

# When football meets business....

"Welcome to the best." Soccerex's CEO Duncan Revie seemed to be quite confident when he welcomed the nearly 2,000 delegates who attended the 2008 edition of this football exhibition, considered as the place-to-be for people working in the football industry around the world. Once again, Soccerex took place in Johannesburg, from November 22 to 26 2008, and I had the great opportunity to represent the International Football Federation N.F.-Board during this event. But, what exactly is Soccerex? What is the purpose of such an event? Who is attending and why? Well, basically Soccerex is a "platform" that regroups key decision-makers belonging to the football industry, enabling them to meet each other and eventually initiate talks about potential deals. Just to give a figure, a reported £600 million of business was generated from Soccerex 2007 alone. This includes sponsorship deals, TV Rights, commercial contracts (acquisition of innovative products etc) and so on. To summarize, Soccerex is "when football meets the economy and football meets media" (Joseph S. Blatter, FIFA President). However, after this basic and annoying presentation widely inspired by Soccerex's brochure (sorry for that!), let me try to describe the inside reality of such an event. First, it is hectic. No break. Forty minutes after my arrival at Johannesburg O.R. Tambo International airport I was already participating in an international development workshop reserved to right holders only (Clubs, Federations etc), where Senior Executives from Liverpool, Milan AC, Tottenham Hotspurs, Supersport United and others were debating

about the best strategies to enter new markets and develop their brands in those markets. I might surprise you, but African countries are not commercial priorities for these gentlemen (except South Africa of course). They are more interested in Chinese, Indian or US markets for instance. In Africa, they prefer to sign partnership agreements with academies. For instance, Tottenham Hotspurs and Supersport United have an agreement and every player joining the Supersport United academy commits himself with Tottenham (assuming he is good enough to join the London-based club of course). Unfortunately, the speaker from Supersport United clearly stated that his club wasn't looking for partnerships with clubs from lower leagues (Malawi, Botswana, Angola, Mozambique etc). The workshop continued for a while, with discussions about the clubs' TV channels (in particular Real Madrid and Milan AC), about the huge potential offered by the internet (Facebook), about the necessity to "monetize" football and so on. When it finally ended, I was perfectly aware of what Soccerex would be: business, business and...business. But, after all, I was here for that, not for discussing about the best player or the coach of the season! The next days of the convention were also very interesting, and I learnt a lot. First lesson: FIFA people are rock-stars. On November 23, Jérôme Valcke (FIFA General Secretary) and Danny Jordaan (CEO South Africa 2010 LOC) welcomed the Soccerex delegates and gave an update about the 2010 World Cup. When the conference finished they visited the exhibition. It hardly lasted more than 20 minutes, but it was just crazy: they were like the Rolling Stones, followed by dozens of groupies and media trying to talk to them, to shake their hands or to



give them a business card. Honestly, it was astonishing! Another interesting lesson: even in an exhibition reserved for key decision-makers, there are some "big guys". And it is not easy to talk to them, since they normally stay in the "VIP lounge". Obviously FIFA people are "big guys", so are delegates from the main clubs (Liverpool, Real Madrid etc) or Senior Executives from global corporations (VISA, Continental, or Motorola). And, believe me; it is not easy to talk to a so-called "big guy." And even if you luckily manage to do so, you have to be fast, go straight to the point, and try to get his business card. Just to give you an example, during the 10-minutes break of a conference led by Continental's Head of the 2010 FIFA World Cup Project, I tried my luck and started discussing with him. Two minutes later, somebody from Olympique Lyon (France) arrived with the same objective and interrupted our conversation. It was too late for me, I missed the opportunity. By the way, a little advice: don't be shy, try your luck. Indeed, the last day of Soccerex, I was discussing with a friend when, suddenly, he stopped talking and said: "Look, this man is Osvaldo Ardiles (winner of the 1978 World Cup with Argentina). Go and talk to him, a guy like that would be a perfect ambassador for your federation N.F.-Board". I was definitely sceptical "How can a World Cup winner be interested in the N.F.-Board?" However, I introduced myself and gave him my business card, just in case.

One week later Osvaldo Ardiles sent me an e-mail and we will see soon what we can develop together in the future! To conclude, the convention itself is not enough. To be very efficient, it is important to consider also the networking opportunities that occur after –or before– the event. For instance, the choice of the hotel is important because meeting delegates in a more relaxed environment can help to create fruitful business relationships. And it is also true for after-event parties (social evenings, fashion shows etc). Unfortunately it is impossible to sum up in a single column all the information or experiences that Soccerex can offer to an attendee. I tried to give an overall view of such an event, to express the few things that kept my attention, to provide some "tips" for all the readers willing to develop their company or their football club internationally (by the way, all those willing to discuss this matter in more detail are more than welcome to contact me by e-mail: [marketing@nf-board.com](mailto:marketing@nf-board.com)) because I think that it belongs to all the people involved in football in this country to join their efforts, to share their opinions and experiences, in order to develop this sport. "Si se puede(\*)" as they say in Peru. There is a real potential for Botswana soccer and that is why, for 2009, I wish all the members of the football community in this country as many successes as possible.

**Yes, it is possible.  
Happy New Year!**