



WORLD CUP SPECIAL

AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE

Kick Off assistant editor Zola Doda took his Under-11 team to Germany for an unforgettable trip.



Flying the flag – SA ambassador Moses Chikane with Zola Doda and his team

For any 10-year-old to be on an aeroplane for the first time is an exciting feeling, but to be on a plane, for the first time, that is going to Germany and the World Cup finals is an experience I will never forget." These were the words spoken by our captain, Teboho Mathiso, as we landed in Frankfurt for the Junior Football Cup tournament.

My soccer team, FC Napoli, were invited by the Junior Football Cup committee, in association with the German Football Association, to represent South Africa in the seven-a-side tournament played during the World Cup finals. The trip turned out to be an experience of a life-time for the boys from Mfuleni.

Free airplane tickets, free accommodation, a free mini-bus and a coach for nine days, as well as a free flight in a private jet was beyond the wildest dreams for the kids.

Above all, for me, the most important thing about the trip was not only to experience the World Cup vibe and to participate in the Junior Football Cup, but it was more about showing my Under-11 team how people from other countries live and how that can change their lives for the better. It was also about us teaching people more about our country ahead of the

2010 World Cup finals.

Upon hearing that we were in Germany for the tournament, South African ambassador Moses Chikane left Berlin for Kassel, where teams from Russia, Northern Ireland, Romania, Holland, Costa Rica, Ghana, China and other countries had gathered for the biggest junior tournament in the world.

"Welcome to Germany boys, and I'm happy that you came to represent my country in this tournament," Chikane said before the opening ceremony. "I will make sure that I spend my time with you from the opening ceremony up to the last game. I also want to take a picture with the team that I will keep in my office and also give one to President Thabo Mbeki when he arrives here for the unveiling of the 2010 World Cup logo."

The ambassador kept his word and spent three days with the team, not to mention that he was also part of our team-talks and often gave words of wisdom.

When the tournament kicked-off, we were sure that we would do well, perhaps unaware of the high international standards in youth football. In European countries, players start their development

at the age of six and by the time they turn 10, they are polishing their basic skills. This is a far cry to most South African teams where, at age 11, players rely entirely on pure talent. Also, in Europe the offside and back-pass rules do not apply to Under-11 teams and our side struggled to cope with the sudden change. We lost all our matches in a tournament won by the famous Russian side CSKA Moscow. The Under-11s from Delron Buckley's former club, Arminia Bielefeld, finished third.

After the tournament it was time to visit the German FA headquarters at Frankfurt Stadium – on the same day Argentina took on Holland. We were escorted to the offices by a security guard and the vice-president of the German World Cup Organising Committee, Wolfgang Niersbach, together with Mathias Eillers, who is the development officer for the German FA.

Our players had an opportunity to take pictures with the replicas of the 1954, 1974 and 1990 World Cup trophies before heading to Frankfurt Airport.

Our team might not have won the tournament, but the experience they gained in Germany is something to remember. ☺