

Soccer City: history

Formally known as FNB Stadium, Soccer City was built in 1987 and had distinctive blue and white plastic bucket seats for 80 000 people. A two-metre wide "moat" ran around the entire field to protect players from pitch invasion by spectators.

The old stadium, June 2004

It was built after an agreement was reached between the erstwhile National Professional Soccer League (NPSL) and First National Bank (FNB) to build a football stadium in Nasrec.

The first football game to be played at the massive stadium was appropriately a Soweto derby between Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates, two of the most popular teams in Johannesburg and South Africa.

Subsequently, FNB Stadium staged some of the most memorable football matches in the country, hosting numerous cup finals and charity matches. It will definitely be remembered for the die-hard Chiefs fans in their black and gold colours and the Pirates fans in their black and white, making a din with their vuvuzelas in the bowl shaped stadium.

It was also host of the finals of the African Cup of Nations in February 2006, when the South African national football team, affectionately known as Bafana Bafana, beat Tunisia 2-0.

Work carries on at Soccer City, July 2008

It was at the same venue in 1997 that Bafana Bafana defeated Congo 1-0 in front of an excited capacity crowd to qualify for the 1998 World Cup finals for the first time.

Besides being the premier venue for football matches, the stadium will be remembered for the mass rally held in 1990 to welcome the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. About 100 000 people swarmed the stadium to hear Mandela call for a unified South Africa.

Three years later, in 1993, after South African Communist Party leader Chris Hani was assassinated, more than 80 000 mourners gathered at FNB Stadium to pay their last respects to a man who "spent his life fighting for freedom, democracy and justice".

Some religious groups have also made their mark on the history of the stadium, with the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God holding big New Year's vigils at the stadium. One of South Africa's most popular churches, the Zion Christian Church, or ZCC, has also held colourful church ceremonies for its members at the stadium.

Sources

- City of Johannesburg website
- City of Johannesburg World Cup website
- South Africa: The Good News website
- FIFA website
- Ke Nako magazine (April/May 2008), from the 2010 communication project management unit of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS)