

Singer in tune with preparing Eden Park for the 2011 Rugby World Cup

By Kevin Kevany



Singer site supervisor, Dan Simkin (left) and Bruce Atchinson, project manager in "Command Central"

Every couple of years an iconic construction project comes around, with the latest "must be in it" contract offering the prestige of involvement and the high risk of not getting it right, plus a demanding deadline. The reconstruction of Eden Park Stadium for the 2011 Rugby World Cup is one such project.

Singer Group MD, Jeff McLaren, has over the last decade or more risen to the challenge of ensuring that "Singer" is on the scoreboard post-tender time.

He puts Singer's success in winning the "big ones" down to the strong team he has built up around him, particularly in recent years – a highly competitive blend of experience and talented newcomers, with "skills across the park" – and a commitment to getting the job done on time and budget. All of this could have Graham Henry popping by for a coffee at the company's head office high above Spaghetti Junction, on the edge of downtown Auckland, fairly soon.

"I have always believed in investing in good

people and the best equipment, and then either developing the leadership or bringing in some specialist, project-appropriate skills, when the job demands it," McLaren says.

Stepping up to the line for Eden Park is highly-experienced project manager, Bruce Atchinson, plus Dan Simkin, a top-ranking site supervisor, who has worked successfully with Bruce for a number of years.

When asked about the quality of work from the Singer team, Alan Gray, the Fletcher Construction project director for this mega-project, who knows the core of the squad and has worked with it previously on a number of major projects offered: "Very good. Excellent."

"With any sub-contractor, knowing the people you are dealing with certainly makes a difference. Bruce has a wealth of knowledge and immense experience, which gives us a good understanding of what needs to be done. Over the years we have developed a mutual respect and I have learnt to appreciate that he does what

he says he will.

"The fact that he has the client's interests at heart in everything he does means that he will regularly, proactively, put up alternate ways of achieving savings or productivity improvements which benefit the customer – and he is very good at that," Gray adds, noting it is something Fletchers encourage all their subbies to do.

With just on a year to go to completion – a year ahead of the actual Rugby World Cup – no one wants to go on the record as to how things are progressing, but you sense there is a quiet confidence that the refurbished Eden Park will be an on-time, on-budget stunner. And that's before you get to the numbers:

14 kilometres of mains cable

40 kilometres of lighting cable

16 kilometres of sports field cabling, with each lamp individually connected and independently controlled

2 mains switchboards ("West" and "East")

146 distribution boards

4 electrical risers

4,650 internal lights and

242 pitch floodlights [This excludes the

lights in the external landscaping and any external spotlights on the buildings.]

2 x 300 KVA UPS to provide the field with an hour at full load, while 2 temporary generators get up to speed.

You are tempted to offer: "Man, this place is wired", but think better of it. For the team is days away from the massive physical task of pulling the cables which will provide the backbone to the whole project – due to be completed in the next few weeks. It's a testing time.

The overall task is onerous too, with a massive footprint to get around; little communality, or repetitive work; a variety of zones – all unique in their requirements – with the 50 corporate boxes the only "standard item" on the job list.

"We cannot afford to lag in any of the zones, or we'll lose our structure and before you know it, things can start to unravel. That's not a position you ever want to get into, for many reasons," Bruce emphasises.

The Singer Team is hugely enthusiastic about what the stadium will look like on completion: something for New Zealand to be proud of. All the stands will be integrated by



The Singer team lines up for the Rugby World Cup 2011

ringed concourses, allowing people to move freely inside the stadium. The oft criticised catering facilities have been given a huge boost, with kitchens on every level and improved beer dispensing facilities – all needing the Singer tender touch.

The quality touch and attention to detail which has served Singer well on other prestigious projects will be especially called in for the VIP areas, including two pre-function rooms, two function rooms and the “OCR”, with stages, dimming systems and A/V facilities, all prescribed.

Atchinson came on board in late 2008 at the pre-tender stage, to familiarise himself with the project, the team, and to put in place a sound structure and a resourcing programme to underpin the strategy which ensures that the person with the right skills and experience for a task is empowered with the tools and the gear to do it, at all times.

“We’ve got a great bunch of guys on this team. I have been impressed by the way we have hit the ground running and maintained our concentration. The Singer style is not the ‘whip-cracking’ type, but based on treating everyone with respect. It works,” he says.

On a site the size of a small farm, with hundreds of other contractors pushing ahead to meet their own scheduled tasks, it takes some

doing and will require some tight teamwork right through. Part of the formula too is keeping the suppliers in the loop, by making their task easier, say, by ordering as far ahead as possible.

“At the heart of all this, is ‘man-management’. That’s super important. It is a bit of a learning game, assessing strengths, attitudes, personalities, experience and matching that with the guys’ own preferences. I haven’t been let down yet.

“And then, of course, there are the really mundane tasks that no one likes but simply have to be done,” Bruce adds.

A handful of fortunate apprentices have been drawn from the Singer pool, as and when needed, and gained a good deal of valuable experience. No doubt, like the rest of the team, they’ll be hoping to be called up for the six games of on-site, standby-duty during the 2011 Super 14 games and any other matches in the lead-up to the big tournament. 2011 is not only the All Blacks’ next big moment of truth, but also for the contractors who built the super-stadium.

The final word is with Dan Simkin: “These kinds of jobs don’t come around all that often, so it’s great to be part of history in the making. We’ve got a team to be proud of inside the stadium. Let’s hope that proves to be the case at the end of the finals. Singer certainly has a good record when it comes to the big jobs.”

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