

Call to invest more in soccer

Red Cap's Creesen Naicker wants clubs to engage companies, writes Thahir Asmal

THE beautiful game belongs to everyone and there will always be an obligation to give back to the people.

That is the view of Creesen Naicker, board member of the Red Cap Foundation, who spoke on the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects at the Soccerex African Forum in Durban this week.

Naicker, part of the Fifa alumni (international masters in sport management, law and humanities), joined Tim Vine, public affairs manager for the Barclays Premier League, in a discussion of the path forward for business and CSR projects.

With Soccerex attracting some of the leading decision-makers in African football for networking and business opportunities, it was the ideal platform for Naicker to get his message across.

"It was a fruitful discussion at Soccerex. Our main aim was to highlight just how pivotal it is to give back in order to grow sport," he said.

Naicker, who completed his Master's degree in Switzerland, England and Italy, has extensive knowledge of the European game and how successful the relationship between football and CSR can be.

The 29-year-old has done research and projects with international sports bodies such as Fifa, Uefa and the International Olympic Committee. He has worked with clients such as Mr Price, Octagon Sports Marketing, the Sports Science Institute of SA and Danone SA on similar projects.

"CSR projects need to be seen as an investment rather than a cost. That is the view in Europe and the US."

He believes that if local clubs include these projects in



Creesen Naicker spoke on the importance of corporate social responsibility at Soccerex in Durban this week.

their development strategies, they will be able to reap healthy rewards.

"The likes of Spain and Germany use this model to communicate with local communities," he said. "That is why they are able to produce top players."

Naicker, who grew up in Asherville, Durban, believes a lack of CSR projects is harming the game in SA.

"When clubs engage their community, it allows them to harness home-grown talent."

Naicker, who started the Young Heroes programme in 2005 – now the Department of Basic Education's programme for innovation in physical edu-

cation and school sport – is adamant that development needs to begin at an early age.

"Children need to come through the system from a young age," he said.

"Coaches should not have to deal with the bad habits of a pro footballer at the age of 21. That stuff must be rectified at the age of 12 or 13."

Despite progress since the 2010 Fifa World Cup, Naicker said SA was still battling to meet core needs. "We are still focused on building pitches and academies, and developing referees; so it is hard for us to deliver CSR projects. But it needs to start happening sooner rather than later."