

SA should be really proud: Merkel

Wednesday, 07 July 2010

The unforgettable scenes of Angela Merkel passionately supporting the German national team at the 2006 FIFA World Cup on home turf four years ago will live long in the memory. The German chancellor was once again in the crowd on Saturday, getting behind Joachim Low's charges as they powered past Argentina 4-0 in Cape Town to book their place in the semi-finals of South Africa 2010.

Ahead of the match, Merkel met with South African president Jacob Zuma at his residence in Cape Town, before visiting a German-sponsored urban-violence prevention project in the Khayelitsha township. Just before the crucial clash between Argentina and Germany kicked off, Merkel took a few minutes to answer some questions from FIFA.com.

FIFA.com: Chancellor Merkel, you clearly enjoyed being a part of the FIFA World Cup fever that swept Germany four years ago. Now the tournament is being held in South Africa, what are your impressions?

Angela Merkel: I could already see from afar that the tournament had been wonderfully organised and that the atmosphere was incredible. Now I'm here I have to say that South Africa should be really proud of themselves. I told President Jacob Zuma that they're doing a great job and that they've gained the respect of the whole world. It's been a huge victory for the people of South Africa. When we look back on the tournament in the future, we'll remember Africa in a different light.

How will the 2010 FIFA World Cup affect South Africa in the long term?

I think that it's given the whole of Africa more confidence. In South Africa, the infrastructure has been improved considerably. There will be more possibilities for young people. It will give them courage and create jobs for the unemployed - I think it's been a resounding success.

Joachim Low's team have shown themselves to be a young, attacking and creative outfit. Have you been impressed?

Yes, of course (smiles). We all knew that we had a very young squad, and after Michael Ballack's withdrawal, the team had to show even more maturity. They've done incredibly well. Long may it continue.

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Niall Wilkins
First Secretary Political
South African High Commission
Trafalgar Square
London WC2N 5DP

Tel: 0207 451 7240
Fax: 0207 451 7283