

Now we can believe again

Our World Cup soccer writer, James McGillivray has so far attended eight World Cup games across the country and in the process he's seen South Africa rediscover what we'd lost - BELIEF!

What a World Cup it has been!



It started slowly with players struggling to adapt to the ball, vuvuzelas and driving on the left hand side of the road (and any other ridiculous excuse the British press could conjure up to detract attention from the fact that England played horribly, and Robert Green made the kind of mistake that Primary School players get dropped for).

They labelled it 'The Worst World Cup Ever' after three days and started making up the excuses for England's inevitable dismal performance. Meanwhile, in reality, players and fans alike started to warm up to the tournament and the second round of matches (except for England's) were all crackerjack affairs!

I have no love for any journalists, particularly the ones who come from the "Don't let the truth get in the way of a good story" school of journalism. But the English press are the worst! I met some British fans getting off the Gautrain on Sunday morning, and they asked directions to the FIFA ticket office. It's about 500m up Rivonia Drive, in the heart of Sandton, so I showed them the way to go. As I said goodbye, they asked me if it was safe to walk. I think they were a bit flabbergasted when I laughed at them and told them they'd be fine if they didn't get hit by a car! But it just shows the wealth of lies purported by the tabloids in Britain, where Africa "shouldn't be hosting a global event" and Soccer City "looks a bit shabby!"

I've been to eight games so far, watching Brazil, Argentina, Netherlands, Spain as well as the African contingent games of Cameroon, Nigeria, Cote D'Ivoire and of course Bafana Bafana. I've visited Ellis Park, Soccer City, Loftus Versveld and Royal Bafokeng, and my experience of the World Cup so far has been dominated by people exceeding my expectations.

The stewards at the grounds are amazing. They're friendly, courteous and well trained. Any problems with seating that I've seen have been sorted out politely and quickly, with a minimum of fuss!

The police at the entrances have taken on their added responsibility without making a big deal out of it, and are efficient and firm, but tolerant.

The transport has been incredible! I've often been home, less than an hour after a game ended without walking out early. The parking has been jacked up, the buses know which routes to take, and the organization at both sides of the journey has been world-class.

Congratulations to all of these people, and a special word to the hundreds of volunteers at the stadiums, who contribute to the smooth running of the tournament. Every game, I'm proud to be South African, when I see the passion that these people exhibit in their work!

So far my favourite moments of my World Cup experience have been:

- The first glimpse I caught of Soccer City took my breath away, but the moment I stepped inside the stadium, I got goose bumps. I have been to many amazing sporting arenas around the world (being a soccerholic), but Soccer City really is one of the best.
- I took a friend to the Brazil vs North Korea game, and as she walked into Ellis Park, she was rendered speechless by the atmosphere .
- I have had a chance to experience some of the best football fans in the world. Football has the reputation of being followed by hooligans, but the people I've had the pleasure to meet, have been interesting, intelligent people who share my love for football. Each nation seems to have a unique breed of fan, the Danish are soft-spoken and open, the Argentinians are so passionate, the Brazilians are so friendly, the Africans are so vibrant and the Dutch are so HOT (well at least the 36 I saw were!)
- I've seen some amazing goals from some of the players I've watched on TV and idolized for years, Rommedahl, Fabiano, Villa, Drogba and Suarez. But my favourite so far has been the goal scored by super Nicklas Bendtner!
- Of course, football is not only about goals, it's sometimes about spectacular saves too, and I've seen a couple of great ones from Enyema and Sorensen.

But my favourite of all memories so far, was sitting in the stands in Rustenburg, watching the Mexico vs Uruguay game, with people all around me listening to Bafana Bafana vs France on the radio and keeping us updated. As Mphela scored the second goal and Suarez scored in Rustenburg, we really started to believe that the impossible would happen. The atmosphere in the stands, 450km away from Bloemfontein was incredible, as South Africans of all races, ages and sexes stood singing Shoshaloza and believing!

I'm sure you were all emailed the 'IT DOESN'T MATTER THAT WE DIDN'T GO THROUGH' slideshow that says *"It doesn't matter that we didn't go through, what matters is that our team inspired us all, gave us hope...what matters is what we're creating, the jobs, the skills, the infrastructure and a common future...what matters is that we host the best World Cup ever"*.

If I had to write that slide show, I wouldn't have put any of the material implications of the World Cup in it, I wouldn't have put in any words. I would have had a video of the people in Rustenburg, standing and singing Shoshaloza while watching two South American teams, and I would say that the most important thing that South Africa has gained from the 2010 World Cup is BELIEF!!

I tell you now, that if England had the same belief as we do, the players would play without fear, and they'd perform to the ability everyone knows they have! Now that's something the English press should write about!

Let's build on this momentum and keep believing...

SONY

