

## Sports

# Wales unchanged for Ireland as Williams declared fit

## Victory over Ireland would ensure record 6 Nations clean sweep of Gatland's reign

**CARDIFF:** Warren Gatland yesterday named an unchanged Wales team for his final Six Nations game in charge, full-back Liam Williams having overcome a right shoulder 'stinger' injury.

It will be Gatland's 50th Six Nations match with Wales, with the Kiwi coach slated to step down from his post following this year's Rugby World Cup in Japan. Wales head into Saturday's match at Cardiff's Principality Stadium as the only unbeaten team in the Six Nations tournament with four victories from four played, part of a 13-match unbeaten streak.

Victory over Ireland would ensure a record third Six Nations clean sweep of Gatland's reign following Grand Slams in 2008 and 2012, and a first Six Nations title since 2013. The Irish, however, can still win the title should they beat the Welsh and Scotland be victorious over England in Saturday's final game.

"We've named an unchanged squad and rewarded the players for the last couple of outings and the last couple of victories," said Gatland, who took over as Wales coach at the end of 2007. "These players are on a very good run, they are a hugely impressive group and they deserve to be going into the final weekend with everything to play for."

"It is a great reward for them for the hard work they have put in and we are all looking forward to what is going to be a huge game."

Leaving the Wales set-up along with Gatland after the World Cup will be respected assistant coaches Shaun Edwards, Rob Howley

and Robin McBryde, among others. And the New Zealander admitted that tomorrow would likely prove emotional. "For a number of us as coaches this is our last Six Nations game and the fact that it is in Cardiff is extra special," he said. "There is bound to be a bit of emotion on Saturday and that is something to embrace."

Captain Alun Wyn Jones will equal Welshman Gethin Jenkins' total Test appearance record as he moves to 134 caps (125 Wales, nine British and Irish Lions) and to joint fifth in the overall world Test appearance list.

Jones again packs down with Adam Beard in the second row, with Rob Evans, Ken Owens and Tomas Francis continuing together in the front row, as Josh Navidi, Justin Tipuric and Ross Moriarty combine in the back row.

Gareth Davies and Gareth Anscombe are named at half-back with Hadleigh Parkes and Jonathan Davies in the centre. Josh Adams, George North and Liam Williams once again comprise the back three for Wales.

Williams had been an injury doubt after going off injured in last weekend's 18-11 victory over Scotland. But the Saracens full-back has shaken off that knock, sustained in a tackle, to be declared fit. Elliot Dee, Nicky Smith and Dillon Lewis provide the front-row cover on the bench with Jake Ball and Aaron Wainwright completing the forward contingent. Aled Davies, Dan Biggar and Owen Watkin provide backline cover.

Wales team to play Ireland in the final round of Six Nations matches at Cardiff's



**EDINBURGH:** File photo shows Scotland's number 8 Josh Strauss (2L) is tackled during the Six Nations international rugby union match between Scotland and Wales at Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh on March 9, 2019. —AFP

Principality Stadium on Saturday (kick-off 1345 GMT):

Liam Williams; George North, Jonathan Davies, Hadleigh Parkes, Josh Adams; Gareth Anscombe, Gareth Davies; Ross Moriarty, Justin Tipuric, Josh Navidi; Alun Wyn Jones

(capt), Adam Beard; Tomas Francis, Ken Owens, Rob Evans.

Replacements: Elliot Dee, Nicky Smith, Dillon Lewis, Jake Ball, Aaron Wainwright, Aled Davies, Dan Biggar, Owen Watkin Coach: Warren Gatland (NZL). —AFP

## Skateboard whizz-kid Brown chooses Britain in Olympic blow to Japan

**TOKYO:** Ten-year-old skateboarding sensation Sky Brown, who had been a medal hope for Japan at next year's Tokyo Olympics, yesterday opted to qualify under the British flag. The pint-sized YouTube smash, born to a Japanese mother and a British father, told AFP she had taken the decision because Britain offered a more relaxed approach, given her tender years.

"I chose to compete for Britain because they told me 'Have fun, there's no pressure!'—and I feel like that's the best way for me to skate my best," said Japan-based Brown, the world's youngest professional skateboarder.

"I want to work hard and try my best, but I mostly skateboard for fun—it's my happy place." Japanese skate officials struggled to match Britain's technical know-how and structure, leaving Brown to make a difficult choice—and one which could potentially cost the Olympic host nation a medal.

"It would be really cool to qualify (for Britain's Olympic team)," said Brown, who is also a professional surfer and has just become Nike's youngest athlete. "It's really cool that the Olympics will be in Japan because it's my home, it's where I was born," added Brown, who lives in Miyazaki, southern Japan. —AFP

## England drop Cokanasiga as Jones rings changes for Scotland

**BAGSHOT:** Joe Cokanasiga has been dropped by England coach Eddie Jones for tomorrow Six Nations finale against Scotland at Twickenham. The powerhouse wing produced a man-of-the-match display in England's 57-14 thrashing of Italy as he rampaged around Twickenham last weekend, with former England coach Clive Woodward comparing the Fiji-born flyer to New Zealand great Jonah Lomu.

But Cokanasiga was not even named on the bench for the Calcutta Cup clash against Scotland with fellow wing Jack Nowell, the man he came in for last weekend, returning after a shoulder 'stinger' injury in one of four changes made by Jones to his starting XV.

Jones said leaving the four-times capped Cokanasiga out completely was all part of his plan for the 21-year-old's future development ahead of this year's World Cup in Japan. "Joe's a good, young player and we're looking after him," Jones told reporters at England's training base in Bagshot, southwest of London, on Thursday.

"He'll feature very strongly in our plans for the future, but we just feel this week that Jack Nowell is our best player in that position. "He (Cokanasiga) is a young player and we don't need to rush him. We'll bring him through carefully and he's got a long career ahead of him."

The Australian added: "We've got a good plan in place for him. He'll be

ready by the World Cup." Elsewhere Henry Slade returns in the centres to partner Manu Tuilagi. Ben Te'o drops to the bench, with Jones opting for a more traditional midfield balance of guile and strength following last week's power-packed duo.

There are also two changes in the pack, with Mark Wilson back at blind-side flanker instead of Brad Shields and prop Ben Moon returning in place of Ellis Genge. Ben Youngs will make his 85th appearance to surpass the England record for a scrum-half held by Danny Care.

If Wales beat Ireland in Cardiff earlier on Saturday they will be crowned champions and complete a Grand Slam. But if the Welsh lose, England will take the title instead if they beat the Scots. "It's the last week of the tournament so it's exciting. It will be a fascinating finish too, with the three teams that can win it and we are playing against one of our most traditional foes in Scotland," said Jones.

"Scotland are a difficult side—they are always at you, they play with a lot of enthusiasm and effort and have got a lot of attacking strings to their bow," he added. Scotland beat England 25-13 at Murrayfield to win the Calcutta Cup last season but they have only beaten Italy so far in this Six Nations and the Scots have not won at Twickenham since 1983.

Whatever happens, England will have had a far better Championship after losing their last three Six Nations matches to finish fifth last season. That was part of a run of five straight Test defeats that included subsequent losses in the opening two internationals of their tour of South Africa.

"The massive improvement for us is in our mindset," said Jones, "whose side would have been going for a Grand Slam themselves but for a second-half collapse during a 21-13 loss to Wales in Cardiff. "That's what's pleased me the most, the clarity with which we can play the game and the way we are becoming adaptable.

"We still have a long way to go don't get me wrong but it's going to be massively important for tomorrow. "But if we impose our game on Scotland, it'll be pretty tough for them." —AFP