

An Old Camdenian in Africa

May 2010

A few things have happened to me over the last few weeks that I will tell you about.

But first the FIFA World Cup.

Our countdown has gone from years to months and now to days.

Local ticket sales were slow as FIFA saw the Internet as the best way to handle it. The fact that only some 8% or so of local soccer fans have access to the internet did not seem to play a role in this decision.

In April they started to sell across the counter and long queues formed as tickets in group 4 (R140 each) flew off the shelves.

I have still been unable to get a ticket for the England/Slovenia or Germany/Serbia games in PE .I did have a fleeting opportunity to see Chile v Switz. but as I went to pay on the internet the banking system failed and went off line thus nullifying the ticket order.

The higher priced tickets have not all gone and every now and then they convert some to category 4 status at R140 each. I may still get one.

Are we ready?

In one word –yes.

I could write a lot more about it but fans will find excellent stadium facilities, great hotels and a wonderful country in South Africa.

They will not be worried by the fact that the Government assures us that there will enough electricity and drinking water at least to cover the World Cup. And afterwards?

Fans will not be bothered if the Gautrain and buses are not operating or if Taxis go on strike and create a bit of mayhem. They will find their way ok in the same manner they have done for the past few years.

If they get injured or sick they will go to good private hospitals and marvel at the superb and speedy health service.

Even if they commit a crime here they will be attended to by way of special courts that have been set up to deal with overseas tourists in a prompt and gentle way.

They will see policemen and feel safe because most of the countries resources will be channeled to safeguard the visitors.

If you are still unsure but can afford it then get on over here.

So onto some of our news.

I am back at work!

Now this is significant in two ways.

One- we need the money in our poor retirement years (remember large sums lost by "expert" financial advisors).

Secondly it is good to get the grey matter active again.

Just thought of a good third reason. The opportunity to nibble lots of chocolate.

It is only for 6 months until the Kraft buy out of Cadbury is clarified regarding any realignment of staff around the world. A freeze on new employment at a time of lost staff members saw them call me up to see if I could help. I thought about it for half a second and said yes.



The pic above is from our office by the North End Lake and a view across to the brand new Nelson Mandela Stadium.

During the FIFA cup our roads will be closed on game days to permit smooth flow of people to the ground and I imagine to stop undesirables gaining access. We should be able to get passed the check points by way of car permits. Not too sure about deliveries of raw materials.

Does this mean that every time we have a full house at the stadium that we will close the road to our factory?

I am lucky to be available at this precise moment but it is a reality that SA has lost so many skills either through retirement or emigration that lots of old timers are being asked to come back to help with road building, healthcare etc.

It has taken the Government many years to accept this state of affairs but with crumbling facilities all over the country they had no choice. It is, of course, too little and too late.

On top of all the other issues there is now the collapse of sewerage works that have stood largely unattended since democracy. Raw sewerage is pumped directly into rivers and dams either because the plants are non operative or cannot cope with the flow. Drinking water is affected and so too the use of lakes, rivers and dams for leisure activities.

This is not a picture that one sees readily unless you are in the rural or informal sectors but as it flows into mainstream water supplies then whole towns and cities may be affected. As soccer tourists you will not be affected.

In our part of SA we are still in drought conditions and some small villages and towns e.g Bathurst, have no water and are being kept alive with road tankers. We have a little water but in a few months PE will go dry unless we get good rains in the catchment areas.

Bathurst is close to Grahamstown and was the original administrative centre for the British Settlers of 1820. The churchyard there will offer good clues for anyone trying to trace those who braved the border territory and died here in the process of setting up home. The Pig and Whistle is the oldest serving pub in SA and I had a drink and a pie there earlier this year.

Grahamstown is home to the Festival in June/July and, as I have said before, it is a must attend event for anyone interested in the performing arts. I have seen the programme and it is packed full of an enormous array of activities from concert orchestras, ballet, opera, comedy, theatre and

lots and lots of fringe performances. Get there if you can but it could be very chilly so wear layers of clothes that you can organize depending on how the weather turns out.



What else? Well yes there is another event of note.

We have seen our financial advisors lose lots of our retirement money over the last 9 years and so took a chunk of it out and took a minority co-ownership of a small 1 bedroomed flat in the garden city of Letchworth, Herts. A pic of the small block is shown. Any one interested in renting?

What strikes me about our FIFA World Cup is that when I tune in to other world news a lot of countries are talking about their next event. This might be the

Olympics, or Commonwealth Games, or 20/20 World Cup and lots of other things that go on and become front of mind for the people of those countries.

The event seems to take on a disproportionate role in the country concerned. FIFA make profit from the Soccer WC and the motivation from all the others must be the same. Is it possible that the face of sport has changed and that it is being led by some very clever and now rich marketeers who convince nations to spend billions but then speedily run away after the event and do it all over again somewhere else.

In their wake are empty stadiums and little to show in the GDP of the country who invested so much. Is it vanity that makes Governments so easy victims?

My work (started about 10 days ago) has already taken me back up to Jhb and the extended airport with roadworks, Gautrain stations, and building after building going up to house office workers and retailers. It remains the dynamic heart of SA that provides a sense of confidence and optimism about the road ahead. People are in good and well paid jobs and enjoy all the advantages that money can offer behind their high walled and security gated houses.

This contrasts with the sombre and negative view from our part of SA, the Eastern Cape, where 60% unemployment is not uncommon and a new building makes front page news.

It is clear that in the turmoil of this incompetent and corrupt government that many are making a good living and enjoying the spoils that flow. They are, in fact, benefiting from this state of affairs! Wow is that right?

Now I also think back to my time of arrival in 1973 when apartheid was in full cry and I also benefited from the situation by way of a career path, money and all the trappings afforded us at that time. There are two different regimes at play, both wrong, but out of which we have made a living. In the 70's, 80's and 90's I believed that common sense would prevail and that the country would continue to have a prosperous future.

But today I do not!

Is the difference merely because I no longer enjoy the spoils on offer? Is it because I now have the time to look around me at what is happening and recoil in horror. But why did I not do that when the armed forces here were so maltreating and dehumanizing black people during apartheid?

My point. Well it is quite clear to me why there two views about SA. One is optimistic, The Haves and the other pessimistic The Have Nots. Of course the really good people have it all yet still soldier on and fight the evils of apartheid or the present self gratifying ANC Government.

I could take up pages about our politics. It is in a mess with Jacob Zuma an ineffective and rudderless leader. His strings are pulled from all sides thus opening up faction after faction that dilutes the focus of service delivery.

In contrast I have seen the UK elections. Perhaps we should acknowledge that most politicians do not deserve our respect and any comment has this as a foundation point.

But to my mind the style, respect and talk of fairness during and after the elections came as a wonderful breath of fresh air. I hope our ANC were watching and taking note.

I have to say that I always admired Hague and see him as a fine Foreign Minister. We attended a book launch of his at the Ilkley Literary Festival and he spoke to a packed town hall (ok so not as big as the Albert Hall) and he spoke with his usual charm and charisma about his book and the personal failings that he noted during his effort to lead the Tory party. It was a display of rare honesty given by someone who exuded competence and presence. I am sure there will be many out there who disagree in a big way.

This may be the last missive before the games begin. I hope they go off well and that the world is given some great soccer. I also hope that the best and most exciting team wins. Could that be England? Probably not, but over the next month we will all find out. In the mean time I raise a glass to a new and vibrant England 20/20 side that has at last taken this form of the game seriously.

Cheers to you all from sunny South Africa.
Alan Shearn