**PRESS RELEASE**

Design work complete for artificial soccer pitch in Bloemfontein

***02 November, 2015:*** *SMEC has completed design work for Phase 2 of the upgrade of the Johnson Bendile Sports Stadium in Bloemfontein. The project involves the installation of a FIFA One Star artificial soccer pitch.*

SMEC’s Bloemfontein office has been working closely with the Mangaung Metro Municipality to upgrade all of its sports facilities since 2012. “We have a very good working relationship with the client,” explains **Smiley Marais**, Function Manager: Urban Development, at SMEC South Africa.

This has included upgrading tennis courts at five municipal tennis clubs, renewal of the Free State Athletic Track in accordance with IAAF standards, upgrading of the Mangaung Stadium Swimming Pool to comply with FINA standards, upgrading the open-air boxing arena in the local township, upgrading of the Heidedal swimming pool and complex, and Phase One of both the Billy Murison and Johnson Bendile sports stadium.

Named after South African soccer and cricket player Johnson Bendile, the sports stadium is located in the old township area of Botshabelo in Bloemfontein, adjacent to a newly upgraded park and recreational area.

“Some years ago, a start was made to develop the grounds,” adds Marais. No subsequent development took place, however, with the Mangaung Metro Municipality eventually deciding upon a phased approach.

Construction of Phase One commenced in December 2014, comprising the repair of the vandalised Clearvu security fence, and construction of ticket offices and a caretaker’s residence, two all-weather tennis courts and installation of all ancillary services, including a carpark with 80 parking bays.

The second phase comprises the installation of a FIFA One Star artificial soccer pitch, in addition to all ancillaries. “Design work has already been completed, and we are awaiting the appointment of the client’s contractor,” Marais reveals. The start of the construction is expected to be finalised within three months.

Marais cites the main challenges associated with the project as supplying the correct product materials, the correct installation and accurate levels as per the FIFA standard, which includes the accreditation of the installer itself.

“The FIFA standards for sports turf systems are designed to ensure that a consistent world-class standard of surface is available internationally. These surfaces must have a minimal amount of maintenance, and yet be available for the development of players’ skills all year round,” Marais elaborates.

The FIFA One Star recommended for this particular project is mainly for recreational, community and municipal use. However, it still has to go through a series of stringent tests before the necessary FIFA certificate can be issued.

Commenting on the applicability of an artificial turf surface, Marais points to its weather resistance and durability. Only artificial playing surfaces that have been tested in the laboratory as well as on the field, in accordance with FIFA’s stringent quality programmed, can be labelled as ‘football turf’.

The soccer pitch itself will be 109 m by 72 m. SMEC’s scope of work consists of civil works, layer works and level verifications. This is broken down further into installation of sub-soil drainage, and installation of the pitch material, sand and rubber layers, construction of the goal boxes, installation of fencing and the provision of a hydrostatic tractor for operations and maintenance.

***Ends***

**Notes to the editor**To download hi-res images for this release, please visit <http://media.ngage.co.za> and click the SMEC link to view the company’s press office.

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