

Lions cricket union protects wickets — and data — at cutting-edge “smart” stadium

Based in Johannesburg, the Lions cricket union is a champion many times over. It also operates the iconic DP World Wanderers Stadium, one of the finest stadiums on the African continent. Lions have implemented a unique business model to maximise revenues from the ground whether cricket is taking place or not.

On the pitch, the union has recently won the Cricket South Africa (CSA) 4-Day Domestic Series four times, including in 2023–24. Lions also won the CSA One-Day Cup in 2021–22 and 2022–23 as well as taking home two consecutive Twenty20 (T20) Challenge trophies in 2023–24 and 2024–25. As of 2025, Lions have won four T20 titles in six seasons.

The challenge

Lions executives say that they don’t operate a cricket stadium; they operate a stadium where cricket is played in. The DP World Wanderers Stadium is busy year-round, with events such as concerts, a variety of shows and weddings taking place there.

But what makes the stadium business model unique is that the ground houses offices that currently provide working space for about 50 tenants. The offices are up and running at all times, even when a match is taking place. The DP World Wanderers Stadium was the first stadium in Africa equipped with 5G connectivity. It’s also the only stadium that can have 28,000 fans connected to Wi-Fi free of charge.

KEY CHALLENGES

- Data protection for a stadium with innovative digital technology.
- Safeguarding sensitive and valuable customer data.
- Need to speed up recovery time and improve recovery points.

KEY REQUIREMENTS

- An MSP with extensive backup experience.
- Ease of deployment and management.
- Fast, reliable and accurate recovery of supporters’ data.

PROTECTED RESOURCES

- Approximately 4TB of data on 32 workstations.
- Data from a recently launched application for fans.
- Data for companies working in stadium office space.

KEY BENEFITS

- 50% improvement in RTO and RPO.
- Much easier onboarding, offboarding and management.
- Confidence and peace of mind with MRB Secure managing backup.

The IT team have full control of the managed Wi-Fi solution and have full capabilities to increase or decrease capacity on demand depending on how many people are connected at once. They can even identify and disconnect individual users who abuse the free bandwidth.

The union collects data from Wi-Fi-connected fans for marketing purposes and has big plans for the future of the stadium. Lions are soon to launch a mobile application for fans. Executives are striving to create in-stadium services that take care of fans' every need, all through the app.

"We want you to come to our stadium, scan the QR code on the chair in front of you, and have the capability to request a multitude of services available, whether it's to fix your chair, call security or let us know exactly what you need," says Brecht Mohonathan, Lions CFO. "We know when you call security, go to our shop or upgrade your seat. We know if there was someone smoking near you, so we need to deploy an additional security guard."

It all adds up to more revenue for the union, Mohonathan adds. The union collects customer relationship management data it uses to offer services and send push notifications about perks to fans.

"We can deliver food to you at your seat," Mohonathan says. "When you leave, we send you a message to say thanks for joining us. Before the next match, we send

you something. We might let you know that for a little extra money, we can upgrade you to a VIP box."

But with collecting so much data comes the responsibility of protecting it. To deepen their relationship with fans, Lions need to store and safeguard sensitive data.

"We've got your WhatsApp number, your email, your birthday," Mohonathan says. "That is the level of data we need to protect. That data is worth a lot to us because it's our connection to fans."

The solution

Ian Nettleton is managing director of MRB Secure, the managed service provider (MSP) that provides backup services to Lions. They have more than 15 years of experience providing backup solutions. Nettleton, who joined MRB Secure in 2022, found Lions in a somewhat unorthodox way: His daughter plays for the union's women's team. He made contact with Mohonathan and other Lions officials in mid-2023.

"I'd been following Lions for a while," he says. "I saw a couple of competitors' sign boards displayed at the ground. I approached Lions to see if they had any gaps in their backup services. I simply posed a question and got an introduction."

With Advanced Backup for workstations in Acronis Cyber Protect Cloud, MRB Secure was able to unseat an incumbent vendor and deliver backup services to



the union beginning in December 2023. Lions have servers on-site but also back up Microsoft 365 data in the cloud through MRB Secure and Acronis as part of a retention and redundancy strategy.

Acronis Advanced Backup is installed on all of the union's workstations. With it, MRB Secure can restore a machine for Lions back to where it was at any given point in time. The union can also hold multiple copies and backups, an important feature in a high-performance environment. Lions current back up almost 4TB of data on 32 workstations.

Backup is also critical for compliance, Nettleton notes. Lions must meet the requirements of South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), which is similar to GDPR in Europe.

For MRB Secure, the experience has been "plain sailing" so far, Nettleton says. He has ambitions to expand the MSP's presence in cricket as well as in sport generally. Nettleton says he is satisfied with his company's relationship with Acronis.

"From a tech perspective, we're Acronis partners because we think Acronis is ahead of the game," he says. "One of the reasons we partnered with Acronis is speed. We really like the ease of onboarding, offboarding and adding new features. It's a simple exercise to add what customers need."

Nettleton says MRB Secure has benefitted from a positive relationship with the union, including hosting events at Lions matches.

"We get a lot of interaction with the customer," he says.



"The more events we hold, the more our customers are interested in coming. We're bringing in more leads and prospects."



The result

MRB Secure and Acronis Cyber Protect Cloud have driven much faster data recovery for Lions. Both recovery time objectives (RTOs) and recovery point objectives (RPOs) have improved by 50%. Data recovery has also become less intrusive for employees.



“We use the Microsoft 365 suite, but OneDrive doesn’t allow backup for a physical machine,” Mohonathan says. “When your machine breaks, IT needs to be able to pull an image, pick up the workstation and get it fixed without interrupting your work. We used to have to take a laptop, bring down an OST file from the cloud, wait for OneDrive and then reinstall everything. Now, with MRB Secure providing backup services, all we do is we take the machine and log onto the Acronis portal. Everything is already there. You can continue working on a loaner while we fix your machine. Within two hours, the data is copied back, and nobody has to stop working.”

Acronis even helped Lions out of a jam after a contractor left the union in a lurch, Mohonathan explains.

“About 10 years ago, we had a company come in and develop a bespoke administration system,” he says.

“The person who built it left the country. He got rid of the source code and left us with an app on equipment that was 10 years old. We put Acronis onto the one workstation that had the tool. We virtualised it and bolted it into a virtual server and virtual desktop. We tried every single tool, and Acronis was the only tool that helped us extrapolate the image and bring it into a virtual environment.”

For Lions, fast, reliable data backup is at the foundation of running a union and stadium that are among the elite in Africa.

“With opportunity comes risk,” Mohonathan, who manages the union’s IT staff, says. “As we embark on a digital transition, that’s where MRB Secure comes into play. I get peace of mind because with them providing backup services, I know our IT infrastructure has got this. I don’t have to focus my time and energy on IT.”