

It's a common sight on most Californian beaches, yet beach volleyball has failed to take off in Dubai - until now.

An international tournament this week will see bronzed beach babes and hunks battle it out on the sands of Jumeirah Beach Park, in scenes reminiscent of 'Baywatch'.

The Swiss FIVB Beach Volleyball World Tour Dubai Open will showcase the sport to UAE residents for the first time since the competition was created in 1969.

For the event, a 3,500-seater stadium and seven outside courts will be built in Jumeirah Beach Park.

The tournament starts on Sunday and entry is free for the entire week, with the event ending on October 11.

Although popularised in Southern California, the first recorded beach volleyball games took place on the beaches of Waikiki, Honolulu, in 1915.

What was originally designed to give bored surfers something to do when the surf was down, beach volleyball now enjoys unrivalled success in the Olympics, since its debut in Atlanta 1996 to Beijing 2008, where the United States won gold in both genders.

Fans in Dubai will be able to witness first-hand the exciting sport and have an opportunity to see some of the world's best beach volleyball players in action.

One of those is American Kerri Walsh, who will be looking to book her place in the final having competed in the Olympics. "Overwhelming is the best word I can use to describe the post-Olympic ride this time around," said Walsh.

"I am a very tired girl, but so excited to finish the season in Dubai and end 2008 on the highest note possible."

"Dubai will be my final event of the 2008 season.

"My body, mind and soul are very tired and ready for the off-season."

The FIVB World Tour holds more than 30 events across the globe each year. UAE beach volleyball enthusiasts will be able to watch almost 250 players from more than 40 nations competing in the first Swiss FIVB Beach Volleyball World Tour Dubai Open.

Mohammed Abdul Karim Juffar, President of the UAE Volleyball Association, said:

"The FIVB Beach Volleyball Dubai Open will offer the public a great opportunity to see this hugely popular sport for the very first time here in the UAE.

"Dubai enjoys wonderful weather and glorious beaches and I think that both fans and players will really enjoy coming to this event.

"I call this period of time 'The UAE Volleyball Year.'"

Dubai is one of nine new sites on the Swiss FIVB World Tour calendar this year along with Adelaide (Australia), Guaraja (Brazil), Sanya (China), Prague (Czech Republic), Osaka (Japan), Myslowice (Poland), Moscow (Russia) and Barcelona (Spain).

The \$1.25 million double gender event marks the first-time a women's tournament has been held in the Arabian Gulf.

FIVB President Dr Rubén Acosta said: "This exciting development in beach volleyball is the first step on the road to a long and prosperous future collaboration between the FIVB and UAE National Federation.

"The Dubai Open for beach volleyball will be a spectacular example of what we will achieve in the Middle East.

"There is a huge plan for volleyball in the area."

BEACH VOLLEYBALL TERMS

SPIKE Also hit or attack. A ball contacted with force by a player on the offensive team who intends to terminate the ball on the opponent's floor or off the opponent's blocker.

UNDERHAND SERVE Serve in which the ball is given a slight under-hand toss from about waist high and then struck with the opposite closed fist in an "underhand pitching" motion.

ATTACKER Also "hitter" or "spiker". A player who attempts to hit a ball offensively with the purpose of terminating play in his or her team's favour.

BLOCK A defensive play by one or more players meant to deflect a spiked ball back to the hitter's court. It may be a combination of one, two or three players jumping in front of the opposing spiker and contacting the spiked ball with the hands.

FLOATER A serve which does not spin or rotate and therefore moves in an erratic path. This is similar to a "knuckle ball" pitch in baseball.

