

SuperSport looks sensational for FIFA World Cup



Every FIFA World Cup is a trigger for SuperSport, one of the most successful providers of televised sports coverage across the African continent, to motivate for a studio revamp. In time for the 2018 FIFA World Cup phenomena that kept many viewers glued to their couches, Michael Gill of MGD had the vision to completely change the look and feel of the iconic Studio 6. His concept was brought to fruition by Gearhouse SDS who built the set, while DWR Distribution supplied the foundation, a Prolyte grid, from which the set and lighting equipment is hung.



Due to several zones in both Studio 6 and the adjacent Arena studio which formed part of the broadcast area, DWR also supplied extra lighting fixtures, a cabling infrastructure, wireless dot2 remote system and dimming.



Having designed numerous sets for SuperSport in the past, designer Michael Gill presented a 3D mock-up model of the fresh studio. "We could all see that this was going to be special," said Jacques Barnard, Vision Control and Lighting Supervisor at SuperSport. "Moving away from curves and rounded edges, the new corporate looking set has strong, angular lines with at least ten different zones or presentation areas. The production team loves all the options made available to them. I suspect this design is going to lead the way. It's very new and something we haven't seen before."



To keep the show running during the installation period, Ryan Toerien, Producer/Director and Broadcast Operations Manager at SuperSport, created a make-shift studio in the corporate building across the road at MultiChoice City. "We ran a fiber line from the control room to the building and basically created a 'remote production' and it worked beautifully," said Barnard. "Ryan had the foresight to utilize the space during the

project, and our viewers have become so accustomed to the look that we are considering using it after the World Cup.”



The three-month project had a tight deadline. The reveal would coincide with the FIFA World Cup opening ceremony, the football tournament kicking off with the hosts Russia up against Saudi Arabia at the Luzhniki Stadium in the Russian capital.



“However, when we began the process we found that our existing rigging was not up to standard,” said Barnard. “We needed a grid that would be secure and certified. We almost started behind schedule because we realized that we needed to bring on board the services of DWR. Much of the set is suspended from the rig and we had to be a hundred percent sure that everything was according to engineering specifications.”



Lighting designer Johsua Cutts was commissioned to design the grid and determine the position of the studio's existing lighting fixtures. “From a trussing perspective, I had to cover as much of the areas as possible with limited resources,” said Cutts. “I had to make sure that the layout of the grid allowed for future growth and

changes to the studio. I worked closely with DWR's Kevin Stannett, Keith Pugin and Andi Rodgers. I am very pleased with the result as the grid is more stable than it has ever been."



Once his design and drawing were complete, the grid could commence. "DWR Distribution supplied the absolute foundation from which everything hangs, fixtures and set included," commented Duncan Riley of DWR. "We initially wanted to do the infrastructure when SuperSport invested in lighting gear last year, but the timing wasn't right. This system is a massive upgrade to what was in the studio previously. The trussing infrastructure has to support the weight of certain set elements, one of the main reasons it had to be checked by an engineer."



Kevin Stannett says some 214 meters of Prolyte trussing was used for the installation. This comprised of H30V, X30D, H40V, 10 Box corners and 5 custom wall plates. "We dropped all existing trussing; had it powder coated black and re-installed using completely new rigging hardware. With the new and old trussing in black, it magically disappears," Stannett described. "We added a new cable structure which included 4 DMX tie lines to the Studio 6 control room as well as DMX outlets on the grid and at floor level." Additional dimming in studio six includes 5 LSC MDR 10-way DMX splitters. A wireless system enables the studio's MA Lighting dot2 lighting console to be controlled from a mobile device."

"We lost quite a few days because of the delay on the set but we understand this industry," said Riley. "We are used to working under pressure and when you have a deadline, you meet that deadline. SuperSport is a company that delivers on time and being "live" they can't delay. DWR had to perform to SuperSport's expectations because if we didn't, there would be three other companies waiting in line. It's that simple. Thank you to our team, Kevin, Andi and Keith as well as to Jacob Mogale and the Install Crew."



Joshua Cutts, who has worked on various projects for SuperSport since 2010, carefully planned the new lighting layout. As SuperSport had upgraded their fixtures from tungsten to LED technology just over a year ago, it was a matter of placing the right lights in the right spots and comprised of QuartzColor Fresnels, Philips Strand SoftLight 300S TV Panels, Robe Robin DL4S Profiles, Robe Robin Spikies, Philips Strand Relayrack panels and control on MA dot2 consoles.



In addition, DWR supplied a further 5 QuartzColor X5 LED Fresnels, 6 Philips Strand 300S Softlights with barndoors and 20 Longman Excelsior 184 RGBW LED Bars. Additional dimming consisted of 2 Philips Strand Relay Racks (12 way), two DWR Fat Albert Distros and in the Arena studio, a LSC Gen VI (12 way).



“I had to marry what Michael Gill wanted for the set, what the directors wanted for the set and what the cameras needed for the set!” smiled Cutts. “I used a lot of colour on the previous set, but this time around I’m lighting with less colour and relying on the ample LED screens in the revamped studio to add another dimension of colour within the space. Michael and I decided to use a lot of LED white light to match the crisp new design.”

The challenge was being sure not to overlight the space which could result in the set looking flat. As directors tried out the different zones in rehearsal time and played with camera angles, Cutts and his team would follow them and brighten or darken the space to reach a happy medium. “It’s much like sculpting,” remarked Cutts. “The process is slow because unlike the larger live entertainment shows we do, in a studio everything is visible all the time. It’s almost like theatre in a way where you sit with one look, and you add five percent here, take away three percent there.”



The looks created have been saved, making it easy for the operators to use. “To lock it down we make it simple – one fader per zone and one look per type of show. At the same time, we have to make it energetic, interesting and each shot has to be dynamic.”



There is a renewed energy seen at SuperSport. “The team has a sparkle in their eyes, they want to explore the new spaces and be creative in the newly revamped studio to add value to the production,” ended Barnard. “Everyone is excited; there’s a buzz, it’s fresh and has ignited us all.”

Photos: Duncan Riley