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Sickler champion, Rashid best Omani sailor

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MUSCAT — The Nawras sponsored 2007 Oman Open National Championship for Lasers (one-man Olympic class sailing dinghies) was sailed from the beach off the Ras Al Hamra Boat Club. In all 24 sailors competed in the event organised by the Oman Laser Association with participants from Royal Oman Navy, RAHBC, Castaways — Civil Aviation Recreation Club and two international entries from Qatar and France.

Douwe Sickler came out on top with eight points, repeating his performances of 2003 and 2004. Second place was for Frank van Beek (last year's winner) only one point behind the leader with Tony van Thiel following closely as third with 10 points.

Rashid Khalifa Al Yahyai from RNO-Windum was the best Omani sailor with a sixth place overall, an excellent performance. Rashid again showed that he is the best Omani Laser sailor, a fact that was confirmed by his recent participation in the Asian Games in Qatar. Abdulhakeem Al Keyumi of the Castaways came second best Omani sailor, improving on his last year's third place.

RNO's Sabah Saif Salim Al Buraidi claimed the third place.

On the first day the fleet of 24 boats went out in light winds. By the time they arrived at the starting line the wind had died down completely and races had to be abandoned for the day.

The following day saw light winds building up late in the morning and a decision was taken to start at 12 noon. All competitors lined up for the start but a strong current pushed half the fleet over the line before the start signal. The OOD (Officer Of the Day) wisely decided on a general recall and a restart. The second attempt went better and some very competitive racing developed. Henrik Norgard (new to the Oman sailing scene) won the first race. The second race again saw the fleet starting too early twice with two general recalls. The third attempt was better and Douwe Sickler showed his old form of 2003 and 2004 and took first place.

The fleet had a double surprise during this race. The second mark had floated away almost two miles with the current requiring some quick thinking of all sailors. On the long run back to the third buoy a humpback whale surfaced straight in the mid-



SUPER SAILORS: The top three overall finishers and top three Omani sailors

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dle of the fleet, an awesome sight (especially when you are sitting 10cm of the water in a small boat!). The third

race of the day was just possible in very light winds requiring super concentration. Tony van Thiel secured a first in

this one. A fourth race was attempted but the wind stopped and all sailors returned to the beach for the calculation of the results and the prize ceremony. Prizes, sponsored by Nawras and ULO, were awarded by Tore Solberg (Nawras marketing director) to all participants. The RAHBC sailing captain, Cees van Eden congratulated Tony van Thiel with the excellent organisation of the championship. OOD Barrie Wilshire and his team of Chuck Heller, Nigel Burn, Fred Rourke and Bob Sambell were thanked for their strong management of

the races. Tony finished by thanking Nawras and ULO for their sponsorship of the event. He also thanked Saif Said Al Shebli of the Ministry of Sports Affairs for his presence at the ceremony and expressed his hope for the ministry to materialise possible plans for a Youth Sailing Training Centre.

This would give a strong impetus for Omani youth to participate in this sport. The Laser is a small single sail boat sailed by one person. It is an Olympic class which is very popular around the world. Laser sailing is a sport which can be practiced in Oman throughout the year. In strong winds the sailing is very physical, the boat gives you a great workout. With Oman's strong history of sailing, good winds, beautiful beaches and deep blue sea, Laser sailing has the prospective to become a true national sport with the potential of Omani participation in world class events such as the Asian and Olympic Games.

Final results: 1. Douwe Sickler (8 points); 2. Frank van Beek (9 points); 3. Tony van Thiel (10 points); 4. Jan Wind (14 points); 5. Henrik Norgard (15 points); 6. Rashid Khalifa Al Yahyai (RNO - 21 points); 7. Iain Hudson (22 points); 8. Cees van Eden (22 points); 9. Abdulhakeem Al Keyumi (33 points); 10. Fred Park (33 points).