

# World Cup is a reason to share the love in Mzansi

**A**T THE opening of the 2010 National Communication Partnership Conference this week, local organising committee chairman Irvin Khoza related a defining moment that he experienced at the 2006 Soccer World Cup in Germany. On his way to the stadium, the taxi driver remarked: "It's strange, but for the first time since I can remember, the Germans have really started to love each other."

Khoza shared this incident with the audience, to underline his point that South Africans should start improving their interpersonal relations with each other in the run-up to 2010, and look for the good in each other rather than engage in the continual search for finding fault in others.

So, how can brotherly and sisterly love be ignited among the people of Mzansi? And what are the leverage points for converting the prevailing fear and mistrust into a newfound sense of a close-knit fraternity and a shared destiny?

Following Khoza's remarks about the need for improved internal relations, many commentators called for a comparison of SA's psychometrical state of the nation with that of the previous hosts, Germany, around the 300-day countdown mark.

At this point in 2005, roughly six weeks after the Confederations Cup, most Germans felt anxious rather than elated at the prospect of hosting the world the following year. Germany's leading political magazine, *Der Spiegel*, said: "The euphoria that had energised the country during the 2005 Confederations Cup had died without a whimper. Football was once a beacon of hope for Germany. The 2006 World Cup was supposed to boost the gross domestic product; an outstanding performance by the national team would fuel a national liftoff."

Coach Jurgen Klinsmann was the public face of this hope."

But things started going wrong in early 2006. First came the 4-1 defeat by Italy; then German clubs crashed out of European tournaments, followed by the

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eruption of a domestic match-fixing scandal involving players and managers. A number of xenophobic attacks in east Germany prompted a former government spokesman to call for "no-go zones", the Swedish ombudsman for equal opportunities called for a boycott of the World Cup (he anticipated a rise in forced prostitution), and unemployment peaked at a post-war record of 5-million plus.

Concluded *Der Spiegel*: "The country seemed grumpy, timid, ugly. The World Cup, an experiment in mass merrymaking, was in danger of being ripped apart in a savage orgy of self-mutilation and bellyaching."

It was then that Chancellor Angela Merkel, Klinsmann and the grandees of German football convened for a sporting summit in mid-March 2006. At the top of their agenda: How to turn the World Cup into a frolicking, fun-filled fest. Looking back at what winning the 1954 World Cup had done for the beaten-down German psyche just after the war, and how the "Miracle of Berne" had become a catalyst for renewed self-confidence, they rallied behind Klinsmann's rebranding programme for the national team.

Concluded Klinsmann: "Winning the tournament would give us the chance to show the world who we are. We have the opportunity to redefine Germany — to create a national brand." As a result, all of government and the 2006 stakeholders became deliberate and vocal spokesmen for

Klinsmann's previously much maligned reform programme and his grand vision.

The result? When Germany beat Poland in their second group game, thereby qualifying for the knock-out stages of the tournament, the entire nation erupted into a state of collective euphoria and what *Der Spiegel* termed "Partyotism" — a new phenomenon of expressing their love for the nation in the most festive manner. On June 14 2006, at 22:53 when Oliver Neuville scored the winning 1-0 goal in extra time, Germany had reached the tipping point.

Even Merkel, not known for outbursts of emotion, was swept up in the football frenzy, cheering, punching the air during matches and hugging coach Klinsmann and the World Cup's chief organiser, Franz Beckenbauer. "Germany's image abroad has definitely changed incredibly. I liked this inner, happy self-confidence a lot," she told RTL television. Merkel said she hoped the last four weeks had given the country the confidence and drive to tackle its problems — mass unemployment and runaway welfare costs. "We're a great country, we can do it, and we're admired by others," she said.

A different kind of boost, albeit not less significant to the national wellbeing, had tongues wagging at Germany's kindergartens. It appears that the mix of sun, beer and excitement during the World Cup produced a massive hormone rush in German bedrooms. Nine months on, birth clinics across the country reported a much-needed baby boom — and many of the so-called World Cup babies were called after the national football heroes.

To make Khoza's greatest wish come true and generate the much needed internal love affair of Mzansi, what can you do to rally your troops behind the national team and show the world why Madiba has repeatedly called SA a "nation of champions"?

■ *Dr Eberl is the author of the 2010 Scorecard: Converting Visitors to Brand Advocates.*