

After the Goal Rush, what then?

Julie-May Ellingson says Durban must not feel deflated once the World Cup is over. Thanks to our flashy new stadium there will be many more big events planned. **Matthew Savides** reports

BE PREPARED for a post-World Cup depression. With the tournament over, the euphoria and excitement having died down and the host cities having returned to a semblance of normality, it is likely an anti-climatic feel will spread across the country – especially if many pre-tournament expectations haven't been met.

This feeling was common after the Sydney and Athens Olympics in 2000 and 2004, respectively, and many feel it will be replicated here when the event finishes on July 11. It was also evident after the Springboks' victories in the 1995 and 2007 Rugby World Cups, with the latter not even held in the country.

But there is a ray of hope for Durbanites: the eThekweni Municipality has acknowledged this and is planning for it, which international sports journalist Neil Collins says is the correct way to go.

In particular, there are plans in place to capitalise on the popularity of the Moses Mabhida Stadium, including the hosting of various high-profile sporting events.

"I don't think we must be naive that this (depression) won't happen," said Julie-May Ellingson, head of the municipality's strategic projects unit. She added it was common after



JULIE-MAY ELLINGSON

the event, many people were critical, saying the event would be terrible. But when it started, there was a sudden feeling of pride. That negative feeling was turned into a positive. And for the first three or four months afterwards, that feeling of pride continued.

"But after that – and this happened in Montreal, Athens, Sydney – people started questioning whether it was worth spending all that money. In South Africa, for the next few weeks you'll feel that pride. People will say, 'Gosh, this is great. We can do this.' There'll be a honeymoon period afterwards, and I don't think the counter views to this will be evident until well after the World Cup," he said.

It was important, then, Collins said, to capitalise on this excitement and pride before it dies down.

"You need to exploit that. The logical thing is to bid strongly and firmly for the Olympics – and Durban, I've always said this, is a perfect Olympic host city. I've never seen a city so well equipped to host an Olympics. The top South African sports co-ordinators need to grab hold of the opportunities and see which major events they can bring across here," he said.

It has been suggested that Durban will bid to host the

Olympics – possibly as early as 2020 – but no formal announcement has been made. However, a meeting of the International Olympic Committee in Durban next year might be the perfect opportunity for such an announcement.

One of the reasons behind building the Moses Mabhida Stadium was to host major international events, including the Olympics. Nonetheless, there are still question marks around the decision.

Ellingson said this was coming up less frequently. "I would go to presentations and I would time the number of seconds it took for someone to ask me that question. But in the last six months... I haven't been asked this. People are now asking when the Sharks are moving across – not 'if', but 'when'."

Ellingson is convinced that building the new venue was the right decision.

"Durban has always had a longer term view; it's always been about 2010 and beyond. Our objective has always been, in all the infrastructure that's been put in, that it's not about 2010, but about going into the future in terms of our own economic development strategy."



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Proving them wrong

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Jordaan did not dwell on what happened. The next day, he announced that South Africa would bid again. Four years on, it was successful.

That's when the hard work began: building or upgrading 10 stadia and several airports, constructing road and rail links, improving mobile and web connections.

South Africa has faced more criticism than any other host nation. Every major tournament is beset by criticism. The 2000 Sydney Olympics, now remembered as the best ever, was widely condemned in the years leading up to the opening ceremony.

But for Jordaan, criticism of this tournament is about more than the usual gripes about over-running budgets and delayed projects. It's about the way the rest of the world views Africa.

Franz Beckenbauer, who led Germany's bid for 2006, questioned whether an African country could host the event.

"The organisation for the World Cup in South Africa is beset by big problems," he said in 2006. "But these are not South African problems – these are African problems."

Other senior European football officials have been just as scathing, while South Africans have become used to the over-the-top reporting of crime by sections of the European media.

"We want to explode the myth that there is a contradiction between being African and being world-class," he said, standing outside Soccer City in Johannesburg.

With the World Cup in sight, Jordaan is more relaxed now.

"If we cannot convince them now, we will never convince them," he says, before



calmly going through every major claim after another, ending each with the simple rejoinder: "They were wrong."

Stadiums won't be ready on time? They were wrong. No one will buy tickets? They were wrong. Fifa will make a loss? They were wrong.

The legacy of apartheid is not just high crime and high poverty. Fighting such a system has, Jordaan argues, "strengthened [South Africans'] resolve to say we will prove you wrong. We come from a history where I was told that I cannot vote, I am not good enough, I do not have equal worth. If we had accepted those conditions, we would still live under apartheid. We proved all those things to be wrong."

Criticism

"In 1990, when Mandela walked out of prison, they said the country would go up in flames. Well, it didn't happen. In 1994, they said the election would never succeed and there would be chaos and bloodshed. Well, it didn't happen. We have gone through our own history creating defining moments. One of those moments will be the World Cup 2010."

The "they" to whom Jordaan refers are not limited to foreigners. Some of the harshest criticism has come from inside South Africa – most of it from whites. As Professor

Steven Friedman, a political analyst at the University of Johannesburg, told me: "Some white people assume black people can't run a World Cup."

Yet, as the opening game draws closer, internal criticism is abating. For decades, football has been seen as a black sport, but the crowds at last year's Confederations Cup, a World Cup warm-up, were refreshingly mixed-race.

Of all the matches at the World Cup, the first-round pairing of South Korea against Greece on June 12 is arguably the least exciting prospect. But it is the match that will mean the most for Jordaan. It is the first to take place at the Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium in Port Elizabeth, the city in which Jordaan grew up.

Under apartheid rules, the stadium had been split into areas for different races. The VIP seats in the main stand, where Jordaan will take his seat, had been reserved for whites.

"To sit in an area that was previously for whites only is an indication of the road we have travelled," he smiles. An indication, too, of the personal road Jordaan has travelled. "From being excluded to being the organiser of the biggest event on Earth is something special."

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