



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

## 2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

### -Youth Sports Expands in Baghdad District with PRT Help-

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**Adhamiyah, Iraq** - Sports programs in Adhamiyah had a long history as an important social function for youth long before terrorism and sectarian violence threatened to upend communal activity in this district in the north of Baghdad.

Following the successful “Surge” of 2007, the local embedded Provisional Reconstruction Team (ePRT) and its military counterparts have been doing their best to reestablish normalcy by reintroducing youth basketball, wrestling, and weightlifting programs in Adhamiyah.



*Iraqi youth practice wrestling at the Adamiyah Sports Complex in a Baghdad ePRT 3 sponsored program.*

Although damaged in 2003, the privately-owned Adhamiyah Sports Complex has a proud tradition of employing Olympic athletes to train youth from all over the capital. The sports complex was recently rebuilt and as a result provides a venue for local youths seeking the mental and physical discipline that sports demands.

Working in partnership with the local community to define their own priorities, Baghdad EPRT 3 provided financial support for the programs at the sports center, which the Americans hope also will build the capacity of local Iraqis to undertake future projects.

Currently, six sports programs are being offered at the Center to 225 local youth. They include: Boxing, Basketball, Soccer, Swimming, Weightlifting, and Wrestling. Through these programs, youth are able to develop physically and socially while learning teamwork and valuable other skills that will aid them throughout their adult life.

At the grand opening of the sports complex that also serves as a community center, a locally known artist was commissioned to design and paint a mural for the structure. The mural will help promote the sports center and encourage participation in sports programs while fostering pride within the community.

A unique aspect of the sports complex is that former Olympic athletes are employed as trainers. By allowing youth and former Olympians to train and learn from each other, it is felt that Adhamiyah youth will have access to positive role models who live in the local community and strive to one day represent their country through competition in sports.

At the same time by providing a safe and wholesome environment for youth, the community will be able to begin working on other complex issues and projects knowing that youth have a place to develop into productive members of society.

For 30 older children and students, the ePRT has helped fund the Future Leaders of Adhamiyah, a program developed to teach sports management while allowing older more experienced athletes to mentor and train younger athletes.

The ePRT hopes in the future to support expansion of the sports complex while renovating additional facilities to accommodate more youth interested in athletics. The owner of the sports complex said he hopes it will serve as an anchor for the construction of larger facilities, reinvigorate markets, and attract new businesses that want to locate in the city.

While the sports complex is a work in progress, it is a sign of success to know that Iraqis are beginning to proactively develop the foundation needed to establish other sports programs that help train youths while fulfilling social needs of the local community.