

Setting sail from Strandfontein to Rio

11/8/1999 PLAINSMAN



■ A group of aspirant sailors from the MTN Royal Cape Sailing Academy are eager to take part in the 6th Cape to Rio yacht race.

When the Cape to Rio race gets underway early in the new millennium, a 21-year-old Cape Technikon student from Strandfontein hopes to be aboard one of the yachts.

Virgil Mpaly is part of a group of aspirant sailors from the MTN Royal Cape Sailing Academy who are eager to participate in the 6th Cape to Rio yacht race starting in January.

Most of these students have sailed in all major regattas in South Africa as well as in two world championship events and are ready for their biggest challenge to date – racing across the Atlantic against an international fleet.

"I used to be a keen athlete and soccer player, but since I started sailing, it was easy to channel my spare time and energy into sailing," says Virgil, who spends at least five hours on the water every weekend.

"A Boy Scout buddy of mine at Grassy Park Primary, introduced me to the sport," says Virgil, "and I've never looked back."

Virgil and his friends have been competing in the Lipton Cup – an offshore challenge raced from Gordon's Bay Yacht Club this week.

They are competing in a Lavranos 26 and know that a good performance will bring them one step closer to being selected.

"The Royal Cape Yacht Club

began its development programme when queries to pupils in disadvantaged schools on whether anyone

wanted to learn to sail competitively drew an amazing response," says Royal Cape manager, Anthony

Steward, who is driving the programme.

From the initial group of 10

pupils, the academy currently has more than 120 in the programme and over 200 pupils have been involved over the last two years.

"Once they had a taste of sailing at sea, their dedication and enthusiasm were amazing and their record speaks for itself," says Anthony, the first sailor to attempt to circle the globe in an open boat.

Peter During, MTN regional general manager, commented on the encouraging response of the academy students.

Peter said: "Development is a major focus of all our sports sponsorships.

"The academy affords us the opportunity to make a previously exclusive sport accessible to youngsters from all walks of life."

According to Virgil, the academy offers students an opportunity to learn about sailing and seamanship while providing a platform to gain competitive racing experience.

Anthony says they hope to accommodate at least two academy teams in the Cape to Rio.

"There are enough talented yachtsmen and women in our squad to make up a number of teams.

"However, as funds are limited, outside sponsorships will determine how many youngsters will be able to share in this once-in-a-lifetime experience."