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FIFA WINS FIRST 2010 AMBUSH MARKETING RULING

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FIFA has secured its first ruling against ambush marketers, earning a court judgment against Pretoria's Eastwoods Tavern. The popular sports bar is located close to the Loftus stadium, one of the venues that will host games during next year's Soccer World Cup tournament.



Eastwoods Tavern had carried the legend "World Cup 2010" below the main signage on its roof. At the same time it erected banners featuring the flags of a number of prominent soccer-playing countries accompanied by the numerals 2010 along with the words "Twenty Ten South Africa".

FIFA obtained a judgment with costs against Eastwoods. We believe the judgement is timely, coming two months before the Confederations Cup Tournament, the dress rehearsal for the 2010 World Cup, and just over a year before the main tournament itself. It sends out a clear signal to any other organisation considering ambush marketing that they will suffer unwelcome consequences. FIFA has shown that it has an effective game plan for taking on ambush marketers and that it has the will, the team and the wherewithal to prevent ambush marketing.

The action against Eastwoods Tavern is the culmination of a five-year strategy, which entailed an extensive trade mark registration programme covering trade marks such as South Africa 2010, World Cup 2010 and the like as far back as 2004.

Section 15A of the South African Merchandise Marks Act empowers the Minister of Trade and Industry to designate major sporting events, such as the 2010 World Cup, as "protected events". By this means ambush marketers can be prevented from competing unlawfully with FIFA by obtaining special promotional benefit from, or associating themselves with, the 2010 World Cup, without being sponsors. This objective was achieved in May 2006 when the Minister of Trade and Industry published a notice declaring the World Cup to be a protected event.

By virtue of the large fees that sponsors of the tournament pay, it is essential that FIFA can guarantee and deliver exclusivity of advertising exposure to sponsors in their various fields of business. Damaging the relationship between FIFA and its sponsors by detracting from the exclusive rights given to sponsors could seriously damage FIFA and indeed place the staging of a World Cup in jeopardy.

An application was launched in FIFA's name in the Pretoria High Court claiming interdicts against Eastwoods Tavern on the grounds of infringing the registered trade marks World Cup 2010, South Africa 2010 and Twenty Ten South Africa, passing off under the common law, and unlawful competition through violating Section 15A of the Merchandise Marks Act and Section 9(d) of the Trade Practices Act. FIFA also claimed the costs of the court proceedings against Eastwood Tavern. An order granting all the relief sought was made in the Pretoria High Court.

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