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It can't be over: A letter to all South Africans

As a football fan, the privilege of watching the world's best players grace our pitches in the biggest tournament in the world is over. I don't have words to describe what this month has meant to me as a football nut. Even the biggest cynic needs to give unreserved credit to FIFA and the LOC for staging a world class event. The stadiums, infrastructure, television production and operations have set the standard for future host countries.

But it's not FIFA or the LOC that make me ache with pride. The true stars of the World Cup have been the South African people. Everywhere I have been in the last month (and I've been just about everywhere!) our guests have been greeted with the biggest smiles in the world. It is the policemen, the stadium volunteers, the waiters and the pump attendants that have been our biggest asset. Talk to any foreign visitor and the first thing they'll mention is the indefatigable spirit of the ordinary South African. Our unbridled joy in sharing the miracle of the Rainbow Nation with the rest of the world will be the World Cup's most enduring image. Peter Davies, (a far more accomplished writer than I) wrote before the World Cup that visitors to South Africa had more chance of getting killed by kindness than by crime. He was proved absolutely right.

It is in many ways fitting that Spain won on the field last night. Like us, Spain has a tumultuous past characterised by fascism and unjust rule. Like us Spain remains to some extent a divided country with large social and economic issues.

As South Africans we understand this dynamic. We are a diverse and complicated society. The outpourings of joy over the last month have been a celebration of the fact that despite this diversity, we are truly one nation. From time to time we allow ourselves to relive the miracle of 1994 and this is why we felt the way we did. It was our World Cup and every single one of us felt a responsibility to make it the best World Cup yet.

For Spain, the on-field challenge is how to avoid the fate of the previous World Cup finalists Italy and France who slipped into obscurity during the tournament. Our challenge as a country is to capture and bottle the winning feeling, and then to redirect and sustain it. The patriotism which we have exhibited over the last month needs now to be deployed to fight the poverty, sickness, joblessness and hopelessness that still exist now that the World Cup is a memory. At the most basic level, we need to maintain the unbridled joy of the last month by continuing to fly our amazing flag (the only 6-colour flag in the world!). Beyond that however, we need to become true patriots. Patriotism is not just about waving a flag, it's about devoting your life (or a portion thereof) to the betterment of our nation. We need to realize that patriotism, (like football) is a question of collective will. We can only win as a nation if we remain one.

Today, I can assure you that the entire nation is rejoicing in the indescribable joy of being united. Despite their turbulent past, their economic woes and the diversity of their population, today the Spanish are basking in what it means to win as one. Maybe in a small way this is the legacy of our hosting the World Cup. Today the Spanish know how it feels to be South African.

John Dixon is the Group CEO of Drafftcb South Africa, the advertising and communication agency that kick started Keep Flying, an initiative intended to encourage South Africans to unite behind the

country's flag now that the final whistle has blown at the 2010 World Cup and avoid the depression that all host nations have suffered in the past. For more about the initiative, visit www.keepflying.co.za.