



TOUGH guys Shaun Pammenter (left) and Camron Wills, local crewmen on the Shosholoza, are heading back overseas for the final races of the prestigious America's Cup
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Team Shosholoza seen as a threat

BARBARA COLE

REACHING the semi-finals of the prestigious 2007 America's Cup used to be a dream for the 17 crew on the South African yacht, Shosholoza, but now it is a distinct possibility.

"It's going to be a mountain climb and we'll have to sail better than we've ever sailed before in the 20 races ahead of us, but it is possible. And once we get there, who knows?" said Shaun Pammenter, one of the two Durban crewmen on Team Shosholoza.

Pammenter, 27, of La Lucia, and his Durban crewmate, Camron Wills, 29, of Westville have been in the team for two years.

They have been back home on leave from the Shosholoza's Spanish base in Valencia, where the last races of the America's Cup, the most presti-

gious yachting event in the world, will be played out.

Durban-based shipping tycoon, Captain Salvatore Sarno, is the brains behind Shosholoza, Africa's first entry in the race, which will attract some four billion TV viewers around the globe.

With only the most technologically-advanced countries in the world being able to mount a challenge for the America's Cup, Sarno says that Shosholoza gives the country the chance to present South Africa as a modern, dynamic and exciting country with skills and technological expertise equal to the best in the world.

And when the Shosholoza first appeared on the scene in the 12-yacht race each representing a national side - the other teams were not worried about them and did not con-

sider them a threat. Initially, Shosholoza was lying "12th out of 12th" Pammenter and Wills recalled.

But since then, they have been winning races, the team's experience has grown over the past two years of racing and regattas and there was now a new Shosholoza yacht, which has been modified and improved to add vital seconds to the yacht's performance.

"Valuable seconds are what this game is all about. This is a race where coming first is everything and second is nothing," said Pammenter.

Now, the other teams take Team Shosholoza as a very serious challenger. The team finished seventh overall in the 2006 America's Cup season championships.

"We have confidence in ourselves and our boat. We are now in with a chance. We could not

say that a year ago," said Pammenter. The teams likely to make it to the semi-finals are Emirates Team New Zealand, the BMW Oracle Racing team of US, and the Luna Ross Challenge of Italy.

That leaves a fourth vacant spot and Pammenter, Wills and their team mates-backed by an equally-motivated support team-will be working flat out and getting in as much sailing time as possible to make sure they win the coveted spot.

"The pressure to perform is incredible. It gets much more each time we go out as more is expected of us," said Wills, who explained that most crewmen in rival yachts were competing in their second America's Cup, while some were taking part in their fifth.

"Winning races against experienced teams was an incredible achievement," he said.