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GOING OUT: Abu Dhabi finest eye third netball title

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The capital's top netball stars are all geared up to defend their title at next month's highly anticipated Intergulf Championships in Al Ain, an annual gathering of the Gulf's top netball teams.

The Intergulf Netball Championships is one of the world's longest running international events. From its humble beginnings 23 years ago, the tournament is now a prestigious fixture on the international circuit.



The event regularly attracts umpires and officials from the UK, New Zealand and South Africa, many of who take an active part in developing netball and umpiring standards across the Gulf throughout the year.

Abu Dhabi fended off teams from across the Gulf to win the highly coveted title for the second year running at the event held in Dubai last year.

Abu Dhabi clinched the trophy from long-term rivals Dubai A in a cliffhanger of a finale at The Sevens.

It was a superb 14-10 triumph for the Abu Dhabi women who fought hard to down a Dubai side well known for their athleticism and fierce competitive spirit. Abu Dhabi shooters Cherie Mansfield and Jen Burridge proved just too strong for the hosts.

The then vice-captain Jacqueline Coetzee, who is now the Abu Dhabi Netball League's vice chair lady, said: *"Gosh. We were absolutely delighted to retain the title for the second year in a row.*

"Dubai proved to be an extremely formidable opponent and really made us work for it in what was one of the most physical games of netball we've ever played.

“The standard of competition was particularly high and bringing the trophy back to Abu Dhabi was an extremely satisfying reward for the months of training and hard work. We’re extremely grateful to our band of vocal supporters who helped propel us further when we were too tired to go on.”

The tournament marked an intensive weekend of netball attended by over 250 of the top players across the Gulf including teams from Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain.

Now the Abu Dhabi women are all set to make it a hat-trick of titles and the bragging rights that go with it.

Abu Dhabi will be fielding a total of five teams, three of which will be participating in the competitive tournament and two U19 teams in the social tournament.

Teams were selected from players within the Abu Dhabi Netball League, a collection of over 200 women who play in competitive and social leagues on a weekly basis. They have also entered a men’s team who will play on the last tournament day.

Coetzee added: *“The Intergulf Championship attracts elite netball players, coaches and umpires from across the region and represents the highest title for netball teams across the Gulf.”*

“Support for both the league and the Abu Dhabi teams is at an all time high and we are anticipating fierce competition.”

The event also aims to bolster netball across the Gulf. While the game is the most widely participated women’s sport in the world, little is known about the sport throughout the Middle East.

Abu Dhabi Netball League Chairlady Erene Spies said: *“Each year the interest in the game continues to grow along with our numbers and it’s encouraging to see women of all ages and abilities come together to share in the love of the game.”*

“Women’s sport is a vital component of building a community and we are fortunate to have the support of local businesses such as Infiniti, Gray Mackenzie & Partners, High Spirits and Parks Biodiversity amongst others which ensures that the league can continue.”

The event is being held in Al Ain at the Hilton Hotel on March 4-5. Entrance is free and spectators are encouraged to go and join in the fun.

More information on the Intergulf Championships and netball in Abu Dhabi is available online at www.adnetball.com