

We'll be watching out for Shosholoza



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MERCURY
2/4/2007

WE OFTEN forget the extent to which our sport has been globalised and become big business.

At present we have no fewer than three of our Durban staff members abroad, or soon about to depart, to cover overseas sporting events. This is quite apart from our group's reporting team currently based in the West Indies for the cricket World Cup.

Rugby writers Zayn Nabbi (after a late start owing to visa problems) and Mike Greenaway respectively are in Australia and Hong Kong to cover the Sharks tour Down Under and the Hong Kong World Sevens tournament.

Writer Tania Broughton is preparing to take a break from the courts, a beat she covers so well and comprehensively, to travel in the other direction. She will be writing about South Africa's valiant efforts, through its entrant Shosholoza, to secure the yachting world's finest trophy, the America's Cup.

While it is worlds apart from the heat and passion of rugby, competitive yachting is no less competitive and intense.

I watched part of the America's Cup live off the Auckland coast in 1999/2000 and was hooked. The hype that surrounds this great event is amazing.

Wikipedia describes it as not only the most famous and prestigious regatta in the sport of sailing, but the oldest active trophy in international sport. It predates the FA Cup by two decades and the modern Olympics by 45 years.

Regarded as the "Holy Grail" of yachting it attracts top sailors and yacht designers. It is not only a test of sailing, athleticism and teamwork, but the supreme challenge of boat and sail design, of fundraising, and of managing people.

The America's Cup races in fact take place between only two boats - the holder and the challenger. Would-be challengers, virtually all from wealthy and from developed countries, spend years and vast amounts of money in planning and often secret preparation. The competing teams from each country race - in the preceding Louis Vuitton Cup - for the right to challenge the holder (currently Swiss).

This is the first time in 150 years that an African team has entered and its successes have surprised many; we are hugely privileged to be part of it. Shosholoza's mere participation has raised eyebrows at the level of its technical expertise and human skills in South Africa.

As residents of or near a major port city we should keenly follow every Shosholoza development because if the challenging team wins the cup, the cup's ownership is transferred from the defender's yacht club to the winning team's yacht club.

The next event in fact would move to South African waters in the event that Shosholoza should beat the odds and win the cup. It would be like having another World Cup soon after the 2010 soccer World Cup.