

## Report on Rochdale Goalball Saudi Arabia Trip

Rochdale Goalball Club's Paul Jackson from Kirkholt has just returned home after a never-to-be-forgotten visit to Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. He was part of a British Goalball representative squad invited to participate in the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Saudi-British Sports Memorandum of Understanding Programme. The programme was set up in 1988 by the Saudi Government in conjunction with the British Foreign Office, and sponsored by BAE Systems.

For the five-man team consisting of Paul; Ahmed Afshiri, Yahye Siyad and Osman Baiia from London Sports; and Leeds' Steve Troy; under the leadership of coach Mick McGuire of MTM Training, the event was to prove highly successful. They played a series of exhibition matches over three days against the Saudi Arabian national squad; narrowly losing the first match 3-4, reversing the result in their second match to win 3-2 and concluding the event with an outstanding 10-6 victory. According to his coach, Paul played superbly throughout and was a key member of the team.



*Paul in a Saudi training kit*

Amongst the interested spectators at the final match was HRH Prince Sultan bin Fahd and other members of the Saudi-British Sports Memorandum of Understanding Programme. After the game, the British Ambassador William Patey invited the team to join him and his wife at the Embassy in Riyadh for refreshments.

For 26 year-old Paul, the whole trip was the experience of a lifetime. Besides visiting places he had only ever seen pictures of on TV before, it was his first-ever excursion outside the UK!



*Steve Troy, Paul and Ahmed Afshari with Ambassador William Patey*