

## YOUNGS WARY OF FIJI THREAT

**BAGSHOT:** England scrum-half Ben Youngs said yesterday his side were ready for a journey into the "unknown" against opening World Cup opponents Fiji.

Tournament hosts England launch the World Cup against the Pacific Islanders at Twickenham on Friday. "Fiji are a little bit of the unknown because they can do the unexpected," said Youngs of a side renowned for their ability with ball in hand. "There's only so much prep we can do on them because they can do something out of nothing, that's the type of player they have."

"We'll have to make sure we're watertight in defence and force them to make errors and play too loose." Much of the build-up has centred on the fact that England, Australia and Wales are all drawn in Pool A—the so-called 'group of death', with at least one of rugby's major nations to be knocked out before the quarter-finals as only two teams will qualify for the last eight. But Fiji, who knocked Wales out of the 2007 World Cup in France, are the reigning Pacific Nations Cup champions and boast an impressive back-line.

During the 2013/14 season, the Fiji trio of wing Nemani Nadolo (Crusaders), full-back Metuisela Talebula (Bordeaux) and centre Vereniki Goneva (Leicester), were the leading try-scorers in the southern hemisphere's Super Rugby, France's Top 14 and England's Premiership respectively.

Youngs, who played alongside Goneva at Leicester, added: "Niki is one of the best players I've played with simply because he can either run over you or step you."

"He makes you do the splits as you try to tackle him, simply because you don't know what way he will try to go. He's got all the ability, great hands and is a physical guy.

He can be very physical, but also subtle with electric pace. "Then there's Nadolo, he's a big guy so we don't want to get a big run up. There will be moments when there are four people on his back trying to drag him down, so we have to make sure we don't feed their belief by keep giving them the ball." Youngs also highlighted the threat posed by opposing scrum-half Nikola Matawalu, saying: "Matawalu at nine is a real handful." "He's probably the heartbeat of their team, giving up 50kgs on Nadolo, but equally electric and can do something special." While England will be looking to make Twickenham something of a fortress, Youngs understands how England's headquarters ground can inspire opposition teams as well.

"Niki said it's a huge honour for them to play in the opening game in front of 82,000," Youngs explained. "We won't underestimate them, they're here to win."

England, however, will be firm favorites tomorrow as they have never been beaten by Fiji in a Test match. After all the hype surrounding the tournament Youngs, who is set to win his 50th cap on Friday in an England team where brother Tom will start at hooker, is relieved that a match is now just days away. "England are ready to go and we've been ready to go for the last couple of weeks," said Youngs, whose father Nick won six caps as an England scrum-half from 1983-84. "It's been a long wait for a lot of guys, so we can't wait to get out there on Friday. There's a real edge and intensity about us, not nervousness, just excitement."

"We have a young group of guys who have no fear. They're too young to have any fear," added the 26-year-old. "You can really sense the buzz around the country. Everyone knows it's coming now." — AFP



**LONDON:** Former New Zealand rugby union player Jonah Lomu (front right) and members of the Ngati Ranana London Maori Club perform a haka during a photocall in London's Covent Garden. — AFP

## FAMILY THE BEDROCK FOR BATTLING LOMU

**LONDON:** New Zealand rugby union legend Jonah Lomu wants to live to see his two young sons grow into adulthood and certainly not experience the agony he has gone through with the kidney ailment that has bedevilled him for over a decade.

The 40-year-old former wing had to quit the sport in 2002 because of Nephrotic syndrome, a rare kidney disease, and having had one kidney transplant is now searching for that to be replaced.

While he awaits a donor he undergoes six hours of dialysis treatment every other day. However, Lomu has not let that prevent him from travelling to England to attend the World Cup which despite his headline grabbing tries he never got to lift the trophy, losing in the 1995 final and the 1999 semi-finals along with his third wife Nadine, and two sons Dhyreille, aged five, and six-year-old Brayley.

All three were present the two boys sporting jackets with Lomu adorning the back—which was especially poignant for Lomu as he performed the haka in London's iconic Covent Garden yesterday. "I didn't think I would perform the haka

again," Lomu told AFP. "My two sons have never seen me do the haka before and this has brought it to life for me. It is something special for them as previously they have only seen videos of me doing it." Lomu, who performed the haka as part of his role as Mastercard ambassador for the tournament, had a stormy relationship with his own father, who died two years ago, but he is determined he makes the most of his own sons.

"I do want to see them grow into grown men," said Lomu. "Whether they play rugby or not doesn't matter. I just want them to be healthy and to grow. One thing as a dad you don't want is for them to come to any harm or anything bad to happen to them."

"The illnesses and pains I'm going through, I don't want them to experience that, no dad wants that. "This (the World Cup trip) is a great experience for them. This is where rugby started, so what a way to take two kids on a journey."

"I'm their dad and I'm trying to set an example and my beautiful wife ensures I do everything I need to do to do so." Indeed Lomu, who sports tattoos of his two boys names on his right arm and that of his wife on his left one, said Nadine-

who Lomu revealed is responsible for Dhyreille's name coming up with it at 1:00am while pregnant and eating pizza—is an immeasurable support to him.

"Rugby has prepared me for the challenges of life, but the thing is the most important thing is that your pillars are rock solid and the family keeps you in great stead," said Lomu.

"I am thankful that I have a beautiful wife and the kids are here. Nadine makes sure that my family stays together."

"She is my manager, my wife, my best friend and my boss!" Lomu, scorer of 37 tries in 63 Test appearances, still has enormous pull as was clear from the amount of people, young and old who sidled up and asked to have photos taken with him which he agreed to—three policemen waited for 20 minutes to have their photo taken with him. "It's quite humbling for people to recognise me, given it is now 20 years ago since I first played in the World Cup. "Made all the more humbling when kids come up to me and say 'I never saw you play live but I watch you on you tube' and other children saying they want to play like me." — AFP



**SURREY:** England's James Haskell (center) runs attached to a teammate during a warm-up exercise in a training session at the England Rugby team's training base in Bagshot. — AFP

## MEYER TAKES NO CHANCES WITH JAPANESE CHALLENGE

**BRIGHTON:** South Africa coach Heyneke Meyer yesterday named most experienced Springbok side ever to take on Japan in their opening Pool B game.

The starting XV led by centre Jean de Villiers has 880 caps to their name, 44 more than the previous mark when South Africa played Australia in the 2011 quarter-final.

The Japanese—who will want to put on a good show as they host the 2019 World Cup—have never threatened to make it through to the knockout stages but Meyer said Springbok players who played club rugby there said they could be in for a nasty surprise. "We play against the big teams from the southern and northern hemisphere quite often, and with them it's mostly a case of you know what to expect," Meyer told www.sarugby.net.

"But Japan will pose a different threat. They have a very astute coach in Eddie Jones, and our players who play in Japan have warned us to expect a very high tempo game and good, low tackling to stop momentum." Meyer, who has come under pressure over a string of poor results including an historic defeat to Argentina in the recent Rugby

Championship, said it was imperative to gain some momentum from the start. "The players know that nothing but their best will be good enough on Saturday, and we realise the importance of starting the World Cup on a good note," said Meyer.

"But having said that, we also know that there is no such thing as an easy game in rugby by any more, and they will be just as fired up as us." De Villiers returns to skipper the side having recovered sufficiently from a broken jaw suffered during the defeat to Argentina in which his performance was also labelled that of a 'carthorse'. The 34-year-old—who contributes over 100 caps to the Springbok total—will hope for better luck at this World Cup than in 2007 where he was injured in the opening pool game, missing the chance to be part of the team that won the trophy.

Other veterans from the 2007 campaign are also in the starting line-up including 38-year-old lock Victor Matfield, who was named man of the match in the victory over England in the final, and star wing Bryan Habana. The Springboks, who are favorites to top their pool, will go on to play Scotland, Samoa and the United States. — AFP



**JOHANNESBURG:** South African National Rugby team pose during an official send off of the team to the Rugby World Cup. — AFP

## ARGENTINA EYE PIECE OF HISTORY

**LONDON:** Argentina know the odds are stacked against them when they face New Zealand in their opening World Cup encounter at Wembley Stadium on Sunday but coach Daniel Hourcade hopes they can add the champions scalp to those of other notable ones in the recent past.

Wins over Australia and South Africa in the last two years "show we are developing and I continue to hope we keep making history," coach Daniel Hourcade said.

In 21 matches dating back 30 years the Pumas have never beaten the All Blacks, with a solitary draw in 1985 when the formidable Hugo Porta kicked four penalties and three drop goals the only time they have avoided a loss.

Since joining the Rugby Championship in 2012, Argentina have recorded famous wins over South Africa and Australia but against the All Blacks they have never been closer than 15 points behind at the final whistle.

Captain Agustin Creevy, however, still refuses

to admit defeat before the game has played out, clinging to the hope that the All Blacks dominance over the champion South American side cannot last forever.

"New Zealand are favourites to win the title. They are the best in the world. We know how good they are, but we are going out to play the perfect match and win," he said.

Hourcade is less confident but acknowledges his side's opportunity to finish second to the All Blacks in Pool C to progress to the quarter-finals. "Even when we have played well against the All Blacks we did not even get close," he said. "On paper we are not favourites, but we have come here with the idea of having a great World Cup." Despite his own expectations, Hourcade has instilled in his players a belief that they can succeed.

Lock Matias Alemanno said they are "prepared psychologically" but it will take a special effort to down the reigning world champions.

"We start as equals and have to do everything right, everything perfect. If we don't do it 100 percent we will not win."

In Argentina's last World Cup match against the All Blacks, in the 2011 quarter-finals, they led 7-6 midway through the first half before the pressure told with New Zealand finishing up comfortable 33-10 winners. Wing Horacio Agulla said their game plan was to again knock the All Blacks off their stride at the start, and this time they believed they could maintain the advantage to the end.

"I really want to win and believe we can," he said. "There will be a lot of intensity at the start, there will be a lot of emotion inside but we must keep a cool head."

A clean sweep against the remaining sides in their pool, Tonga, Georgia and Namibia should be enough to get Argentina into the quarter-finals and a clash against the winners of Pool D, likely to be either France or Ireland. — AFP



**JOHANNESBURG:** South African National Rugby team pose during an official send off of the team to the Rugby World Cup. — AFP

## ALL BLACKS PLAY DOWN OFF-FIELD INSULT WAR

**LONDON:** The All Blacks refused to be provoked by a mocking haka led by former England scrum-half Matt Dawson, saying Wednesday their focus was on their opening World Cup game against Argentina and not an escalating psychological war off field.

Dawson's "hakarena" ridicules the All Blacks pre-match haka, a traditional war dance which has immense cultural significance for the New Zealanders.

In a video clip he urges England fans to use it to counter the supposed benefits the All Blacks get from the pre-match ritual.

It follows a scathing outburst from former All Black Ali Williams who said it will be "a dark day" if hosts England win the World Cup and he described their home ground Twickenham as "the most hostile stadium there is". But the off-field insults were brushed aside by the All Blacks who said they were there strictly for the rugby with their campaign starting against Argentina on Sunday.

Seasoned campaigner Keven Mealamu, a close friend of Williams, said the former lock was not reflecting the views of other All Blacks who had played with him at Twickenham.

"That's his own thoughts," Mealamu a 126-Test veteran hooker said while surrounded by props Charlie Faumuina and Wyatt Crockett.

He described the All Blacks rivalry with England as "awesome" and said there was "a lot of mutual respect." On Dawson's jibe at a significant piece of New Zealand culture, Mealamu, who is of Samoan descent, said it was "quite funny" seeing the haka mixed with the dance from the 1994 Spanish hit song 'Macarena'. "It's obvious it's something he's looked at. The haka is part of what we do but it's not actually what we do as a rugby team when we go

out there to play the game."

Under intense questioning from European media, Mealamu acknowledged the haka was a special part of New Zealand's culture. When asked if Dawson should have shown more respect, Mealamu said: "It is his view on the way he sees it. We've heard a bit about it but we're just looking forward to playing Argentina." Faumuina said he was not concerned with the off-field jibes and the haka was something dear to the All Blacks which they did for themselves. "I don't think it worries us too much what people are trying to do." — AFP