

Volunteers receive fitness boost ahead of Africa cycle

A TEAM of Portadown charity volunteers have been given an energising boost by Portadown Rugby Club ahead of their gruelling cycle across Africa later this year.

Members of the Ambassadors in Sport (AIS) Cycle for Hope team will each receive six months free membership to Peak NRG after trainers at the gym threw their support behind the volunteers, saving them up to £2,000 in fees.

The cyclists began their intense training last month and will now be able to take cycle classes at the rugby club as well as using the gym in the run-up to their 15,000 km bicycle trek from Morocco to Cape Town beginning in December.

Seven of the ten core cyclist team have already signed up and begun preparations to take on the dirt roads and 100 degree heat in aid of football and youth rehabilitation academies in Africa.

The support from the gym is a positive step for the volunteers according to project co-ordinator Annette Williamson, based at the AIS Ireland office on the Derrylettiff Road.

"Some of the team already use the gym there and Ambassadors have put some publicity in there before but we were so pleased when they agreed to the free membership," she said.

"They were very open about it."

Robbie Bremner, manager of Peak NRG gym, said they had no hesitation about offering the team full use of the gym. "We try to support many members in the different charities they support.

"Supporting Cycle For Hope was a no-brainer for us and I hope other local businesses support these young people in

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what will be the toughest conditions they have encountered."

One member of the team, so far made up of five men and two women all from the Portadown area, is particularly keen to lead the fitness preparation.

Stewart Glass, 27, has a background in football and rugby, having played at school, university and now in the Ambassadors football team in the Mid-Ulster League.

"I have always been into sport and keeping fit and I use the gym quite a bit already," he said.

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"The best thing the team can do is to get out on the road but with work and everything else at the minute that is not always possible."

"But that's the great thing about the gym. We can do high intensity spinning classes and fit them around our busy schedules."

The team, who will be joined by ex-Manchester United footballer and AIS patron Lee Sharpe on two legs of the nine-leg cycle, will increase the intensity of their training as the departure date nears.

Mr Glass, who works for the Ulster Wildlife Trust, said, "We will be doing two or three gym sessions a week at least and also trying to organise group cycles around Northern Ireland at weekends to get some team spirit going."

Anyone interested in taking part in the Cycle for Hope or sponsoring someone can call Annette Williamson on 07764181146 or visit www.cycleforhope.org.



Preparing for the Cycle For Hope across Africa later this year are, from left, Mark Baxter, Kyla Cuthbert, Robbie Bremner, Peak NRG Gym manager, Robert Cuthbert, Jonathan Laverty, Judith Kerr and Stewart Glass . PT23-213.