

British Forces in Basra staged a Premier League sponsored 6-a-side football competition on the Contingent Operating Base (COB), Basra, Iraq this week. All 20 teams played in premier league strips kindly donated by the Premier League. In a spirited and hard fought, but sportsmanlike, competition the Iraqi Police Service, playing in Wigan strip, eventually ran out worthy winners. They beat 903 Expeditionary Air Wing, Royal Air Force, in the final by 2 goals to nil.

Brigadier Abdul Hussein Soud Sawadi Toama, the Commander of 52 Brigade Iraqi Army, who fielded a team said: "We had a beautiful day away from our military jobs and we are grateful to participate in this competition"

Major General Andy Salmon, Commander of Multi-National Division (South East), said: "Everyone has got on with it together in a spirit of fun and mutual trust and cooperation which is exactly a reflection of what we have done for the last eight or nine months"

The competition took the World Cup format with 4 leagues of 5 teams and the winners and runners up of each league going forward into the final 8 knockout stages of the competition. The competition was not a purely British military event. Three teams entered from the Iraqi Army and one each from the Iraqi Air Force, Police, and Department of Border Enforcement. Teams from KBR and Turners, two civilian engineering companies employed on the COB also entered teams. In order to decide which team would wear which strip the organisers held a charity auction during which the teams bid for their favourite strip. The auction raised a total of \$6115 for the competition's chosen charity, Project 65. This figure was generously matched by the Premier League, so the donation to Project 65 is \$12230. Project 65 has been created to honour the memory of the men who took part in the Coup de Main operation to capture the bridges over the Caen Canal and River Orne in the first combat operation of D-Day 65 years ago. The bridges are nowadays known as Pegasus and Horsa Bridges. A new military charity, Project 65 aims to raise £500,000, a small proportion of which will be used to erect a simple but lasting memorial to the men of the Coup de Main force and those directly associated with the operation 65 years ago. The memorial will be erected directly in front of the original bridge within the grounds of the Memorial Pegasus Museum. The remainder of the money raised will be split between the following service charities: The Royal British Legion BLESMA (British Limbless Ex Service Men's Association) St Dunstan's RAF Benevolent Fund Army Benevolent Fund Help for Heroes

All of the British military teams that competed were part of Multi-National Division (South East) which consists 20 Armoured Brigade and additional units. The teams that entered are as follows:

Man Utd 5th Battalion The Rifles
Liverpool 1st Royal Tank Regiment
Aston Villa Queens Royal Hussars
Chelsea 200 Signals Squadron, Royal Signals
Arsenal Royal Artillery
Everton KBR (civilian)
Wigan Athletic Iraqi Police Service
West Ham Utd Royal Military Police
Manchester City 1 Logistic Supply Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps
Fulham 1st Battalion Princess of Wales Royal Regiment
Sunderland 903 Expeditionary Air Wing, Royal Air Force
Hull City 35 Engineer Regiment, Royal Engineers
Newcastle 52 Brigade Iraqi Army
Bolton Department of Border Enforcement
Portsmouth Turners (civilian)
Tottenham Hotspur UK Medical Group
Stoke City 50 Brigade Iraqi Army
Blackburn 51 Brigade Iraqi Army
Middlesbrough 1st Battalion Yorkshire Regiment
West Bromwich Albion Iraqi Air Force