

## SOUTH AFRICA RING CHANGES AFTER JAPAN HUMILIATION

**BIRMINGHAM:** South Africa brought back big guns such as Willie le Roux and Duane Vermeulen to tackle Samoa in the World Cup on Saturday in eight changes to the team stunned by Japan. However, hard-man hooker Bismarck du Plessis, 31, was dropped but 38-year-old lock Victor Matfield, persuaded to come out of retirement by coach Heyneke Meyer, retained his place. Despite being criticized for the age of the side that lost 34-32 to Japan last weekend, Meyer has named an even more experienced line-up, with a new record 891 caps between them for the Pool B game against Samoa in Birmingham. "The last few days have been a time for retrospection and the team this week has been selected specifically with Samoa in mind, as we know we'll have to be at our very best to succeed," Meyer said on Wednesday.

"They will pose a massive challenge and I think it's fair to say that it's the biggest game of the season for us. They have a very strong team with players plying their trade all over the world," he added. Springbok captain Jean de Villiers, 34, escaped the cull despite calls in South Africa for him to be replaced. He will move from inside to outside centre. But the ongoing row in South Africa over the racial composition of the side part of the process of post-apartheid 'transformation' which intensified after the Japan defeat, is sure to be revived again given there are now only six non-white players in Meyer's matchday 23 to play Samoa, compared to seven last time out.

However, as was the case for the shock loss to Japan, four non-white players will start with wings



**BIRMINGHAM:** The official logo of the 2015 Rugby Union World Cup is seen on a giant rugby ball in Birmingham, central England yesterday. — AFP

JP Pietersen and Bryan Habana, centre Damian de Allende and prop Tendai Mtawarira all in South Africa's 1st XV. The government 'target' is to have seven non-white players in a matchday 23 and five

on the pitch at any one time, although this is an aspiration rather than a strict requirement. Three players nominated for the World Rugby player of the year award over the last two years-Eben

Etzebeth, Vermeulen and Le Roux-were all recalled to the starting lineup. Adriaan Strauss, who will win his 50th cap, is the starting hooker.

Vermeulen will make his first Test appearance of the year in the No 8 jersey. He had neck surgery in July. "Duane has been one of the stalwarts of this team and it's great to have him back in the mix," said Meyer. "He is one of the best loose forwards in the world and apart from being a superb ball-carrier and also a great line-out option, he is also good on the ground and brings leadership to the team." Le Roux, Pietersen and De Allende returned in the backline, with Fourie du Preez and Handre Pollard forming a new half-back pairing after scrum-half Ruan Pienaar and fly-half Pat Lambie were dropped to the bench.

In the pack, Etzebeth was one of three changes to the starting line-up with Vermeulen and Strauss. On the bench, Schalk Brits, 34, and Frans Malherbe made their first appearances on a Rugby World Cup teamsheet. "It's been a very tough week after the massive disappointment of last weekend and we owe our supporters a winning performance on Saturday," said Meyer. Meyer added he was looking for "energy and unpredictability" in the team. "It means some players have dropped out of the squad altogether but this is a 31-man campaign and they will have other chances, but we needed to make changes after Saturday's performance." Of those who started the match against Japan, full-back Zane Kirchner, centre Lwazi Mvovo, back-rower Pieter-Steph du Toit and hooker Du Plessis all failed to make the matchday 23. — AFP

## SAM BURGESS CAN BE ENGLAND'S SONNY BILL

**BAGSHOT:** Sam Burgess could give the same boost to England at the World Cup as fellow code-hopper Sonny Bill Williams has to defending champions New Zealand, according to backs coach, Andy Farrell. Burgess has raw power and physicality, but a lack of rugby union experience and just one season at Bath and 112 minutes of Test rugby. His case highlights the tendency to view rugby league converts as that of an impact substitute at the World Cup. Burgess impressed off the bench during England's opening 35-11 win over Fiji last week.

Now a chest injury to first-choice centre Jonathan Joseph has opened up the possibility of Burgess starting in the crunch Pool A match against Wales at Twickenham on Saturday. Farrell, who like Burgess made his name in rugby league before switching, believes the Bath powerhouse could provide England with the kind of dynamic midfield presence the All Blacks have come to expect from Williams. "It depends whether you want to make the impact (off the bench) or make that impact from the start. "The start of the game is pretty important as well; how you get off and how you make the other team feel," Farrell told reporters at England's training base in Bagshot, southwest of London, on Tuesday.

### More than impact

"I wouldn't just pigeon-hole him (Burgess) as an impact (player), just like New Zealand wouldn't pigeon-hole Sonny Bill, would they? "He's quite comfortable starting or coming off the bench and doing

what's best for the team," Farrell added. If Joseph is unfit England, who like Wales — 54-9 winners over Uruguay last weekend — are due to announce their team on Thursday for a fixture in a 'Pool of Death' also featuring Australia, face a conundrum with Brad Barritt, Henry Slade and fly-half Owen Farrell, in his second string role of centre, all in contention for a midfield berth. England coach Stuart Lancaster has used a remarkable 13 different midfield combinations since taking charge in 2012. Meanwhile No 8 Billy Vunipola is pushing hard for a starting spot in place of Ben Morgan, doubtful with a knee problem, after making his mark off the bench against Fiji.

Last month, Wales coach Warren Gatland, before his side were beset by an injury crisis, said England were "not 100 percent sure of where they are going" and suggested they did not know their best team. But Farrell said: "Everyone is so intrigued by selection because we're in a great position. Is it Billy, is it Ben? Is it Sam, is it Brad? Is it this, is it that? "It's only like that-people trying to work it out - because we have so many options-but for us it is brilliant because we know they can all do it and they are pushing each other to do it." Farrell added: "No-one says he (Joseph) is out. "We are not worried about any scenario. That is why you pick the squad you do in the first place so that you cover all bases. We are 100 percent confident and comfortable with everyone, to have a proper good international team that can do the business." — AFP



**RICHMOND:** Linda Melanie Villumsen of New Zealand, turns onto second street during the women's elite time trials at the UCI Road World Championships cycling races in Richmond, Va on Tuesday, Sept 22, 2015. — AP

## KIWI VILLUMSEN FINALLY CLAIMS TIME TRIAL GOLD

### DEFENDING CHAMPION BRENNAUER TAKES BRONZE

**RICHMOND:** New Zealand's Linda Villumsen powered to victory in the road cycling world championship individual time trial on Tuesday, claiming the title that had always eluded her. Twice runner-up and three-times a bronze medalist, Villumsen finally got to the top of the podium with a time of 40 minutes 29.87 seconds over the challenging 29.9 km course.

Dressed all in black and riding a stealth black bike, Villumsen had looked set for a commanding victory until Dutchwoman Anna van der Breggen provided a late fright, crossing 2.54 seconds behind to take the silver.

Defending champion Lisa Brennauer of Germany had to settle for the bronze. "I was getting used to being second and third and fourth and fifth but then it was just a day where every-

thing went my way and I started to believe maybe halfway through," said Villumsen. "I just gave what I could and felt really good all the way. I felt maybe this was my day."

Danish-born Villumsen won her first bronze medal competing for Denmark at the 2009 worlds and the next four years won medals for New Zealand, silver in 2011 and 2013 and two more bronze in 2010 and 2012. The 30-year-old signaled her gold medal intentions early - going out in the last wave, Villumsen went on the attack and by midway had the best time by nearly 11 seconds.

Not satisfied, Villumsen stormed through the last kilometers coming home with a 26-second lead with only eight riders still on the course. "I really can't believe it. It is an incredible feeling,"

said Villumsen. "It's difficult being on the finish line and nearly there and not quite there.

"But it all played out my way today. "Usually I fade out a little bit but today I was stronger at the distance. When I was halfway and I felt I wasn't empty, I still had something in the tank, I was, okay, this is going well." For much of the day it appeared 42-year-old American Kristin Armstrong might write the feel-good ending. Coming out of retirement for the chance to race at home, the two-time defending Olympic champion in the discipline set the early target of 40:50.45. Just the second rider out onto the course, the 2006 and 2009 world champion waited and watched for over three hours before the final riders challenged her time and pushed her off the podium into fifth place. — Reuters



**LONDON:** Fiji's centre Vereniki Goneva (left) tackles England's centre Sam Burgess (right) during a Pool A match of the 2015 Rugby World Cup between England and Fiji at Twickenham stadium in south west London. — AFP

## SAM CANE 'CENTRAL' TO ALL BLACKS LONG-TERM FUTURE

**LONDON:** The rapid elevation of 23-year-old Sam Cane to captain New Zealand against Namibia at London's Olympic Stadium is the latest chapter in the All Blacks blueprint for the future. He's not earmarked as the next first choice captain after the talismanic Richie McCaw finally retires but he will be the one after that in coach Steve Hansen's vision which requires constant forward planning. "It's a great opportunity to future proof," Hansen said as he made wholesale changes to his starting line up for their second Pool C match against minnows Namibia.

The position of All Blacks captain ranks as probably the second-most important role in rugby-obsessed New Zealand behind the prime minister. The skipper is expected to uphold the team's phenomenal record as one of the most successful sports teams in the world with a 76 percent winning rate from 532 Tests over more than 120 years. The 12 changes to face Namibia, which meant starting an almost second XV against the southern Africans, is Hansen's way of making sure all of his squad get World Cup game time and he has cover for any eventualities ahead.

Kieran Read is the captain in waiting behind McCaw and if the defending champions suffer another horror run of injuries- they lost three fly-halves in the 2011 World Cup-then Cane is the insurance policy.

"If you look at the immediate future Rico (McCaw) will come back and be the leader and then after that you've got people like Kieran Read likely to be the next full-time guy. After that, you're saying who's going to drop in. "He's seen

probably two of the best leaders in world rugby pretty close up in Rich and Reado so he's had a great apprenticeship."

### 'Right temperament'

Hansen, always keen to cover all possibilities, has blooded 37 All Blacks in the past four years of whom 14 have survived to make the World Cup. Cane was one of the first he brought in as a 20-year-old in 2012 to be the upside understudy to McCaw. Covering for the All Blacks figurehead meant most of his 25 Tests have been off the bench but off the park the All Blacks immediately recognized him as holding leadership credentials. Cane was promoted to the team leadership group



**New Zealand's flanker Sam Cane**

after only a year in the side, a rare honor for a player unable to command a regular starting berth. "I just think he's got the right temperament and playing skills," said Hansen. "In the heat of battle he's a clear-headed young fellow and to me that's mental fortitude to be able to stay on task when everything around you is imploding. "You can't lead if you can't have the ability under pressure to lead so you are looking for that."

Cane admitted to being surprised at being tapped to replace McCaw as both flanker and captain. He knew Hansen intended big changes for the Namibia match and was only hoping to get some game time after playing 16 minutes off the bench against Argentina. "I was hoping, with the short turnaround, it will be great to get a start and he (Hansen) said you'll be starting and you'll also be captain. It took me back a little bit," Cane said. "Over the last couple of years I've grown comfortable in the leadership role and enjoy that part of it and enjoy having a say in what goes on in the team and how to make it better."

The appointment of the 67th All Blacks captain was applauded by the team who say there is immense respect for Cane who now captains the Chiefs in Super rugby after joining the squad as a 17-year-old. Scrum-half TJ Perenara, who also played with Cane in New Zealand age-group sides, said it was no surprise: "I always saw potential in him to be captain. In all the teams I've been in with him he's always had a leadership role." Beauden Barrett, a member of the successful 2011 Junior World Championship side with Cane, described him as "a natural leader." — AFP



## ZAIN SPONSORS KUWAIT'S NATIONAL JET SKI TEAM FOR FIFTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, announced its main sponsorship of the Kuwait National Jet Ski team for the fifth consecutive year. The company's sponsorship will extend during the team's participation in the upcoming World Jet Ski Championship 2015 that will be held early October in the United States. Zain expressed its utmost confidence in the talents of the Kuwaiti youth. The company's officials were present with the team in Kuwait International Airport before their departure to the United States, where they expressed Zain's wishes of the best of luck to the team on their upcoming participation in the World Jet Ski Championship.

Zain's sponsorship falls under its solid Corporate Social Responsibility strategy towards the youth and sports sectors as well as supporting Kuwaiti athletes. The company further expressed its keenness on encouraging Kuwaiti athletes to represent Kuwait in the various internationally renowned championships. The National Jet Ski team is authorized by the Kuwait

Sea Sport Club to officially represent Kuwait in regional and international Jet Ski championships. The team champions won a number of prominent titles during past participations, most notably many first place titles of last year's World Jet Ski Championship, held in the United States.

The company expressed its pride in all National teams that raise the Kuwaiti flag high by achieving top international titles, and it further confirms its commitment towards Kuwaiti champions, which resembles the company's endless confidence of the competencies of these young athletes and their capabilities in excelling in different fields.

As a leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, Zain is constantly looking to identify and support excellence across the sports sector. The company will continue to put Kuwaiti National teams and individual athletes at the forefront of its priorities and pledges to continue motivating them to achieve all the recognition they deserve.