

Cape to Rio ~~yacht~~ race

has Brazilians' full support

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BRAZIL is taking very seriously both the forthcoming Cape to Rio Yacht Race and South Africa's hosting of the World Cup.

Fresh from a trip to Rio de Janeiro where he discussed plans for the Rio race, the commodore of the Royal Cape Yacht Club, John Martin, said: "We had an incredible welcome in Rio, far better than anything I had expected, with several high-level meetings, and clearly the Brazilians are very excited about the World Cup.

"I think the fact that we are hosting the cup has clearly changed Brazilian perceptions of South Africa, and they want stronger ties. This is about a lot more than sailing," Martin said.

Brazil is scheduled to host the next World Cup in 2014.

Apart from meetings with senior members of the Yacht Club of Rio de Janeiro to discuss facilities for the race, other high-level meetings were held with the secretary of state tourism, the state secretary for sports, the port captain of Rio, the mayor's office, the Graef Project and media and television professionals.

"I am hugely indebted to the

consul-general of Brazil here in South Africa, Joachim A Whitaker Salles, and his deputy consul-general, Pedro da Cunha e Menezes, who facilitated all our meetings in Rio. No yacht club under normal circumstances would have gained access to the people we were privileged to meet," he said.

Unusually, the city itself will host the prize-giving for the event.

The Graef Project, set up by Brazilian Olympic sailor Torben Graef, winning skipper of the last Volvo Race, assists disadvantaged youngsters through sailing and other life skills, similar to the Izivunguvungu School in Simon's Town.

"At each meeting every one received us warmly and expressed their joy at the return of the Cape to Rio Yacht Race," said Martin. "Clearly these people are as emotional, excited and proud of their city as we are about ours."

He added that almost every meeting began with a discussion of the World Cup, with most Brazilians seeing Argentina and Spain as the most formidable opposition to the Brazilian team.