



Football's beautiful noise

What is plastic, a metre long, brightly coloured and sounds like an elephant? It's the vuvuzela, the noise-making trumpet of South African football fans, and it's come to symbolise the sport in the country.

It's an instrument, but not a musical one. To describe the atmosphere in a stadium packed with thousands of fans blowing their vuvuzelas, is difficult. Up close it sounds like an elephant, but when fans blow in their numbers, the sound is more like a massive swarm of very angry bees. And when there's action near the goal mouth, those bees go really crazy!

To get that sound out requires serious lip and lung strength, and a fair amount of technique. Be sure to get in some good practice before attending any South African football match or you may produce a sad little sound that will cause stares and much shuffling away from you in the seats!

It is said that the earliest form of vuvuzela was the kudu horn, blown to summon African villagers to meetings. Later ones were made of tin. The trumpet became so popular at football matches in the late nineties, that an empowerment company, Masincedane Sport, was set up in 2001 to mass-produce it. Made of plastic, they come in a variety of colours – black or white for fans of Orlando Pirates, yellow for Kaizer Chiefs, and so on – with little drawings on the side warning against blowing in the ear.

There's uncertainty about the origin of the word "vuvuzela". Some say it comes from the isiZulu for "making noise". Others say it's from township slang related to the word "shower", because it "showers people with music" or it looks a little like a shower head.

The announcement on 15 May 2004 that South Africa would host the 2010 Fifa Football World Cup gave the vuvuzela a major boost, with 20 000 sold on the day. There is talk of making it the official instrument of the 2010 tournament.

It's a noisy thing, so it's no surprise that some don't like it. The South African Football Association also seems to have its reservations. It has asked manufacturers to reduce the weight of the trumpet, so that fans do not use it as a weapon.

Love it or hate it, visitors to South Africa's 2010 Football World Cup are sure to go home with a few vuvuzelas tucked in their luggage, and a little ringing in their ears ...

(Source: SouthAfrica.info) UM