

Sports

Is All Blacks' Jordie Barrett better than big brother Beauden?

Barrett family accounts for nearly one-tenth of N Zealand's 31-man Rugby WCup squad

TOKYO: Jordie Barrett's unruffled performance as a makeshift All Blacks fly-half won the praise of coach Steve Hansen — and put him one up on his big brother, two-time World Player of the Year Beauden.

The Barrett family accounts for nearly one-tenth of New Zealand's 31-man Rugby World Cup squad, with playmaker Beauden the eldest brother and the senior All Black compared to Scott, a lock, and utility back Jordie.

But Jordie, youngest of the brothers, earned bragging rights when he took a personal haul of 21 points in New Zealand's 71-9 win over Namibia — bettering Beauden's World Cup high of 16, scored against the same opposition in 2015.

A try and eight-from-nine kicking in the second half — after he missed his first two conversions in the first — left the 22-year-old "elated", according to Hansen. "I think he's pretty excited and happy with how he played, how he did the job that Ian (Foster, the assistant coach) and I wanted him to do, and the team needed him to do," Hansen said.

Jordie has a long way to go to improve on the exploits of his big brother Beauden, who scored a try in the final as New Zealand won the 2015 World Cup and was World Player of the Year two years running.

When told he'd beaten Beauden's personal haul in a World Cup game, Jordie said "that's nice to know" but stressed he wasn't out to get one over on his brother. "That's one thing I don't go there and play for. I'm just happy I found my rhythm off the tee after missing the first two," he said. "It's one thing I've been working at the last couple of months, my goal-kicking, so it's nice it came off."

TWO DAYS TO PREPARE

Jordie's pride in his performance is understandable. He has told how he was often left in tears when the Barretts' competitive instincts took over during games on the family dairy farm in Taranaki. After playing on the right wing against Canada, he was drafted in at fly-half at the last minute for the Namibia game, after being given just two days to prepare.

Given he hadn't started at fly-half since university, it was an assured, all-round performance from the youngest Barrett, whose cross-field kick set up the opening try. He stood up to a physical test from the Namibians, made a storming break to create Anton Leinert-Brown's second try and capped his afternoon by diving over for his own score five minutes from time.

Jordie also had to steer the defending champions through some sticky moments when they were just 10-9 up against a willing Namibia team after half-an-hour. "I loved it, loved every minute even in that first 30 when we were up against it, as a good challenge for me mentally to stay in focus, be where my feet are," he said. "I enjoyed today, felt like I could grow into the game as it went on." Hansen, who will step down after the World Cup, said he wasn't sure if Jordie would play fly-half again.

But the All Blacks are on alert for all eventualities after 2011, when injuries to Dan Carter, Colin Slade and Aaron Cruden handed fourth-choice Stephen Donald kicking duties in the final. "We all know he's not a first five-eighth, and I don't know how many Tests he'll play there, because after this tournament I'm not going to be in charge but it's certainly not his number-one position," Hansen said. "So to be able to come out and play like he did, he should be really, really excited and fulfilled and proud." —AFP



TOKYO: File photo shows New Zealand's fly-half Jordie Barrett (C) is tackled by Namibia's fly-half Helarius Kisting (L) during the Japan 2019 Rugby World Cup Pool B match between New Zealand and Namibia at the Tokyo Stadium in Tokyo on October 6, 2019. —AFP

Routes to Rugby WCup q-finals or the plane home

TOKYO: Heading into the last round of pool games at the Rugby World Cup, only two teams have already booked their quarter-final places: England and France. Some pools are all over bar the shouting, in others there's still all to play for. AFP looks at the various scenarios as teams strive for that last-eight spot.

POOL A

With Ireland, Scotland and Japan all battling for two places, this is the most competitive pool. If Japan beat Scotland on Sunday, they will qualify for their first ever World Cup quarter-final, topping the pool and probably giving themselves another crack at the Springboks — a repeat of the "Miracle of Brighton" game in 2015. If Ireland beat Samoa on Saturday with a bonus point for four tries, they have definitely qualified. Scotland need a bonus-point win over Russia on Wednesday, and they must then beat Japan while preventing the Brave Blossoms from getting a defensive bonus point for losing by seven points or fewer.

There is a scenario in which all three teams finish on 15 points: Ireland beat Samoa without a bonus point, Scotland beat Russia with a bonus point and then score four tries in a narrow win over Japan — meaning both teams get a bonus point. In a two-way scenario, it is the team that won the match between them that proceeds. But this would be a three-way scenario where every team has won one and lost one. In this case, the two teams with the best points difference would qualify. Currently, Japan and Ireland have a much better points difference, but Scotland play bottom-placed Russia next and are likely to improve their tally.

POOL B

Pool B is pretty well decided, with superpowers New Zealand and South Africa virtually assured of taking first and second place respectively, barring miracles from Italy in their last match against the All Blacks. A victory or draw by New Zealand against Italy puts the defending champions through as pool winners.

South Africa can all but guarantee a quarter-final berth with a bonus-point win against minnows Canada today. There is one extremely unlikely scenario in which all teams can end up with 15 points (South Africa get that bonus-point win against Canada, then Italy run in four tries in a narrow victory against the All Blacks). Again, it would come down to points difference and New Zealand and South Africa are currently 115 and 70 points ahead of Italy respectively.

POOL C

Much more clear-cut. England and France have qualified, and all that remains to be decided is who wins the group. That will be fought out when they meet in Yokohama on Saturday. The winner will play the runner-up of Pool D — almost certain to be Australia. But the runner-up in the pool may not be too despondent as they will go into the other half of the knock-out draw from the All Blacks, meaning they cannot meet the defending champions until the final.

POOL D

Australia can qualify if they avoid defeat against Georgia on Friday. If Wales beat Fiji on Wednesday, they will also book their last-eight ticket and will need to win against underdogs Uruguay on Sunday to top the pool. Mathematically, Fiji can still qualify but they have to beat Wales comfortably with a bonus point and hope the Welsh lose to Uruguay.

POSSIBLE QUARTER-FINAL LINE-UPS

Saturday 19 October:

Winner Pool C (England/France) vs Runner-up Pool D (Australia/Wales).

Winner Pool B (New Zealand/South Africa) vs Runner-up Pool A (Japan/Ireland/Scotland).

Sunday 20 October:

Winner Pool D (Australia/Wales) vs Runner-up Pool C (England/France).

Winner Pool A (Japan/Ireland/Scotland) vs Runner-up Pool B (New Zealand/South Africa). —AFP

Gatland taking no risks against Fiji

BEPPU: Wales coach Warren Gatland said he's looking at "the big picture" in keeping the core of his top side together for a third run when they play Fiji tomorrow, with fly-half Dan Biggar declared fit. Gatland has made only two changes for tomorrow's match in Oita and said he could not afford to under-estimate Fiji if Wales are to secure top spot in Pool D.

"We're in control of our own destiny," Gatland said as he resisted the chance to experiment further with his unbeaten

side. While some leading contenders for the Webb Ellis Cup have attempted to keep all their players match fit, to cover any eventuality, Wales have selected the same tight five and same backline to start against Georgia, Australia and now Fiji.

The only changes for the Fiji game are Ross Moriarty and James Davies coming in at number eight and openside flanker, with Josh Navidi switching to the blind-side. Fortuitous scheduling has also given Wales a 10-day break following their 29-25 victory over Australia, allowing the 75-Test Biggar time to recover after failing a head injury assessment against the Wallabies.

"It's good having that experience. It's important for us and it's good that we had that break before this game," Gatland said, adding he could not afford

to take any chances against Fiji.

Wales failed to get out of the pool stages at the 2007 World Cup after suffering a shock loss to Fiji which led to the immediate sacking of then coach Gareth Jenkins. Gatland has been in charge since.

Should Fiji cause another upset, it is unlikely to prevent Wales making the quarter-finals but it would leave the Six Nations champions in danger of finishing their pool in second place and a tougher route to the final.

"I'm thinking about the big picture for later in the tournament," Gatland said of his selection consistency and a need to rock Fiji from the kick-off. "We don't want them (Fiji) spoiling the party for us."

"They come out and look like a team that's really excited for the first 20-30

minutes and the more they're in the game, the more they think they can get something out of it and we've got to negate that."

Fiji coach John McKee, who is also putting out his strongest XV, said he will be using the 2007 result as a reference point for his players, describing it as "one of the great Fijian performances."

Scrum-half Frank Lomani recalls that as an 11-year-old he knew that when Graham Dewes scored the match-winning try in the 38-34 victory it was a "big moment" for Fiji that needed to be repeated.

"We want to write something in our history books, and beating Wales is something we have to try to do so that everyone can remember this team," he said. —AFP

Captain Greene still inspiring Canada's Van der Merwe

KOBE: When Canada star DTH van der Merwe glances at the strapping on his left wrist during the World Cup match against his native South Africa today, he will again be inspired by the words 'Captain Greene'.

Trevor Greene was almost killed by a 16-year-old boy who took an axe to his head as he and other Canadian soldiers talked to village elders in Afghanistan in 2006. "As far as Captain Greene goes, we had him speaking to us before the 2011 World Cup," van der Merwe told reporters at the Kobe Misaki Stadium on Monday.

"He's a Canadian rugby player who obviously went to Afghanistan and had the tragic injury. "So just some of the words he said prior to that World Cup, just the things that he had to go through, the struggles in life, is just something that kind of hit home and we decided that we'll name our mascot 'Captain Greene'."

"I wear my wife and three kids on (the strapping) my right hand and Captain Greene on the left, so when I need a bit of inspiration I just look down at that." Van der Merwe will be making a Canada record 15th World Cup appearance on Tuesday and could become only the fifth player to have scored a try in four different World Cups if he scores against either South Africa or Namibia.

The 33-year-old wing, who grew up in Worcester, a hour's drive north of Cape Town, emigrated with his family when he was a teenager. But the much-travelled van der Merwe, who has played club rugby in England, Wales and Scotland, still has relatives in South Africa and visited family there as recently as February.

Japan 'aiming beyond' quarter-finals at WCup

TOKYO: Japan have publicly set themselves the target of reaching the Rugby World Cup quarter-finals — but privately the tournament hosts have far loftier goals. Yuichiro Fujii, Japan's technical chief, insists the Brave



KOBE: Canada's left wing DTH Van Der Merwe (C) takes part in a captain's run training session at the Kobe Misaki Stadium in Kobe yesterday, on the eve of their Japan 2019 Rugby World Cup Pool B match against South Africa. —AFP

'BUCKET LIST'

Van der Merwe added that while playing a match at Newlands in Cape Town had been "one of my bucket list things", facing South Africa would be a good substitute. Canada, still winless at this World Cup, head into today's match with just a six-day turnaround from their 63-0 thrashing by reigning champions New Zealand.

But coach Kingsley Jones, a former Wales back-row, said: "I walked into a party this morning in the changing room — beatbox going, guys smiling. "For me, that's a massive confidence booster," added Jones, the last of

whose 10 Wales caps came when he captained a side thrashed 96-13 by South Africa at Pretoria in 1998.

Meanwhile Canada captain Tyler Ardron, who plays for the Waikato Chiefs in New Zealand, said they were glad to "measure" themselves against the All Blacks and the Springboks, traditionally the two strongest sides in international rugby union. "It's a different level even from Super Rugby," he said. "I play against the same guys every week, but when you put the 15 best of them on the field at the same time, that pace and physicality is impressive." —AFP

Blossoms are looking to go even deeper if they reach the knockout stage for the first time.

Jamie Joseph's side have won three games, including a stunning 19-12 upset of Ireland, to top Pool A and if they can clinch one of the two quarter-final spots they would likely face South Africa or defending champions New Zealand.

While few would expect them to progress any further, Fujii told Japanese media on Monday: "Our target is the last eight but we're aiming beyond that. If we finish top, we probably get South Africa. The coaching staff are looking at how we can bump them off."

Once tournament pushovers, Japan famously caused one of sport's greatest shocks by toppling two-time champions South Africa 34-32 at the 2015 World Cup

— an astonishing result that was recently made into a movie called "The Brighton Miracle".

But the Springboks pummeled the Japanese 41-7 in a World Cup warm-up game in Kumagaya last month in their first meeting since that humiliating loss on the English south coast.

Japan lock Uwe Helu insisted Monday that the Pacific Nations champions still had to complete the job by beating Scotland this weekend in the biggest game in the country's rugby history.

"Of course there's pressure and for me what we've been doing so far is not going to be good enough," said the beefy second row. "We need to be great." If Japan advance, they would play their quarter-final in Tokyo on October 19 or 20. —AFP