Anolis and Vari-Lite for Supersport HD Studio

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Courtesy Louise Stickland

Leading South African lighting sales and distribution company DWR has supplied over 400 LED fixtures for a brand new landmark, eco-friendly installation at the new HD hub of satellite channel, Supersport.

Located in M-NETs Studio 6, Randburg, Johannesburg, this is the first of its kind in South Africa, setting new imaginative and technological standards with 8 Philips Vari-Lite VLX Wash luminaires,

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plus over 400 Anolis LED units which are integrated into various set elements in a stunning design by Michael Gill.

With sustainability a key issue, this whole elegant, highly versatile lighting rig can be run off 2 x 15 amp plugs!

Gill, who collaborated closely with lighting designer Joshua Cutts of AV Unlimited to produce the stunning original aesthetics, wanted “Something contemporary and totally different that utilised the best technology in the world”.

The new studio was launched in time to broadcast comprehensive coverage of the 2010 Soccer World Cup, and was one of several Soccer World Cup related projects for which DWR delivered equipment prior to kick off.

Lighting is an important aspect in all Gill’s work. He likes to create ‘live’ environments where the dynamics can be switched quickly and dramatically with the application of light. In this case, the geometry and layout of the lighting installation also brings a distinctly different ‘showbizz’ feel to a sports channel, again breaking new ground.

In addition to being able to change the entire look and feel of the space instantly, they also have the scope to create way cool special effects like flag colours – used during the World Cup to highlight the different countries playing in each match.

They also built up various idents and unique looks representing the Supersport branding by illuminating different bits of the set, which could also be matched to graphics appearing on the various plasma screens dotted around. Slick colour wipes can be applied across the whole room to segue between the different looks.

Broadcasting 18 hours and 4 or 5 shows a day from the studio – with a variety of related magazine and youth programmes in addition to the pure sporting coverage – the installation allowed the creation of completely fresh and different looking environments all the time. There is never a dull moment with the lighting, and they still have plenty of headroom to constantly think of new looks.

Covering all 64 World Cup games is certainly putting the system to the test in a high profile fast moving situation enabling amazing atmospheric effects in the studio which could simply not have been otherwise achieved. The lighting can be used either to make the space function as one huge

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area or to split the studio up into 8 different segments.

The Anolis LEDs – the majority of the 400 pieces are ArcLinks – are installed underneath selected floor panels and behind the back wall set pieces – which are finished with either glass or opal Perspex fronts. Together, these constitute 105 different sections or ‘light boxes’ all over the set … and all individually controllable.

The Anolis’ homogenised lightsources create a beautifully smooth wash when combined with the diffused panel fronts.

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The Anolis fixtures are all run from ArcPower transformers – 5 ArcPower 16 x 12s, which is a custom driver developed specially for this project by Anolis in the Czech Republic, and 4 x ArcPower 144s.

Robe CitySkape 48s are used for highlighting set pieces and toning the trusses and slick – visible but understated – metalwork that also shapes the set structure.

The 8 VLXs are rigged on to the top of vertical trussing sections running around the gently curving back wall of the set. For the World Cup broadcasts, they are being used specifically to

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mimic stadium lights for stings, bumpers and for moments that need a bit of additional tension and excitement building.

Gill had used Anolis fixtures before on a Lotto show at the start of the year and was impressed by their brightness, which led to them being spec'd again. It was the first time that Cutts had used either Philips Vari-Lite or Anolis products, but he instantly fell in love with the VLX after seeing it put through its paces at DWR's showroom in Johannesburg. "Duncan (Riley) insisted that I come in and see the units," he explains, so he shoe-horned a visit into his busy schedule, and was blown away with the results!

"To get a fixture THAT bright and with colour mixing THAT smooth is truly incredible," he declares. The VLX contains seven proprietary 120W RGBW LED chipsets that provide output three times the efficiency of comparable tungsten sources and also features a homogenised light engine so the source is free of pixelation and LED 'shadowing'.

It was a bold move to make by Supersports and a big investment, but with the lower running costs and the virtually maintenance free nature of the LEDs, the short term investment will most definitely pay off in the future. Other benefits of the installation include minimal heat output from a huge amount of lighting – so less AC needs to be used to keep the studio at a comfortable temperature.

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“The feedback has been phenomenal,” confirm both Gill and Cutts. “I would put LED lighting and these products into any show we’ll ever do from now on if the budget allows,” enthuses Gill.

Duncan Riley comments, “It’s really great to see a cutting edge design crafted with this technology, and we’re very proud to have been part of it. Already it’s the talk of the TV production community in the country, and I am sure will inspire others to look into the benefits of low power, high impact installations!”

DWR completed their lighting supply to Studio 6 by commissioning locally based Giant Light to

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build custom DMX – controlled LED strips which are fitted to the noses of the staircases.

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