

SETTING THE STANDARD

This year's Cricket World Cup supplied further proof of South Africa's ability to host major sports events

In March this year, Australia's cricketers danced gleefully around the magnificent Wanderers Ground in Johannesburg after lifting the ultimate prize in one-day cricket – The Cricket World Cup.

Their triumph was the finale to a seven-week tournament played at 13 world-class venues throughout South Africa along with others in Harare, Zimbabwe and Nairobi, Kenya. It was a tournament that had everything – exciting action, off-field controversy, fantastic individual performances and, according to International Cricket Council chairman Malcolm Speed, tremendous organisation and infrastructure.

"Everyone who attended the World Cup was impressed by the welcome from the South African people. They were delighted to have us in their country," said Speed.

"The infrastructure was excellent and a lot of effort had been made to upgrade the venues for the media, players and spectator comfort."

Observers of the international sports scene are unlikely to be surprised at Speed's verdict. The Cricket World Cup was the third major international tournament staged in South Africa since the nation proved its mettle as the host of the hugely successful 1995 edition of the IRB's Rugby World Cup,



High praise... the 2003 Cricket World Cup Getty Images Sport

which was followed by soccer's African Cup of Nations.

The South African authorities' experience in devising security strategies for major international events is second to none – South African expertise has even been called upon by the Pentagon – and the Cricket World Cup, like the Rugby World Cup before it, passed without incident.

"One of the problems cricket has faced over the years are pitch invasions," said Speed.

"But in South Africa they went to great pains to deal with an ever present threat and over a tournament of 54 matches, not one unauthorised person got onto the grounds.

"VIP security was especially good, with close protection officers looking after heads of state as well as senior cricket officials and other dignitaries."

Speed singles out South African cricket chief Dr Ali Bacher for personal praise for the success of the event but also recognises the contribution of his entire team, some of whose key members have transferred their talent to ensuring the country is ready, willing and able to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

"What I saw at every venue I visited was a consistently high level of management and administration. Everybody involved was totally committed to making the event a success," he said.

"I was impressed by the huge volunteer involvement. Every one of them was friendly, obliging and well turned out. South African Airways, in particular, went out of their way to be efficient and helpful.

"As hosts, South Africa ensured that there was always a genuine sense that this really was a world event. It was great for the game, not just in South Africa but the whole of Africa." ●

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Event specialist Nigel Rushman explains why past successes have given South Africa's World Cup bid a head start

Nigel Rushman, head of major event specialists Rushmans, has a unique perspective of South Africa as the host of global sports events.

He and his company implemented accreditation and media management strategies for Rugby World Cup 1995, the 1996 African Cup of Nations and this year's Cricket World Cup, the three jewels in the nation's sporting crown. Rushmans also provided media services for the World Summit For Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg last year.

"Before the Rugby World Cup in 1995, South Africa was something of an unknown quantity," he says. "There were those, particularly in the press, who were unsure

"SOUTH AFRICA HAS SOME OF THE FINEST SECURITY SPECIALISTS IN THE WORLD"

NIGEL RUSHMAN

that the country could deliver. But they were all proved wrong.

"The application of all parties to the event, from the telecommunications supplier to the volunteers, was unquestionably world class. A great deal has been learned from subsequent events. South Africa now has a reservoir of experience of global events at least equal to anywhere else in the world."

Rushman was impressed by the enthusiasm shown by South Africans to host the events.

"There was a tremendous desire to be involved and to learn," he says. "In each instance the services and facilities were considered by all of our user groups to be world class. Today, the level of service provision in South Africa makes it very similar to working in Europe.

"South Africa has tremendous experience in dealing with security issues. They have some of the finest, best-trained security specialists in the world. The country's private security sector is well run and regulated and is far in advance of many other countries in that respect." ●