After years of commitment to African football, sports brand Puma believes that adding last year's FIFA World Cup host nation, South Africa, to its portfolio of partners across the continent is the crowning glory.



Part of the family

A year after hosting the FIFA World Cup for the first time in Africa, South Africa's Football Association (SAFA) has agreed a deal with the global sports brand that has tried to build the closest links with Africa, Puma. South Africa was the missing country for the brand at the 2010 tournament. Four of the six African participants in the finals wore Puma kit, but the home team was under contract to rival brand adidas at the time.

Puma took over as official technical supplier to the association in June, effective immediately and lasting until after the FIFA World Cup in Russia in 2018. The brand will provide the official playing kit for all associated South African teams, including the national 'A', youth and women's teams.

The new shirt was launched at an event in Johannesburg by national team captain, Stephen Pienaar, along with other regular members of the team Siphiwe Tshabalala, Renielwe Letsholonyane, Kagisho Dikgacoi, Darren Keet and Katlego Mphela. The kit incorporates performance enhancing fabric with moisture wicking properties, mesh inserts on the side for improved ventilation and embossed fabric to enhance the visual appearance.

In line with Puma's long-standing commitment to corporate social responsibility and to Africa, all proceeds from replica home shirts sales will be donated to charity.

National team captain Stephen Pienaar with team-mates Siphiwe Tshabalala, Renielwe Letsholonyane, Kagisho Dikgacoi and Katlego Mphela at the official launch of South Africa's new official kit.

Puma

African heritage

Puma's association with African football started 16 years ago with the Cameroon national team, and that country's star striker, Samuel Eto'o, has been one of the German company's most high-profile sponsored athletes for many years. In the build-up to the World Cup, Puma events incorporated the map of Africa as a backdrop, and when asked why, chief executive, Jochen Zeitz, said: "We are celebrating Africa, principally because of the World Cup. This is the biggest event ever there. At the same time, we are celebrating Puma's history with Africa."

Even after the World Cup, the sports brand has said it is delighted now to be able to include South Africa in that history. At the Johannesburg event, SAFA president, Kirsten Nemetandani, said: "Puma's presence in African football, across the entire continent, really speaks for itself. From the beginning of our search for a new partner, it was clear that Puma was the most desirable company for us to align ourselves with."

Mr Nemetandani said Puma's commitment to technical innovation was one of the reasons for this, but he made it clear that the "heritage and support Puma has demonstrated for this continent over a number of years" was a more important one. He went on to say that Puma was "the perfect partner" as his association strives to grow the profile of South African football.

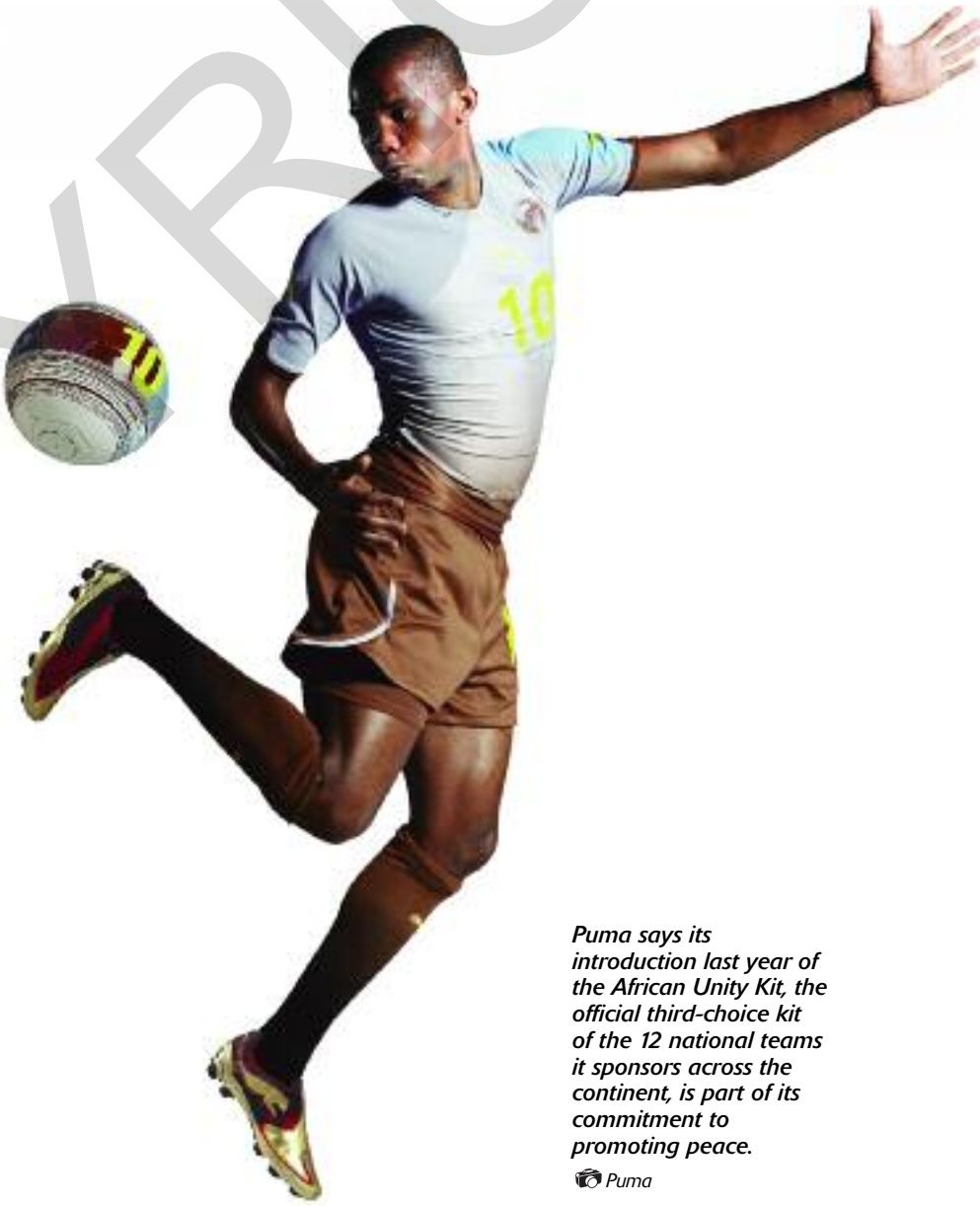
Epic journey

Puma's general manager for South Africa, Ronald Rink, confirmed that his company has been interested in partnering with South Africa for some time now. He said that the deal agreed with SAFA was "one of the top football deals that the continent has to offer". He added: "South African football has been on an epic journey in the last two decades. Following the establishment of SAFA in 1991, winning the African Cup of Nations only five years later was a really remarkable achievement, as was becoming the first ever southern Africa team to play in a World Cup in 1998. Bidding for and winning the right to host the World Cup last year was both a great triumph for this country and for Africa as a whole, and it was indicative of how the resurgence of South Africa as a country and a football nation is perceived around the world. There is a pride and an enthusiasm for the national football team in South Africa, and that continues to unite this country. Puma is proud and enthusiastic to be associated with that."

More to come

For his part, Christian Vogt, senior head of global sports marketing at Puma, said his company was delighted to embark on this new relationship with South Africa's national football teams (men's, women's and youth teams will all wear the new kit, starting in August). "This is a great day for Puma," he said. Mr Vogt explained that the company's portfolio of partners in African football now extends to 12 national associations, but he said South Africa was "the crown". It joins Egypt, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Algeria, Senegal, Morocco, Togo, Burkina Faso, Malawi and Namibia as national teams equipped by Puma. He said the FIFA 2010 World Cup in South Africa had been an exciting event and a testament to SAFA and to the whole of the country and added that he was sure there was a lot more to come from the relationship.

His company's commitment, not just to sport, but to sustainability, peace and art, has also focused intently on Africa, Christian Vogt said. He continued: "These activities have given us many connections to the continent. Just to give a few examples, we have worked with Peace One Day (a movement for having ceasefires in all conflicts at least on one fixed day, September 21, every year) to organise more than 500 football matches in 52 countries, not only in



Puma says its introduction last year of the African Unity Kit, the official third-choice kit of the 12 national teams it sponsors across the continent, is part of its commitment to promoting peace.

Puma

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Africa, but with a great focus on our African partnerships. We have also established a relationship with the trade organisation Cotton Made in Africa. With this initiative, Puma is already making more than a million products a year using cotton made here.

Call to unity

"Last year, we introduced the African Unity Kit, which I think is unique. It's the official FIFA-sanctioned third kit of all Puma-sponsored African national football teams, with proceeds from global sales supporting biodiversity causes in Africa. I haven't seen any other continent decide on an official third kit like this. I am very glad that South Africa will now be part of it."

This arrangement means that if both of the new official outfits for the South African national team (green shirts with yellow shorts or yellow shirts with green shorts) produced a colour clash against a particular opponent, the team would play in the sky blue and earth tones of the African Unity Kit.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of operations in South Africa for Puma. The company says it sees its new partnership with the national football team as a celebration of ten years of hard work and commitment.



Puma's association with African football started 16 years ago with the Cameroon national team. Last year, to mark the extension of their partnership, 10,000 durable footballs were delivered to projects in Africa.

Puma

