

Fifa assures SA fans for 2010 despite SABC court wrangle

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FIFA said yesterday South African audiences would still be able to view World Cup matches next year even if outside broadcast vans were not delivered to the SABC on time — it would just mean the absence of more localised content.

This contradicts the SABC's argument in court papers in which it is trying to prevent a contract regarding the provision of outside broadcast units from being overturned. The issue is at the heart of a court battle over a R400m tender awarded to SonySA to supply outside broadcast vans to the SABC.

Black-owned company Digital Horizon is opposing the tender, saying it was originally awarded to it, but the SABC has warned in court papers that overturning the tender could see it without the required outside broadcast vans during the tournament. It said this would mean most South Africans would not be able to watch the matches.

Fifa spokeswoman Delia Fischer said yesterday Fifa and broadcasting arm Host Broadcasting Services (HBS), with a 2000-strong production team, would be producing the footage from the matches. The SABC's function was to broadcast it. "The SABC has no impact on us, they take what we deliver," she said.

Fischer declined to discuss any aspects of the case, but said the SABC would receive the same feed as 300 broadcasters worldwide, but as the public official broadcaster it had the right to add local content to its broadcast — such as a view of the South African bench or of fans.

The SABC in a statement issued yesterday said it had supplied three high-definition outside broadcast vehicles to HBS during the Confederations Cup and that 11 out of 16 matches were done on SABC facilities. The SABC also said it stood by its decision to award the tender to SonySA, which was the cheaper option. It said the difference between SonySA's bid and Digital Horizon's was R66m.

The case involving the SABC and Digital Horizon was postponed this week to allow both parties to agree on a suitable date for the trial.

Digital Horizon argues that it was originally awarded the tender by the SABC's procurement committee but it was overturned by an ad hoc committee of the previous board. It plans to sue for the total cost of the contract and other losses incurred.

MNet's SuperS port has been awarded the same rights as the SABC by Fifa.