

Be part of the game, Engel tells football fans

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By Anil John

Doha: Tilman Engel, who is moving on for family reasons after two years as head of audience marketing with the Qatar Stars League, has urged people in Qatar to support football by going to stadiums to watch matches.

"A real sports fan is one who attends matches in stadiums and not one who watches them at home," Engel told the Gulf Times in an exclusive interview yesterday.

"Watching a game at home on television is like watching a Hollywood movie. Watching a match at the stadium makes you part of that movie where you cheer and suffer with the players. There's a huge difference between the two."

Engel was hired by the Qatar Football Association to help devise strategies to get fans to the stadiums to watch the Qatar Stars League (QSL) launched with great fanfare last year. And the German is leaving with happy memories.

"It has been a fantastic experience, working with people from different cultures here. Football in Qatar has made a lot of professional people have been hired to deal with various aspects of the game, but what has to be changed takes time. The right steps have been taken by Qatar.

"But it's a steady process. Qatar is going through a consolidation phase at the moment, but in the long run more is needed."

Engel cited Germany's example, saying it took many years to double the average number of spectators attending there.

"About 10 years ago, the average attendance at a football game was just around 20,000. Now it has jumped to almost 40,000. Engel said improved facilities for the spectators and Germany's successful World Cup bid -- they hosted the tournament -- were key factors in bringing in the crowds.

"Lots of stadiums were refurbished to enhance spectator experience as part of the successful World Cup bid and getting the crowds involved.

"When fans flock to a stadium to cheer their team, it makes a huge difference. Teams have won matches purely on the power of the crowd."

Engel said that by bidding for the 2022 World Cup, Qatar has made a huge commitment to the people of the country. "It's a positive, forward trend. It's admirable what the authorities in Qatar are doing. The World Cup bid will certainly help the game become much bigger in Qatar."

Engel, who was general manager of the NFL Europe League team Frankfurt Galaxy, said he wouldn't mind coming back to Qatar in the future if asked to.

"I am not ruling that out. I am looking at different opportunities, not necessarily in sport. I have a degree in political science from the University of America and have worked with the NFL both in the US and in Europe.

Engel, who has also worked with Iowa senator Tom Harkin, was instrumental in establishing a fans outreach program for the QSL under which players visited schools and interacted with kids.

"The plan was a tremendous success. The kids who were lining up for autographs will be the ones buying tickets in a few years' time. It all augurs well for the future."



[Engel: wants fans at stadium](#)