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Sports Tourism: Breaking the Tackle at Rugby Stadiums

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Abstract

Sport tourism is a 'type of tourism activity which refers to the travel experience of the tourist who either observes as a spectator or actively participates in a sporting event'. There is a plethora of research on sports tourism in South Africa focusing on different disciplines. However, limited information is currently available on sports tourism in the Free State province, South Africa, especially on rugby. This article explored the profile, motivation, and experiences of attendees to rugby matches using Toyota Stadium in Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa as a case study. Through quantitative research involving questionnaires, this study identified crucial suggestions to improve the overall stadium experience, as well as providing key marketing initiatives. The article highlights the importance of good clean facilities, and safety for attendees at rugby stadiums. Lastly, the findings of the study strongly suggested the development of a stadium tour and hosting of other events to expand the current tourism offering. These findings could also potentially be applied to other rugby unions and sport stadiums around the world to improve the attendee experience and quality of the stadium.

Keywords: Sports tourism, profiling, motivation, experiences, attendees

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Introduction

International travel reached an estimated 1.3 billion travellers in 2023. Tourists are searching for experiences that are value for money and closer to home. During 2023, Africa recovered an astounding 96% of pre-pandemic visitors (World Tourism Organisation, 2023). The tourism sector in South Africa continues to grow and attract international arrivals from all regions of the world. The Minister of Tourism in South Africa, Patricia de Lille, has highlighted the significant contribution to the economy and job creation that international travel brings to South Africa as a country (South African Government, 2024). South Africa offers visitors the opportunity to experience nature-based tourism activities such as wildlife viewing, marine tourism, heritage tourism activities, and sport tourism. For thousands of years, travel relating to sport has been taking place (Weed, 2008). In South Africa, Sport tourism is considered as a pastime, but it is also a vital part of the national identity and economy. Sport stadiums in South Africa are considered as melting pots of the 'Rainbow Nation', where unity in diversity and the joy of freedom is celebrated (South African Tourism, 2023). Well known stadiums in South Africa include DHL Stadium in Cape Town, FNB Stadium in Johannesburg, and Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban. It is important for a country like South Africa to utilise all their sport stadiums to their full potential, and in doing so, it is also important to consider what the experiences and motivations of the attendees of these events are. According to Tourism Tattler (2016), 10% of foreign tourists come to South Africa to watch or participate in sport events. Previously large-scale sporting events in South Africa include the 1995 IRB Rugby World Cup, the 1996 African Cup of Nations, the 2003 ICC Cricket World Cup, the 2007 World Twenty20 Championships, the 2009 British and Irish Lions tour, the 2009 Confederations Cup, 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup, The Cape Town ePrix and the 2023 Netball World Cup (South African Tourism, 2023). Well known annual sporting events in South Africa include the Comrades Marathon, Pick 'n Pay Cycle Tour (formerly the Cape Argus), Billabong Pro surfing, the Premier Soccer League (PSL), the Rugby Championship, and the recently added Toyota Challenge, which is hosted in Bloemfontein, Free State at the Toyota Stadium. In a recent media statement, the Department of Economic Development, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (DESTEA), Free State motivated tourists to visit the province and to experience unforgettable experiences at a low cost that the Free State provides to visitors. These experiences included gastronomy tourism, action and adventure, culture and heritage, and sports tourism (DESTEA, 2024). Limited information is currently available on Sports Tourism in the province, specifically the profile, motivation and expectations of sport tourists visiting Bloemfontein for a rugby match at Toyota Stadium. The main objective of the study is to identify the profile, motivation, and experiences of attendees to rugby matches using Toyota Stadium in Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa as a case study. The broader aim is to assist the Free State Rugby Union (FSRU) with marketing initiatives, expanding the current tourism offering of Toyota Stadium, and to ensure the overall stadium product can compete with other international stadiums. These findings could potentially also be implemented at other rugby stadiums worldwide.

Sports tourism

According to Nicholas (2023), sport tourism is a global phenomenon. Martin-Gonzalez et al. (2024), have stated that sport tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the tourism industry worldwide. Sport related tourism has experienced increased popularity as a tourism product, and is considered as an economic and social activity that is a segment of the tourism market (Pigeassou, 2004). The UNWTO highlights that sport tourism had an estimated growth rate of 17.5% between 2023 and 2030, and that sport tourism generates around 10% of global expenditure on tourism (Martin-Gonzalez, et al., 2024). Bosnjak et al. (2016), defines sport tourism as 'tourism that involves leisure-based travel that temporarily takes the tourist away from his or

her normal place of residence for the purpose of participating in sport, watching sport, or visiting sport related attractions' (Nicholas, 2023:92). Sport tourism has the potential to promote social, economic and environmental action, as it accelerates development and can leave a long-lasting positive legacy. Sport tourism in Southern Africa specifically serves as a niche sector that can drive economic growth and improve socio-economic conditions. Sports events are distinguished by the various authentic local experiences that they provide for participants or attendees (UN Tourism, 2024). According to Nicholas (2023), sports events vary in scale, from local school sport tournaments, to large international sport events, such as the Rugby World Cup. Numerous academic articles have been published on sport tourism in South Africa (Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2020; Ntelezi et al., 2024; Nyikana, 2016; Turco et al., 2003). When a destination hosts a sporting event, it can benefit the host community in many ways. Benefits could include opportunities for other tourism-related activities such as retail shopping, food and beverage establishments, accommodation establishments as well as attractions and activity visitation. Other positive impacts of sport tourism identified by Nicholas (2023) include tourist spending, job creation, upgrading infrastructure, and stimulation of cultural pride and breakdown of cross-cultural barriers, and enhancing the quality of life of residents and the community. After realising the potential benefits of hosting sport events, many cities have started to invest in sport events in the belief that they can provide marketing, destination planning and development opportunities for the region (Ritchie et al., 2002). One of the three big sports in South Africa is rugby (the other two being soccer and cricket). Rugby is a medium that provides entertainment, cultural identity and a sense of belonging to many South Africans (Dhurup, 2011). This study focuses on attendees at rugby matches at Toyota Stadium, Bloemfontein, Free State.

The case of Toyota Stadium, Bloemfontein, Free State

Bloemfontein is situated in the heart of the Free State province (Proos, 2025) and is the most centrally located metropolitan area in South Africa. The 'City of Roses' is the judicial capital of South Africa, and also the capital of the Free State province (LeMaitre, 2017), and has developed into an educational centre with several well-known high schools (including Grey College, Eunice, and Oranje Girls School), and established tertiary institutions (including the University of the Free State and Central University of Technology). Bloemfontein offers a plethora of tourist attractions, which range from monuments (National Women's Monument), memorials, statues (Nelson Mandela, M.T. Steyn), and historical buildings (the Old Presidency, Fourth Raadsaal, National Afrikaans Literary Museum) (LeMaitre, 2017). Other must-see attractions in Bloemfontein include Naval Hill, the War Museum of the Boer Republics, and the National Museum. Astro tourism is also a recent tourism product which has gained popularity in Bloemfontein (Proos 2025). Another local attraction associated with Bloemfontein is the local rugby team, the Toyota Cheetahs (founded as the Free State Rugby Union in 1895). The Toyota Stadium (as it is known today) was built in 1955 and was used for rugby, athletics, and cycling with a capacity of 12 000. In 1995 the stadium was rebuilt for rugby and soccer with a capacity of 36 000. The stadium was upgraded again in 2009 for the 2010 FIFA World Cup and has a current capacity of 42 000 (Toyota Cheetahs, 2024; van Rensburg, 2021). The following section will allude to profile, motivation and experiences of attendees.

Profile, motivation and experiences of attendees

Profiling, motivation, behaviour, and experiences of attendees to events are important to investigate as they could potentially assist with the improvement of the event and cater to the specific demand of tourists attending events. Ultimately, this could lead to maximising the benefit of the event for both the tourist and host destination. Profiling tourists attending specific events could potentially ensure effective target marketing, leading to better events hosted in the future (Tichaawa & Harilal, 2016). Similarly, Proos (2022) states that for marketers in the tourism industry, it is important to understand the profile and motivation of tourists. Profiling of tourists/attendees could include demographic profile, which determines the age, educational qualifications, annual income, and reasons for attending an event. Other information established by demographic profiling includes spending patterns and whether attendees engage in other tourist activities pre- or post-event (Tichaawa & Harilal, 2016). Attendees are the core of sport events, and without them, the game would cease to exist. Attendees buy tickets and beverages, and provide exposure to sponsors, thus providing the financial sustainability to sport events. People consume sport for various reasons and there are various motivations for attending sport matches (Dhurup, 2010). Numerous motivational theories have been suggested by researchers in literature to establish the motives for fan attendance (Dhurup, 2010). One of these motivational theories are Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow's five categories of human needs that account for human behaviour are arranged hierarchically and include physiological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualisation (Dhurup, 2010; George, 2019; Proos, 2022). Research based on fan motivation has also started to include aspects such as the role that the facility and its service elements play in fan attendance. Stadium, parking, seating, ablution facilities, food and beverage quality and selection, replay screens and prices all make up sport management and needs to be investigated (Dhurup, 2010). Numerous studies have been conducted related to profile, motivation, and experiences of attendees to sport tourism events (Dhurup, 2010; Kshetri et al., 2009; Reimers et al., 2018; Ritchie et al., 2002; Tichaawa & Harilal, 2016). There has, however, not been any exploration of the profile, motivation, and experiences of attendees to rugby matches in the Free State specifically.

Materials and methods

This study adheres to positivism and follows a quantitative research design. Ethical clearance for the research was obtained before data collection started from the CUT Human Research Ethics Committee (CUT HREC). The ethical clearance number is CUT/HREC 2024/000303. Permission was obtained from the FSRU to distribute the questionnaire via their social media platforms. The questionnaire was distributed on the FSRU social media pages in 2024. The population for the study was

attendees who have attended a rugby match at the Toyota Stadium in Bloemfontein previously and who are 18 years and above. The questionnaires were completed anonymously after consent was provided. The questionnaire was structured to acquire the demographic profile, motivation, experiences, and recommendations of attendees to rugby matches at the Toyota Stadium. Data was captured, cleaned and recorded on Excel and was compiled in English, with 408 respondents completing the questionnaire.

Findings

Profile of rugby attendees

This section of the paper presents the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents

Age		**Gender**	
18-30	38%	Male	69%
31-40	24%	Female	30%
41-50	17%	Prefer not to say	1%
51-60	12%	**Annual income**	
61-70	7%	0 – R300,000	40%
70 and older	2%	R301,000 – R500,000	16%
Race		R501,000 – R700.000	6%
White	64%	R701,000 or more	12%
African	30%	Prefer not to say	26%
Coloured	5%	**Highest level of education:**	
Indian	1%	Matric	39%
Country of residence:		Diploma	18%
South Africa	98%	Bachelor's degree	30%
Other	2%	Master's degree	5%
Province of residence:		Doctorate degree	2%
Free State	83%	Other	6%
Gauteng	6%		
Western Cape	2%		
Eastern Cape	2%		
Northern Cape	2%		
KwaZulu Natal	1%		
Mpumalanga	1%		
Limpopo	1%		
North-west	2%		

As illustrated in Table 1, 69% of the respondents are male, 30% female. Most respondents were white (64%), followed by African respondents (30%). Most of the respondents are between the ages of 18-30 (38%), followed by 31-40 (24%). Most respondents (40%) indicated that their annual income is between 0 – R300,000, and 16% R301,000 – R500,000, whilst 26% preferred not to state their annual income. Most respondents (39%) have Matric, followed by a Bachelor's degree (30%), and Diploma (18%). Most respondents (98%) reside in South Africa, whilst 2% are from other countries. Other countries include the United States of America (USA), Lesotho, Namibia, Australia, Ireland, and Chile. Most of the respondents (83%) reside in the Free State province, followed by Gauteng (6%). The following section alludes to the motivation and behaviour of attendees to rugby matches at Toyota Stadium in Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa.

Motivation and behaviour

Respondents were requested to indicate how many rugby matches they have attended at Toyota Stadium. Astoundingly, 64% of respondents have attended 10 or more matches, with 19% indicating that they have attended 2-5 matches, whilst 7% attended only one match. The majority of the respondents indicated that their primary purpose for attending was to watch a rugby match (90%). The least popular purposes for visiting Toyota Stadium were 3% leisure, 3% events, and 1% business. Respondents highlighted other activities which they participated in whilst attending a match indulging in food (28%), attending events (25%), outdoor activities (17%), and 6% culture. Respondents rated the different services and facilities at Toyota Stadium. The rating scale was as follows: (1) inferior, (2) poor, (3) satisfactory, (4) good, and (5) excellent. Most respondents (35%) indicated that the friendliness of the staff is excellent, with 32% indicating good, and 24% satisfactory. The respondents indicated their personal safety experience was excellent (32%), 30% good, and 20% satisfactory. Cuisine was indicated as being mostly satisfactory (33%), 25% good, and 17% excellent. Parking at the stadium was indicated as 25% satisfactory, 24% good, and 22% excellent. The cleanliness of the stadium was indicated as being mostly good (30%), 25% excellent, and 24% satisfactory. Most respondents highlighted the comfortability of the seating as being 30% satisfactory, 30% good, and 22% excellent. The view of the big screen in the stadium was perceived as good by 27% of the respondents, 25% satisfactory and 23% excellent. The sound in the stadium was highlighted as being good (32%), 31% excellent, and 21% satisfactory. The behavior of the fans was expressed as being good (33%), 31% excellent, and 25% satisfactory, with only 4% being inferior. A large amount of the respondents (46%) found that the atmosphere in the stadium was excellent, 32% good, and 16% satisfactory. Accessibility to and from the stadium was highlighted as being good (34%), 31% excellent, and 26% satisfactory. The ablution facilities at the stadium were indicated as being good (28%), and 26% satisfactory, with a concerning 16% and 15% of respondents respectively indicating the ablution facilities as being inferior and poor. The entertainment presented before, during, and after rugby matches was indicated as being 33% good, 27% satisfactory, and 26% excellent. Drinks at the stadium were indicated by respondents as being mostly good (29%), 27% satisfactory, and 25% excellent. Most respondents (33%) indicated that prices for different products at the stadium were satisfactory, and 22% were good. However, 19% and 15% respectively indicated that the prices at the stadium for products are poor and inferior. Prices for tickets to attend rugby matches at the stadium were highlighted as being mostly excellent (37%), followed by 30% good, and 22% satisfactory. When asked about the experience of buying tickets

to attend matches at the stadium, respondents mostly (41%) indicated that it is an excellent experience, whilst 31% indicated a good experience, and 17% were satisfactory. Lastly, the respondents were asked about the marketing of rugby matches, and most of the respondents (31%) indicated excellent marketing, whilst 30% indicated good marketing, followed by 24% satisfactory marketing taking place.

Respondents were allowed to choose multiple motivations for attending a rugby match. Most respondents (24%) are motivated by supporting their favourite rugby team, 19% to watch a rugby match, 19% for enjoyment, 14% to social, and 9% to relax. Other motivations included visiting an iconic stadium (6%), and meeting the rugby players (6%). More than half of the respondents (54%) indicated that the quality of attending a match is satisfactory, whilst 21% indicated being very satisfied, and 18% neutral. The most popular provinces in South Africa where respondents have attended rugby matches are the Free State province (30%), Gauteng (21%), Western Cape (13%), KwaZulu Natal (11%), and the Northern Cape (9%). When asked whether respondents travelled alone or with friends to attend these rugby matches, the results were as follows: 88% attended with friends, and 12% alone. The size of the group that attended the rugby matches were between 2-4 (56%), 5-7 (33%), and 11% 8 or more people. Social media (29%), friends (18%), the internet (16%), radio (13%), and marketing posters on lamppost (10%) were indicated as the most popular places to obtain information regarding rugby matches. When asked how much respondents were willing to pay to attend a rugby match, R51.00-R100,00 for a ticket was the most popular (41%), followed by R21,00-R50,00 (23%), and 19% R101,00-R200,00. When the respondents were asked if they would be interested in a stadium tour at Toyota Stadium, an astounding 73% indicated yes, whilst 27% stated no. When asked how much respondents are willing to pay for a stadium tour, they indicated between R21,00-R50,00 as being the most popular (34%), followed by R51,00-R100,00 (33%). Respondents indicated that they would be most interested in also attending a music festival (27%), a concert (24%), soccer (11%), and a market (10%) at Toyota Stadium.

Recommendations

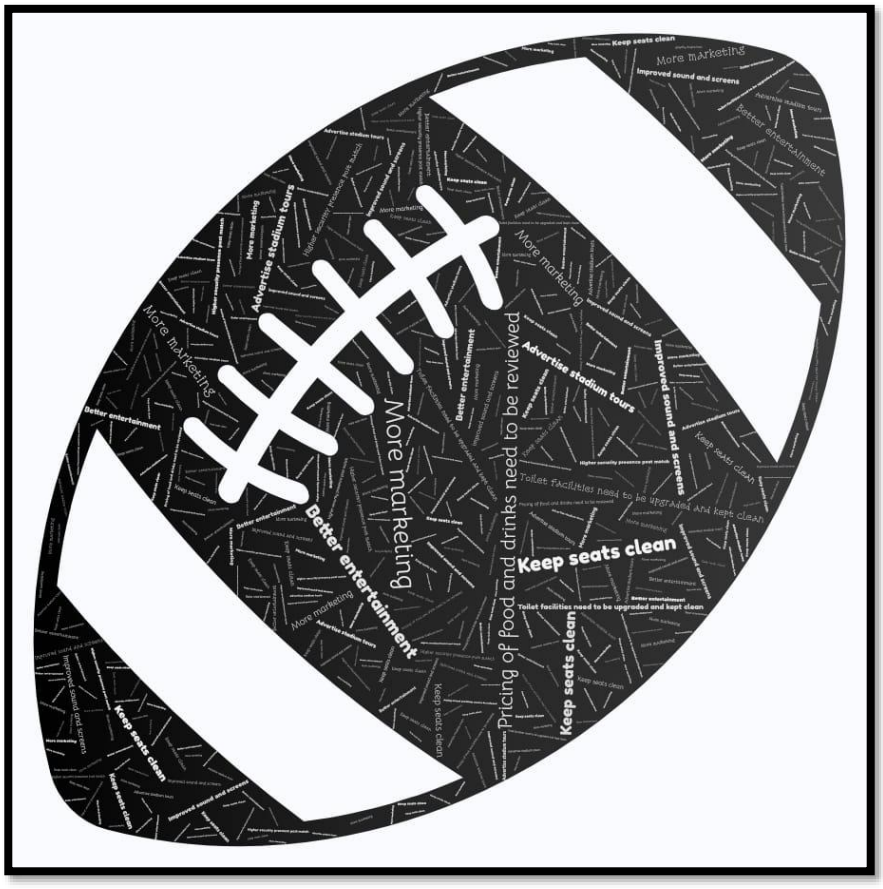

Figure 1. Recommendations from respondents on how to improve the experience at Toyota Stadium

Figure 1 illustrates respondents' recommendations on how to improve the experience at Toyota Stadium. Most of the respondents indicated that 'the toilet facilities need to be upgraded and kept clean', 'having a higher security presence post matches', 'advertise a stadium tour', 'pricing of food and drinks needs to be reviewed', 'better entertainment pre, during, and post rugby matches', 'improved sound and screens for the stadium', 'more marketing', and 'keep the seats clean and in good condition'. It emanates from the above information that the Toyota Stadium needs to urgently consider upgrading facilities at the stadium, ensuring a higher security presence, provide better entertainment, and marketing matches more than what is already happening.

Discussion

The following section provides a brief discussion of the findings and their implications. Through insight into what the typical attendee to rugby matches at Toyota Stadium resembles, focused marketing initiatives can be identified and suggested to assist the FSRU. Suggestions could also improve the overall experience at Toyota Stadium. These findings could also potentially be applied at other rugby stadiums nationally and internationally. The typical profile of an attendee to rugby matches at Toyota Stadium is a white male between 18 and 30 years with an annual income of 0 – R300,000 per year, and they have Matric. These findings correlate with those of Heyns (2012), who focused on rugby game attendance at selected smaller unions in South Africa. Attendees to rugby matches at Toyota Stadium generally reside in South Africa in either the Free State or Gauteng. The clear target market for the FSRU could include local rugby supporters residing in the province and the bordering province of Gauteng. These geographical regions could potentially be identified as the key target market focus area in marketing campaigns launched by the FSRU. According to Proos (2025), the demographic information (typical profile) obtained through research could assist in a marketing strategy that is more focused on a particular target market. The benefits of understanding your target market's profile are that money is not wasted on trying to reach markets that are not interested (Proos, 2022). Respondents indicated that they have attended 10 or more matches at Toyota Stadium and that their primary purpose for attending was to watch a rugby match. Respondents indicated that they participated in other activities whilst they attended a rugby match, including food (eating and drinking), attending other events, partaking in outdoor activities and enjoying cultural activities. Considering the other activities that attendees participate in whilst attending a rugby match, certain specialised packages could be offered. Packages could include where attendees buy a match-day ticket and receive reduced rates for their meals and drinks at a certain establishment. Local tourism attractions in Bloemfontein could also be approached, ranging from the War Museum, the National Museum, or Oliewenhuis Art Museum, whereby a match day ticket could lead to free entry to the different establishments on the day of the match. These establishments could work on a rotation basis, whereby different attractions are visited on different match days by attendees. This could also assist in supporting the local tourism sector in Bloemfontein and the surrounding areas, whereby they receive valuable exposure and potential return visits from attendees and their families. These could lead to a diversification of employment opportunities generated for the region. These findings could be applied to other destinations where rugby stadiums are situated and which desire to improve the attendee experience.

It is clear that attendees at rugby matches are loyal supporters who have attended numerous matches. It is worth investigating the launch of a supporter's loyalty programme whereby loyal attendees receive certain benefits. Suggestions could include that those attendees who attend all the matches during a year/season receive a certain percentage of their tickets purchased for the next year/season. Other benefits could include a certain discount on purchases at the stadium during matches or at the merchandise shop. Loyal attendees could also be offered free parking in the stadium (Momentus, 2025). These benefits could potentially lead to attendees being motivated to attend more rugby matches. A 'supporter of the year' award is also something to consider as this could potentially motivate supporters to become more loyal and attend matches. Something that could also be considered is to identify certain matches during a season where free entry to the stadium is provided on a basis where supporters reserve their tickets via an online system and agree to receive marketing materials from the rugby union. This could potentially lead to stadium attendance being at capacity for certain matches and lead to the creation of a database of loyal supporters interested in attending matches. These databases can then be used to distribute relevant marketing information. From a sponsorship viewpoint, this could be a good initiative to create a higher brand awareness as a full capacity stadium means more eyes on their brand. Navarro (2024) has stated that by sponsoring an event, an increased brand visibility, improved brand perception, and customer loyalty could be an added benefit gained from being a sponsor. A stadium plays a crucial role in the entertainment of a nation (Cubicle Centre, 2021). The facilities and services provided at Toyota Stadium, such as friendliness of staff, personal safety, the atmosphere in the stadium, prices and experience of buying tickets, and the marketing of rugby matches were considered excellent by attendees. These key attributes lead to either a positive or a negative perception and could play a key role in whether attendees return to the stadium in the future, or not. It is advised that Toyota Stadium ensure that the facilities and services are kept in its current excellent condition. For other rugby stadiums, it is of utmost importance that they ensure these facilities and services are in superior condition.

Cuisine, parking, cleanliness, comfortability of the seating, and the prices for different products was highlighted by respondents as being satisfactory. It is suggested that all the above-mentioned facilities and services that are in a satisfactory to excellent condition must be emphasised during marketing of rugby matches, as they are important draw-cards for stadium attendees. This is emphasised by Gerber & Terblanche (2012), who have stated that the satisfaction with the experience of attending sports events would determine if attendees attended another match in the future. The view of the big screen, sound in the stadium, behaviour of the fans, accessibility to and from the stadium, the ablution facilities, the entertainment presented before, during and after rugby matches, and the beverages available, were indicated by respondents as being mostly good. It is important to give these aspects such as the big screen considerable attention, simply because attendees could rather watch a game from home than in the stadium (Wallace, 2016). These facilities and services thus need to receive immediate attention from the FSRU as they could potentially lead to reasons why attendees do not attend matches. Other rugby stadiums should also keep these key aspects in mind. It is suggested that a plan is formulated to improve the view of the big screens, for example by only having one large, big screen in the stadium that could be viewed by everyone. Having a big screen that is effective and efficient plays a big role in attendee satisfaction. World Football Summit (2022) has highlighted that screens at stadiums are a

key element to enhancing the experience of attending a game. The screen could be synced with mobile phones whereby attendees could take funny pictures and appear on the big screen to make the experience more interactive for the target demographic, impressive graphics could also be utilised to improve the overall experience (World Football Summit, 2022). Other suggestions could include having a 'kiss cam' and a 'look alike cam' during matches. A 'kiss cam' is when couples are invited to kiss on camera and is then viewed on the big screen during matches (PCMag, 2025). A 'look alike cam' is when the attendees at matches are scanned to identify individuals who could resemble celebrities and well-known characters, the doppelgangers are then shown on the big screen to unlock a response from the other attendees (Laurinavicius & Balciauskas, 2022). These initiatives are very popular at basketball, baseball, and hockey games in the United States (Fong, et al., 2016). All these suggestions could assist in making the overall experience of attendees more memorable and lead to new and return attendees to rugby matches. These suggestions could potentially resonate with the profile of attendees identified during this study.

Concerning the sound quality, it is suggested that a company who specialises in event sound be approached to advice on improvements to the sound in the stadium. The company could provide suggestions to improve the distribution of the speaker system, sound zoning and using Artificial Intelligence to adjust the sound in different areas in the stadium (Sportsvenue-technology, 2025). To address the issue of the behaviour of fans, a strong emphasis could be put to ensure that drinking and non-drinking areas within the stadium is implemented to ensure that families with small children can enjoy the matches without any issues related to fans being inappropriate. A special students' section for example could be created where students can meet other students and enjoy the match with discounts on certain items at the bar and shops. Other suggestions could include having control measures in place at the stadium that includes alcohol policies, and a high security presence to improve the behaviour of attendees (Gaunt, 2024). Accessibility to and from stadiums needs to be reviewed to ensure efficient movement for all attendees. Considerations to make stadiums more accessible could include more and improved ramps and lifts, disabled toilets, handrails, and trained stewards to assist (Garrett, 2024). Respondents highlighted the ablution facilities numerous times as an issue that needs attention. Nixon (2023) has stated that stadium toilets are associated with mess, queues, poor hygiene and vandalism. It is suggested that a team who only focuses on these facilities in the whole stadium is appointed to ensure that toilets remain clean and that toiletries are replaced on a regular basis as some respondents did highlight cleanliness and availability of toiletries as a major issue. Something else to consider is reviewing the current ablution facilities to see where possible more female toilets could be made available. A temporary solution during large matches could be to hire and make use of portable toilets to ease congestion at such facilities. To ensure that toiletries do not run out during matches, digital technology could be implemented which indicates where resources are running low, and the designated team could refill the required resource before it runs out and leads to attendee frustration (Nixon, 2023).

In relation to entertainment, it is suggested to have a more diverse range of artists performing and perhaps having them perform more than one song where time allows it. A suggestion could be to bring more well-known singers to the stadium as entertainment is one of the key motivators for attendees to the stadium. The availability of drinks and range was highlighted as an issue that needs to be addressed, as well as waiting time at the bars in the stadium. A suggestion could be to employ trained staff to ensure that the process of serving drinks flow quick and hassle-free. The current bars in the stadium could be reviewed to see how the flow from ordering to being served could be fastened and what changes could be made to the current layout. Another suggestion could be to turn to technology whereby virtual-queuing is utilised and where attendees could pre-purchase beverages and collect them at a certain pick up point in the stadium (Momentus, 2025). Concerning availability and range of drinks, a team can be appointed that only oversees this process. A survey could be distributed amongst attendees before a match to see what beverages they would prefer to purchase and according to the results from the survey, the stadium could purchase the drinks the attendees identified. Most respondents are motivated to attend a rugby match by supporting their favourite rugby team, to watch a rugby match, for enjoyment, being social, and to relax. Heyns (2012) also highlighted those attendees to rugby matches are motivated by relaxing with friends and family. Rugby stadiums could potentially investigate arranging events during the match day prior to the match where fans can socialise with other supporters. One aspect that is gaining popularity during sporting events are fan zones (Rapid Retail Ltd, no nd.). A fan zone is a place where attendees get to socialise with other fans, enhancing the overall experience for attendees by fan engagement. Fan zones are all about providing attendees on match day a whole range of entertainment and activities. These activities occur either before, during, or after the main event and are tailored to the interests of the targeted fan base (Julia Charles Event Management, nd.). A fan zone could be created on match day inside and outside stadiums. Stadiums could thus invest in establishing these fan zones on game days, as attending a rugby match is a very social event where individuals like to relax. These factors could further be highlighted in the marketing initiatives of the FSRU and other rugby unions/stadiums to attract more attendees. Some were motivated to visit an iconic stadium and to meet some of the rugby players. Stadiums should thus seriously consider displaying the uniqueness and history of the stadium and having time for attendees to meet players at all the matches. The quality of Toyota Stadium was highlighted as being satisfactory, or very satisfied. This indicates that it is important to address the small issues that has been highlighted by the respondents to ensure that the whole attendee experience is satisfactory. The most popular provinces in South Africa where respondents have attended rugby matches are the Free State province, Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu Natal, and the Northern Cape. Most of the respondents attend matches at Toyota Stadium with friends. These findings correlate with Heyns (2012) where the respondents also indicated that they prefer to attend games with their friends. The sizes of these groups who attends rugby matches at the stadium ranged from two to seven individuals. Rugby unions could perhaps investigate offering packages to attendees where, if you are a group of five friends for example, you receive a discount on your tickets. It can also be suggested to consider having family packages available whereby special discount is provided to families. The FSRU

currently do have packages available (Toyota Cheetahs, nd.), however these packages could be reviewed and adjusted accordingly to the findings of this study. Other rugby unions could use these findings and alter their packages accordingly.

A unique approach to marketing sets successful stadiums apart from those less successful (Desygner, 2024). Heyns (2012) highlights that the best marketing tools are posters and television. Other popular marketing methods highlighted in Heyns (2012) findings include newspapers, Facebook and websites. This correlates with the findings that the most popular places to obtain information regarding rugby matches was social media, friends, the internet, radio, and marketing posters on lampposts in Bloemfontein. It is important to design marketing 'stories' which resonate with a target audience, ensuring that each event turns into a must attend spectacle (Desygner, 2024). It is suggested that the FSRU continues focusing on their current marketing initiatives with a shift in what is being portrayed in the marketing campaigns. It is suggested that a fun, social, relaxing, family environment is portrayed in the marketing initiatives, while ensuring that the content is eye-catching and easily legible and understandable. Personalisation in the marketing initiatives are key to success in attracting attendees to future matches, which has also been highlighted by Desygner (2024). Another suggestion could be to make use of social media influencers who display the stadium, the players, and what can be expected at matches. This may create more visibility and attention for the matches and events at the stadium. Influencers frequently prepare blogs and vlogs and are a source of inspiration for those who follow them and could potentially attract more attendees (Morrison, 2019; Proos, 2025). Social media content is important, and with the profile of attendees to rugby matches at Toyota Stadium, it could be advised that more content be posted on the different social media platforms. Content could include short interviews with players, coaches, staff etc. On days when matches are played at the stadium, regular posts can be uploaded starting from when players arrive to regular updates on the weather, field conditions etc. All these create awareness about the stadium and the matches and engage fans more directly; the goal should be to highlight what you are missing whilst not being at the match on game day. Respondents are willing to pay between R51.00-R100,00 for a ticket to attend a rugby match. This could serve as a guideline when rugby unions decide on prices for tickets. It is important to remember the suggested specials and discounts when setting prices. A key aspect to remember is the profile of the attendees. Respondents would be interested in a stadium tour, and are willing to pay between R21,00-R100,00 for a ticket. This price is in line with what other stadium tours in South Africa costs, for example at DHL Stadium in Cape Town, a stadium tour costs R110,00 for an adult and R75,00 for a child under 12 (DHL Stadium, no date). Stadium tours could include stops at the player changing rooms, the player tunnel, the presidential suite, the highest point in the stadium, and the coach and media boxes. A tour can also include a step onto the playing field, meeting with certain players, coaches, and ending it of at the merchandise shop in the stadium.

During a stadium tour, important details about the history of the stadium, and the rugby union could be provided. There is also an option to package the tours whereby a meal and a drink could be included at the stadium or a braai with some of the players. A VIP package could also be designed whereby you could get the opportunity to for example kick at the goal posts or other similar activities. Similar tours are offered in the United States at some of the National Football League (NFL) stadiums including the Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas, and the AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas (Allegiant Stadium, 2024; AT&T Stadium, 2024). Similar tours that are currently on offer at rugby stadiums include tours at Allianz Stadium (also known as Twickenham) in London, and DHL Stadium in Cape Town, South Africa (Allianz Stadium, 2024; DHL Stadium, 2024). A stadium tour could bring much needed attention to stadiums, serve as an extra source of income, and help with job creation as tour guides, etc. would be required. Other events that respondents are willing to attend and eager to experience at Toyota Stadium include a music festival, a concert, soccer, and a market. Music festivals and concerts are very popular worldwide at stadiums and are something that Toyota Stadium and others should strongly consider hosting to expand tourism offerings. Recommendations from the respondents included that the toilet facilities need to be upgraded and kept clean during matches. A higher security presence after matches, especially for late afternoon/evening matches are recommended, as safety is a key motivational factor for individuals. Other recommendations include more marketing initiatives to create better awareness amongst spectators and making the stadium experience look more attractive. This was also emphasised by (Heyns 2012). Other marketing initiatives recommended include advertising a stadium tour on all platforms. Recommendations regarding the facilities and services at the stadium include reviewing the current pricing structure of food and drinks and keeping the seats clean and in good condition. Concerning entertainment, respondents would like to see better sound quality, and big screens situated in the stadium. Entertainment pre, during, and post rugby matches should be reviewed to be more inclusive and entertaining (some suggestions included bringing back the cheerleaders). Heyns (2012) also suggested the inclusion of cheerleaders as part of the match day entertainment, something that could strongly be considered. All the above-mentioned recommendations need to be taken into consideration by the FSRU as they could potentially lead to a better experience of attendees during a match at Toyota Stadium. These findings could also potentially be applied to other rugby unions and rugby stadiums internationally.

Conclusion

Sport tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the tourism industry worldwide, which offers numerous potential benefits to stadiums etc. Thus, it is important to understand your target markets profile to ensure that money is not wasted on trying to reach markets who are not interested in attending matches at a stadium (Proos, 2022; 2024). This research is a first for the Free State province and provides a point of departure for inquiry into the attendees of rugby matches at Toyota Stadium and other similar stadiums. The study also provides a basis for future research on Sports Tourism in the province. This study found that attendees are loyal supporters, and that the overall facilities and services at Toyota Stadium are in a satisfactory condition. It was also emphasised that there is a need to develop a stadium tour. The information could potentially assist with marketing

strategies and improving the overall rugby match attendee experience. Toyota Stadium is an excellent stadium and with an emphasis focused on certain aspects as identified in this article, could be a stadium of choice and a second home for attendees to attend rugby matches. Toyota Stadium also has the potential to become a must-visit stadium in South Africa for other events and tourism activities. The findings from this study could also potentially be applied to other rugby unions, as well as rugby stadiums internationally.

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