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SOCCER CITY STADIUM: Arena One catered for the VIPs during the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

WORLD CUP 2010: A QUESTION OF LOGISTICS

The Football World Cup in South Africa was the largest and most prestigious sporting event of the year. The Munich-based company Arena One saw to the physical well-being of business guests at twenty-one of the sixty-four games. It was a Herculean task for the German company, partly because logistics networks first had to be established.

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An Arena One employee expertly serves a traditional African layered phuto bake Sowetan chalaka to one of the 100,000 guests in the VIP area of Soccer City Stadium in Johannesburg. A somewhat exotic dish for Europeans, it is a traditional African corn polenta with braised white cabbage cooked Soweto-style. (Soweto is an area of Johannesburg.) It tastes good.

However, before the first guests could take their first bite, the team led by Stephan Thewalt, Frank Wassermann and project manager Ralf Sanktjohanser faced a number of logistical challenges and had to deal with numerous matters particular to the country.

About a year and a half ago when it was clear that Arena One would be responsible for VIP catering at selected stadia for the World Cup in South Africa, the project team 'South Africa' realised that the catering at this World Cup was not going to be quite

the same as the 2006 World Cup in Germany. At last year's Confederations Cup, the Munich firm had its first taste, not only of the South African mentality, but also of the logistical requirements and the more demanding conditions on location. The usefulness of this dress rehearsal should become clear this summer, despite the comparatively small size of the event.

Logistical challenges

Firstly, the World Cup in South Africa required the entire logistics process to be restructured. In 2009, the search began for a suitable production location to set up a logistics chain, thereby ensuring smooth processes. An appropriate place was found in Kempton Park, an airport north of Johannesburg, where Arena One rented a 4,000-sqm hangar that had enough floor space to set up a kitchen. A flower cold storage house here was converted into a refrigeration warehouse for meat during the World Cup.

But Arena One had more than just a kitchen to set up from scratch. The staff also created a barcode system that ensured that meals, equipment and drinks made it to the right stadium and suite, VIP box or business arena. In Soccer City Stadium, which held the opening and closing ceremonies, the firm looked after around 300 VIP boxes and marquee areas and was responsible for catering to business guests at twenty-one of the sixty-four games. The kitchen staff processed sixteen tonnes of food brought into the stadium in three articulated lorries for the opening game. On top of that were 25,000 forks, knives, plates and cups for the guests.

Because a large proportion of supplies could not be obtained in South Africa, around fifteen containers with 350,000 items had to be sent from Germany. A total of around 950,000 items were required for the World Cup. The supplies were sent by ship and were in transit for up to three

months, so there was no room for error. A subsequent order would have been as good as impossible due to the shipping time.

Despite careful preparations, the Arena One team wasn't immune to error. One setback was a strike in South African harbours, meaning cargo could not be unloaded. Various deliveries arrived in stadia and kitchens much later than planned.

1,200 employees

Ultimately, the task in South Africa fell to the staff. Some 1,200 employees, fifty working for Arena One, were required for the VIP boxes and business areas. All employees were trained to meet international standards and bring to this big event the professionalism required and expected by prestigious guests from all over the world. Intercultural training was also provided.

The trainers were confronted with mentality differences and at times had to struggle with communication problems as the English of South African catering staff is often poor. Due to high staff turnover

SIXTEEN TONNES OF FOOD FOR THE OPENING GAME

before and during the 2009 Confederations Cup, Arena One assembled a much larger pool of employees than was actually required. This was possible thanks to the network the Munich firm had already established.

After the preparations, the entire team – the project management, chefs and service staff – waited in eager anticipation for the biggest international sporting event of the year. The World Cup was ready for kick-off. The project management strove to ensure that the guests in every VIP box were dined by the same chef and waiting staff – a service the box guests would appreciate. This led to lively intercultural exchange between the guests and staff.

Incorporating local expertise

To secure local expertise before the World Cup, Arena One agreed to a joint venture with the international caterer By Word of Mouth. Arena One, therefore, had at its side an experienced, professional and award-winning top chef, Karen Short – someone who is familiar with the country's particularities and has cooked for the Nobel laureate and former president Nelson Mandela and the former US president Bill Clinton.



Credit: Getty Images



Credit: Arena One

Before the World Cup, the project team travelled to South Africa about ten times to talk to Karen Short about possible recipes, to browse the markets and to cook test dishes. The result was an international menu with a South African flavour, conceived to whet a guest's appetite for South African food.

All potential suppliers were contacted well in advance to make the risk of a difficult undertaking calculable. It was important to find suppliers who could provide the required quantities of food and equipment. Medium-

sized companies on location were asked to provide handmade products, like decorative bowls or baskets, and suppliers were requested to provide the food. Meat and cheese were ordered months before the World Cup. This proved to be prudent as food prices rose by up to twenty per cent in South Africa in the final weeks before the tournament. ■

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Managing Director of Arena One

Frank Wassermann has been managing the specialist hospitality firm Arena One together with Stephan Thewalt since 2008. During the 2006 World Cup, he managed a large team responsible for hospitality in six German stadia. Prior to this, the forty-six year old worked in the hotel and catering industries and was employed as the managing director of Haberl Gastronomie in Munich. He then founded OK Hospitality Consulting GmbH with star chef Otto Koch.