

Dune-up 2008 attracts 23 athletes

By Nishad Anwar
Times News Service

MUSCAT — A 23-member team of athletes from Switzerland, England, Germany and Holland took off yesterday to the soft, beautiful deserts of Oman as part of Dune-up 2008 powered by McDonalds and Coca-Cola.

Dune-up is an extreme sports event which covers a 100-km mountain bike trail at an altitude of 2,200m at Jebel Shams and a 110km-run through the barren wilderness of Wahiba Sands over a period of four days.

According to Stepanie Trier, the organiser of the desert challenge, this is the equivalent of more than three marathons in three days. "Although Dune-up is not considered to be a race, it makes high demands on both physical and mental stamina," she said at a press briefing at the McDonalds outlet in Qurum yesterday.

Martin Trier who is also in the organising committee, said Oman is the second destination after Tunisia to organise a challenge of this magnitude. He also said they had plans to organise another challenge on the Great Wall of China titled 'Run the Wall'.

Ali Daud, president of McDonalds, Oman said he



DESERT BASH: The Dune-up 2008 team of athletes. — Photo by Ahmed Al Farsi

feels proud to be the sponsor of the challenge because of two factors. "One is the sports element, which goes by the theme of McDonalds, and the other is the tourist element. This is one way to promote Oman and also expose our country to the world," he said, adding that both Stepanie and Martin had relentlessly worked hard to make it a reality.

Sand, extreme heat, wind and the uncertainty about which track to take, all these serve to take the athletes to the limit of their endurance.

Hilal Ali Al Sinani, secretary-general, Oman Olympic Committee, hoped it would be held annually and promised

all support to the organisers. "From our side we will support in all ways we can, and I seriously hope would be held annually," Hilal said.

Stepanie said the goal of this challenge was to reach the final camp without any assistance. "Participants who are unable to keep pace with the group have to give up, and may take advantage of the service cars following the runners," she said.

Asked about the greatest challenge in Dune-Up, Stepanie said being cautious about the soft sand of Sharqiyah and the heat would be the big challenges to overcome. "The first two days will certainly be a challenge

because we were told that there was no rain in that area so far," she said.

The minimum age for the participants is 18 and the maximum 60. All runners must have experience in marathons or half-marathons, and be prepared for long distance runs.

For David Duffy, considered the oldest athlete in the crew, the Dune-up is not new as he has participated in a similar challenge in the dangerous Sahara deserts. "I have been running for eight years now and have lost weight immensely. I have also participated in half marathons in my area," he said.

David who works as a

metallurgist hails from England, but lives in Germany.

Annette Hager of Germany marks her debut with this desert challenge. She finds Muscat as beautiful as her home state Cologne. "This is my first challenge although I have been running for long now. I made a little trip to various places in Muscat and I find it as beautiful as Cologne," Annette said.

World Champion Susanne Beisenherz, who won the coveted title in Triple Iron in 2007, is also a leading challenger. The crew is expected to return to Muscat next Saturday.