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Special Report: Ellis Stadium Stampede Investigated

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04/17/2001. It is not too surprising for chaos to occur during a South African Premier League match between [Kaizer Chiefs](#) and [Orlando Pirates](#) as the duo form one of the most heavy rivalries on the Continent.

The recent stampede at Ellis Park Stadium during a league match between the two clubs, which left 43 fans dead and more than 150 injured, has the worst tragedy to occur since the inception of Kaizer Chiefs in 1970.

The Johannesburg Stadium was already overcrowded and as many other spectators outside forced their way into the stands, broke through the gates and trampled on those that were already seated. This left many to reflect on the Hillsborough disaster that occurred in 1989 before an FA Cup semi-final match between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest wherein 96 Liverpool fans lost their lives due to overcrowding in the stadium.

FIFA President Joseph Blatter and Michel Zen-Ruffinen the Secretary General have both sent a joint letter of condolences to the President of the South African Football Association, Molefi Oliphant. South Africa intends to host the 2010 World Cup and an investigation into the Ellis Park disaster has already been promised by the South African government.

Orlando Pirates are one of the oldest football clubs in South Africa, formed in 1939 during the apartheid period. The rivalry started when a former Pirates' striker Kaizer Motaung

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with Atlanta Chiefs in the North American Soccer League. Motaung who was voted Rookie of the Year in the American Soccer League in 1968, decided to set up his own club, in the American style, named it Kaizer Chiefs entailing the name of his previous club and thus taking some Pirates officials and some of his team mates to his side.

Despite some violent opposition, he was able to mould the Chiefs into one of South Africa's most popular football club outfits thus triggering the era of rivalry with Pirates, in a Country once banned from all international competition.

This is not the first time such a tragedy has occurred between the two sides. In January 1991, 42 fans lost their lives in a pre-season exhibition match in the provincial town of Orkney when fans tried to escape from a Pirates fan who held up a knife threatening to attack Chiefs fans after a goal against his team. Other incidents saw part of the Soccer City Stadium set alight in 1994 by Pirates fans after their team were beaten by Chiefs in a League clash.

The Kaizer Chiefs will return to action 7 days after the disaster on Wednesday when they face Stade Tamponnaise of Reunion in a delayed African Cup Winners' Cup first round, second leg fixture at Soccer City in Johannesburg.

The match was scheduled for Ellis Park on Sunday evening but a 72 hour was granted by the Confederation of African Football. Soccer City is South Africa's biggest stadium with a capacity of 75,000.

Chiefs drew 1-1 with Stade in the first leg last month and the winners will play Sunshine SC of the Seychelles in the second round in May.

Ibrahim Dabo

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