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GQEBERHA SCORES BIG:

Champions Cup Rugby returns for the second year

THE Mandela Bay Development Agency (MBDA) has secured another major sporting coup for the Eastern Cape, with the DHL Stormers set to return to Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium for a high-stakes Investec Champions Cup clash on 13 December.

The Cape Town-based franchise will face French powerhouse, Stade Rochelais, in a Round Two fixture, marking the second consecutive season that Gqeberha has hosted European rugby's premier competition.

With DHL Stadium in Cape Town unavailable due to a scheduling conflict with the World Supercross Championship, the Nelson Mandela Bay venue has once again stepped up as the Stormers' alternative home ground.

The announcement comes as welcome news for the city's economy, with last year's Champions Cup fixture between the Stormers and RC Toulon generating significant financial returns. The December 2024 event attracted 31,000 spectators and injected R8.2 million into the broader city economy, while creating over 1,000 temporary employment opportunities.

MBDA CEO, Anele Qaba, said the return of top-tier rugby validates the city's credentials as a world-class sporting destination.

"Last year, the Stormers spoke of the incredible support they received from the people of Gqeberha and the high standards delivered by our stadium team," Qaba explained. "That feedback stayed with us. It affirmed

that Nelson Mandela Bay is not just viable as an alternative venue, but it is a preferred one."

The venue's reputation has been further enhanced by recent high-profile events, including hosting the Springboks in July. Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium Executive, Raaziq Poole, highlighted the positive feedback from international visitors.

"We received glowing reviews from the RC Toulon staff and management contingent. They complimented the pristine pitch conditions of the stadium, cleanliness, operational staff professionalism, and our city's friendly atmosphere," Poole said.

The stadium generated direct revenue of just under R5 million through kiosk and bar sales, VIP suites, and ticketing income during the 2024

event. Beyond the immediate financial benefits, Qaba emphasised the event's wider economic ripple effects throughout the region.

"Events like these bring visitors into the city, fill our hotels and restaurants, and create temporary work opportunities," he said. "There are tangible benefits for our residents and local businesses."

The temporary employment created by last year's event spanned multiple sectors, including security, cleaning, medical services, and concessions. The MBDA also utilised the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) to source hospitality staff for the event.

As an agency of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, the MBDA continues to focus on activating the

North End and Stadium precinct as an economic catalyst for the region.

"The MBDA continues to operate according to its mandate, delivering results for the people of Nelson Mandela Bay through strategic partnerships, efficient operations and a commitment to inclusive growth," Qaba concluded.

Tickets for the December 13 fixture between the DHL Stormers and Stade Rochelais will go on sale in October.

The match represents another milestone in Gqeberha's growing reputation as a premier destination for major sporting events, building on the success of previous international fixtures and cementing the Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium's status as a national sporting asset.