up by the Maktoum family, Godolphin runs a state-of-the-art operation, winning no less than 117 Group One



races in 11 countries. Its headquarters are fully equipped with a private training track, equine pool and a dedicated feed mill in order to regulate and control the diets of the thoroughbreds housed there. Younger horses are broken in to the race season at the specially designed Desert Stables with only the best-bred picked for international competition. Thanks to the UAE's all-year-round sunshine, Godolphin stables provide a perfect winter retreat until the racing calendar gets under way.

#### *Dubai World Cup*

On 26 May, Nad Al Sheba once again played host to the world's richest horse race-meeting, with more than US\$15 million in prize money. The cup attracted more than 20 countries with a combined entry list close to 1000 horses. Godolphin, four-time winners of the World Cup, was taking no chances in the main race, which has a prize fund of US\$6 million, and entered no less than 11 horses. However, it was American horses that stole the show as jockey John Velazquez rode home to victory astride *Roses In May*, trained by Dale Romans, who had previously finished runner-up in the Breeders' Cup Classic. *Dynever*, trained by Christophe Clement and *Choctaw Nation*, trained by Jeff Mullins, came in second and third respectively.

There were six other races contested on the big day. These included the Dubai Duty Free, Dubai Sheema Classic, Dubai Golden Shaheen, UAE Derby, the Godolphin Mile, and the Dubai Khayla Classic, reserved for purebred Arabians. Champion UAE trainer Gillian Duffield scored success in the Khayla Classic with five-year old *Madjani*, as did Saeed bin Suroor with *Blues & Royals* in the UAE Derby. Bin Suroor also took a second place in the Godolphin Mile with *Qais*, a second in the Sheema Classic with *Razkalla* and a third in the Golden Shaheen with four-year-old *Botanical*.

#### *Endurance Racing*

The UAE is classed as one of the forerunners in the development of endurance racing, with its riders and horses currently ranked amongst some of the world's best. Endurance races are gruelling and tough as many exceed the 120 kilometre mark. Courses are designed to challenge the horses and mid-race veterinary checks ensure that horses are not over-stretched. The UAE can attribute much of its success in this sport to the stamina of the purebred Arabian horse, which is ideally suited to desert terrain, and the passion of its riders.

Spearheading the UAE national team is Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who is currently European Champion. Taking the title in Italy in September 2004, Sheikh Mohammed proved yet again that he has a natural talent for the sport. In the same competition, the national team took an overall second place behind the French team. Later that same month, UAE riders also

dominated the Aachen Endurance Horse Race held in Germany. In the 80-kilometre race, *Dimdi Suni* took the top spot, as did *Majid Al Boom*, who won the 90-kilometre race. Sheikh Khalid bin Sultan Al Nahyan and Sheikh Sultan bin Faisal Al Qasimi both came in third place in the 120-kilometre and 90-kilometre races.

In what was deemed to be a dress rehearsal for the FEI World Endurance Championships, UAE National Cup Day was held on 13 January 2005 at Seih Assalem, Dubai Endurance City. It was the first time that the event had taken place outside of Abu Dhabi. Completed in 5 hours and 20 minutes, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum and Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan were announced joint winners as they crossed the finish line together.

For only the second time in the sport's history, the UAE staged the FEI World Endurance Championships at Endurance Village (the first time was in 1998). The course, designed by Sheikh Mohammed, is shaped like a clover, the idea being that the action is criss-crossed with a central focus in the middle area. Challengers came from over 41 countries and a total of 175 riders competed in the 160-kilometre race. Competition was tough with the biggest challenge coming from France's Barbara Lissarague, but it was Sheikh Hazza bin Sultan bin Zayed Al Nahyan who entered the history books. Deciding to switch horses just before the start of the race paid off for Sheikh Hazza as he not only won the race a minute ahead of Lissarague, he also clocked the fastest time ever recorded. The UAE riders Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum and Sheikh Hazza bin Zayed Al Nahyan came third and fourth, with a total of seven UAE riders finishing in the top 15. This particular competition also made it in to the Guinness Book of Records as being the biggest ever equestrian event to date.

In February, the first female contender in its history took part in the President's Cup held at Al Wathba Endurance Village under the patronage of Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan: Sheikha Madiya bint Hasher Mana Al Maktoum entered the 160-kilometre race riding *Saif al Arab*. International riders from 30 different countries were invited to partake in the event, all of which had been winners of previous international endurance races. Marzooq Salem was the eventual winner, with Matar Ali Al Hammadi and Yousef Ahmed Al Bloushi taking second and third places.