

page three

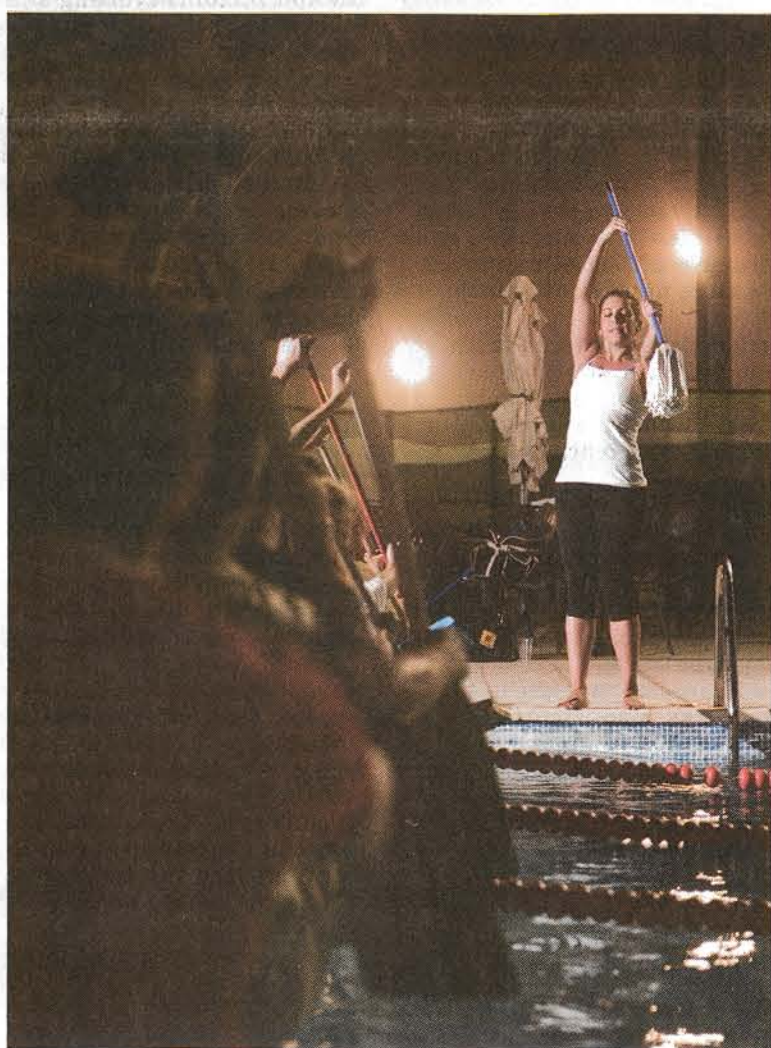
contact us: newsdesk@thenational.ae
Dubai 04-444-4787 or Abu Dhabi 02-414-5307



The team does the best it can with what it has. "The important thing is learning how to paddle properly and doing it unison. You don't need a boat or oars to do that," says the Bax Dragons' coach Jennifer Baxavanis. Photos by Siddharth Siva

Team Al Ain without a paddle

An absence of the more obvious paraphernalia, such as boat, oars or even water, has not stopped the enthusiastic Al Ain dragonboat team from dreaming big. With mops and brooms as paddles, the intrepid Bax Dragons have been training in a rugby club. **Essam al Ghalib reports**



Jennifer Baxavanis leads a session at the Palm Sport Resort Rugby Club.

ALAIN//They have no boat, no oars and no water to practise on, but the city's only dragonboat team is hopeful of a solid performance at this weekend's races in the capital.

On Wednesday evening the 14-strong Bax Dragons, plus their coach and sponsor, were at the Palm Sports Resort with fluorescent pink and blue brooms and mops, rehearsing synchronised paddling on the rugby pitch's stands as bemused passers-by looked on.

"What on earth are they doing with those brooms?" asked Ross Comb, 17, a British soldier holidaying in Al Ain with his parents.

When it was explained to him that this was Al Ain's dragonboat team and that they didn't have enough paddles for all, he said: "They need to train in water I think."

Instead, the team is making do - and not for the first time. "We didn't know if there would be any paddles for us to practise with so I stopped at Carrefour and bought a few mops and brooms," said Walter Cramerstetter, the team captain.

"We practised in the same way earlier this year and made it to the semi-finals in April at the Dubai dragonboat races. I'm hopeful that we will place well again this weekend."

Sponsored and coached by Jennifer Baxavanis, who runs a sales and

training consultancy in Dubai, the team does the best it can with what it has.

"The boat weighs about half a tonne, a bit big and bulky to transport here to Al Ain," she said.

"Even if we could transport it out here, where would we practise with it, with no body of water big enough in or around Al Ain?"

"All those on the team have families, jobs and other responsibilities that prevent them from coming down to Dubai to practise all at the same time, so we do the best we can by practising here in Al Ain."

"The important thing is learning how to paddle properly and doing it in unison."

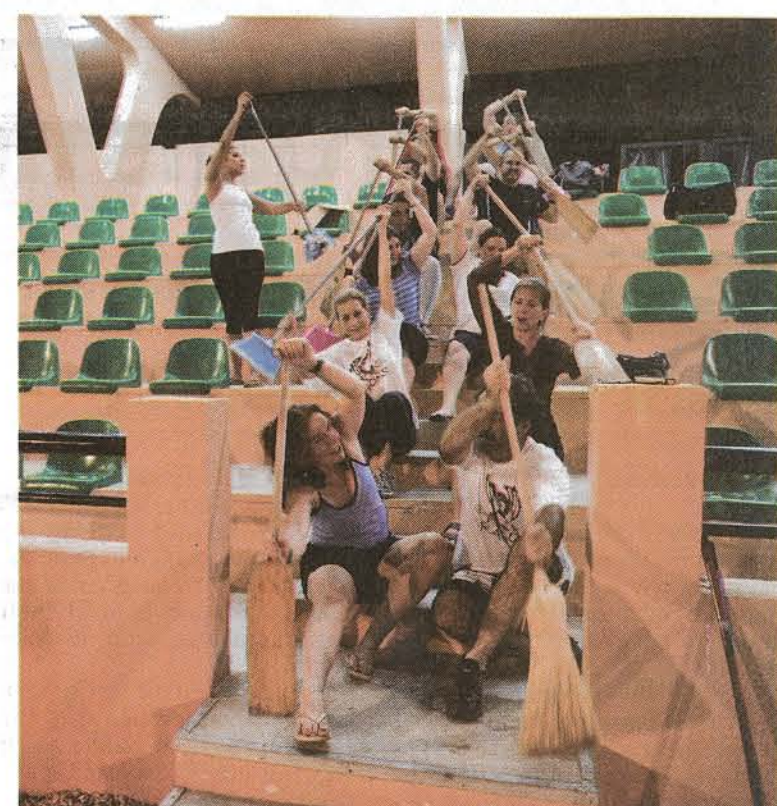
"You don't need a boat or oars to do that."

The Bax Dragons were put together by Mr Cramerstetter through his friends and acquaintances in Al Ain.

Only eight people showed up for Wednesday's session, though, prompting one team member to head to the rugby club in search of volunteers willing to take part in the races, which start at 8am today and continue from 11am tomorrow.

He managed to find four others, three rugby players and a businessman in slacks and a long-sleeved dress shirt.

With the rugby players unconvinced by "rowing" with fluorescent pink and blue brooms, they



The team's synchronised paddling by the side of the rugby pitch bemused passers-by. "They need to train in water," advised one.

were found wooden oars. Of the team they ended up with, only Ms Baxavanis, Mr Cramerstetter and two others had competed in a dragonboat race before.

"Does everyone here know how

to swim?" asked Ms Baxavanis. "Don't worry, you will all be provided a life-jacket and I am a certified lifeguard."

✉ ealghalib@thenational.ae