

Sports

Reinach sets World Cup hat-trick record as Springboks thrash Canada

It's a game we've really targeted: Ardron

KOBE: South Africa's Cobus Reinach scored the fastest hat-trick in Rugby World Cup history as the Springboks all but assured themselves of a place in the quarter-finals with a 66-7 hammering of Canada in Kobe yesterday.

The Springboks ran in 10 tries, including seven in a first-half that featured scrum-half Reinach's 11-minute treble. That was quicker than Australia fullback Chris Latham's 25-minute hat-trick in a 142-0 thrashing of Namibia at Adelaide during the 2003 World Cup.

South Africa led 47-0 at the break against an out-classed Canada, who had to play more than half the match a man down after replacement lock Josh Larsen was sent off. But Canada, just six days on from a 63-0 loss to reigning champions New Zealand, avoided a whitewash thanks to flanker Matt Heaton's try.

This bonus-point victory should see two-time world champions South Africa into the last eight after an opening Pool B defeat by the All Blacks, with hosts Japan — who stunned the Springboks 34-32 at the 2015 World Cup in England — now looming as possible opponents.

"It was scrappy in stages but I can't moan about 10 tries," said Springbok coach Rassie Erasmus. "Obviously they got a red card that made it a little bit easier for us. So overall, not too bad." Canada, who have appeared in every World Cup, have one more chance for a win at this edition when they face fellow minnows Namibia in Kamaishi on Sunday, a game captain Tyler Ardron described as "hugely important."

"It's a game we've really targeted. We want to put our best performance out and we really want to get a result out of that," said Ardron.

BONUS-POINT SCORE

Erasmus made 13 changes to the side that overwhelmed Italy 49-3 last time out. But they still proved far too strong for Canada, with the Springboks opening the scoring in just the third minute under the closed roof

of the Kobe Misaki Stadium. Quick ball saw them across the gainline, with RG Snyman bursting through on a pass from fly-half Elton Jantjies. The lock was hauled down short of the line but the ball came back to outside centre Damian de Allende, one of two Springboks to keep his place in addition to captain Siya Kolisi, for a try under the posts.

Jantjies then kicked the first of eight successful conversions. More good handling saw flanker Kwagga Smith send in left wing S'busiso Nkosi at the corner. Then came Reinach's hat-trick, spanning the 10th-21st minutes. It started with a superb solo effort, the scrum-half breaking from a ruck inside his own 22, chipping over the last defender and regathering before sprinting clear. Snyman and fellow lock Franco Mostert then combined to send in Reinach, capitalising on some weak tackling, for the bonus-point score.

And with Canada reeling, Reinach had his third try. Jantjies's cross-kick was pulled down by Warrick Gelant, the wing finding de Allende who in turn released the onrushing Reinach.

Gelant himself went over in the corner after a fine pass from Jantjies. A spirited Canada, roared on by a sporting crowd, then came close to a try. But South Africa-born left wing DTH van der Merwe, making a Canada record 15th World Cup appearance in his first Test against the Springboks, knocked on fly-half Peter Nelson's cross-kick just metres out.

ROLLING MAUL

Canada's night went from bad to worse when English referee Luke Pearce showed Larsen a red card for a shoulder charge to the neck of Springbok prop Thomas du Toit. And on the stroke of half-time, Frans Steyn scored his first Test try in seven years.

But the biggest cheer of the night came when Canada prevented a whitewash in the 46th minute. Canada captain Tyler Ardron won a line-out and set up a rolling

three games," said Jones after England's 39-10 victory over Argentina.

SOUTH AFRICA

The Springboks gave a decent account of themselves in their 23-13 defeat by New Zealand, and a solid pack built around foraging prop Steven Kitshoff, hard-hitting lock Eben Etzebeth and barn-storming number eight Duane Vermeulen will pose problems for any team.

Flanker Pieter-Steph du Toit more than lived up to his billing as one of the world's best current crop of players by going toe-to-toe with an All Black back-row featuring the touted Ardie Savea and Kieran Read. A second-string team saw off African neighbours Namibia 57-3 before a convincing 49-3 win over 14-man Italy, their potential rivals for the Pool B runners-up spot. Coach Rassie Erasmus has been able to alternate two teams, keeping his troops fresh for a quarter-final likely to be against the winner of Pool A, either Ireland, Scotland or Japan.

WALES

The Six Nations champions opened their account with an emphatic 43-14 victory over Georgia, a team that has never beaten a Tier One nation. Warren Gatland's team then fronted up in what looks set to be the Pool D decider, edging Australia 29-25 in a Tokyo thriller.

The Welsh were outscored three tries to two, but raced to a 23-8 half-time lead and resisted a strong second-half fightback from the Wallabies. Ultimately, a drop-goal apiece from Dan Biggar and his replacement Rhys Patchell were the difference in a result that set up Wales as likely pool winners.

Gatland's squad are currently enjoying a nine-day break before taking on Fiji, who are all but eliminated, today. They will take on Uruguay in their final match after a four-day turnaround from Fiji.

AUSTRALIA

Even coach Michael Cheika has admitted that discipline is a problem for Australia after two yellow cards and 12 penalties against Uruguay. The Wallabies have also been struggling to retain the ball, suggesting they are not yet title material. But for all their faults there is enough to like about the Wallabies to say they are capable of going deep into the play-offs.

They have scored 16 tries in three matches, six by wingers, three by centres and one from fullback, showing they are capable of striking out wide.

FRANCE

France have already won a play-off place but even

Moriarty admitted it would be a "tough" encounter against the Pacific islanders. "We've watched the Fiji games and done our analysis on what we have to do — defence, close them down, and we know what to do on attack to get points on the board," McBryde, who ends a lengthy tenure as Wales assistant coach to move to Leinster after the World Cup, said the 10-day break since the tense 29-25 win over Australia had given the team a chance to recharge.

'LOT OF PATIENCE'

There were no injury concerns after fly-half Dan Biggar was fully cleared of any lingering issues after failing a head injury assessment in the Wallabies match. The calmness now in the Wales camp contrasts with the turmoil five days before their first match when attack coach Rob Howley was sent home amid gambling allegations.

Head coach Warren Gatland said then it was "tough" but they had to move on, with Stephen Jones — who played in the shock loss to Fiji that ended Wales' 2007 campaign — rushed in as Howley's replacement.

"We're in a better place than we have been," McBryde, the forwards coach said, as he singled out the Fiji scrum as an area to be targeted. "They're big men. Collectively, we have to work well and match them. We're not taking anything lightly and that's an area we've been focusing on after the first two games.

"When you look back to 2007, we know if we give them any opportunities, they are good enough to take them." Fiji coach John McKee said the hard and fast surface would suit his free-running Pacific islanders "but they will have to play with a lot of patience" to break down Wales.

Should Fiji repeat their heroic effort of 12 years ago, McKee was in no doubt it would "bring the nation to a halt



KOBE: South Africa's scrum-half Cobus Reinach runs to score a try during the Japan 2019 Rugby World Cup Pool B match between South Africa and Canada at the Kobe Misaki Stadium in Kobe yesterday. — AFP

maul, with wing Jeff Hassler just short. But openside flanker Heaton eventually forced his way over for a try converted by Nelson. There was still time, however for

three more Springbok tries, including a first in Tests for Damian Willemse, only recently arrived in Japan as a replacement for the injured Jesse Kriel. — AFP

How they rate: Top teams' progress at the Rugby World Cup

TOKYO: As the Rugby World Cup nears the end of the pool stage, AFP looks at the leading contenders to lift the Webb Ellis Cup on November 2.

NEW ZEALAND

With wins over South Africa, Canada and Namibia, defending champions New Zealand remain the team to beat as they head towards the knockouts.

They are not yet the complete package and struggled with their handling during a high-paced game against Canada in the clammy atmosphere under the roof in Oita. They were also off-key in the opening half-hour against the amateurs of Namibia.

But they remain dangerous in all areas, with a wide variation in their attacking options: scoring through the middle and out wide, and with tries coming from delicately placed kicks, set-piece moves and turnover ball.

They have also been scoring in bursts, seizing control against South Africa with 17 points in five minutes midway through the first half and putting 14 points on Canada within the first seven minutes.

ENGLAND

England's path through the Rugby World Cup has been compared to a game of Donkey Kong — each match is a level up, starting with the United States and Tonga, then Argentina, France and next the quarter-finals. So far, Eddie Jones's men have negotiated all the barrels and fireballs that have come their way, without really hitting top gear but underscoring their status as second favourites after the All Blacks.

England have an embarrassment of riches in the back three, a crashing outside centre in Manu Tuilagi and the effective "dual playmaker" system with Owen Farrell and George Ford at 12 and 10. Up front, England have nimble flankers and a rampaging number eight in Billy Vunipola, a strong second-row and a powerful scrum. The question is: how high can they try?

It's already a better showing than their woeful first-round exit on home soil at the 2015 World Cup, a showing that saw Australian coach Jones put in charge. "We're exactly where we wanted to be — we're 15 points after

Wales talk bubble trouble for Fiji

OITA: Wales have withdrawn into their own bubble ahead of today's must-win Rugby World Cup match against Fiji, saying they have done their homework on their dangerous opponent. As a powerful typhoon charts course for Japan, Wales are in calm seas, claimed forwards coach Robin McBryde.

Wins over the unpredictable Fiji and minnows Uruguay would see the Six Nations champions qualify top of Pool D and set up a quarter-final with France or England. "We've created a bubble again," McBryde said Tuesday as Wales shut out distractions on the eve of the match in the southern Japanese city of Oita.

"Historically, we always get stronger the more time we spend with each other in that bubble. The environment we're able to create allows individuals to improve their game. "We're aware of Fiji's individual threats but we have had a collectiveness about our preparation. Hopefully that will be reflected in the performance." Number eight Ross Moriarty, promoted to the starting XV after featuring on the bench in the first two games, said they had undertaken close analysis of Fiji.

Wales suffered the consequences of taking Fiji lightly at the 2007 World Cup, losing their pool match which cost them a place in the quarter-finals. But in Japan they have named near-enough their top line up after noting how Fiji ran Australia close in their first match.

After a shock loss to Uruguay with a short turnaround, Fiji returned to their explosive best against Georgia and

coach Jacques Brunel has admitted their three-from-three record in Pool C has been far from impressive, and they will need a big improvement when they face also-unbeaten England for first and second place next weekend.

The famous Gallic flair has produced some scintillating tries with the outside backs running incisive angles and producing precision offloads, but there have also been long periods filled with unforced errors and an inadequate set piece. From 20-3 up against Argentina they hung on to win 23-21. Against Tonga, they led 17-0 and again scraped home 23-21. Between these two games, they showed they could finish strongly with three late tries against the USA to go from 12-9 to 33-9 in the last 14 minutes.

If they cannot up their consistency, it is difficult to see Les Bleus going much past the quarter-finals.

IRELAND

Ireland arrived in Japan top of the World Rugby rankings and launched their Pool A campaign with a resounding 27-3 win over old rivals Scotland. But a shock 19-12 defeat by hosts Japan left Ireland needing to make history if they were to be crowned world champions for the first time, as no side has lifted the Webb Ellis Cup after losing a pool match.

A lacklustre and injury-hit Irish side then beat Russia 35-0 but only secured a four-try bonus point in the final quarter. They now need a bonus-point win over Samoa in their final pool match on Saturday to be sure of a quarter-final place.

JAPAN

Hosts Japan set themselves the bold target of reaching the World Cup quarter-finals for the first time. Though few would have put big money on the Brave Blossoms actually getting there, they find themselves on the brink of doing just that.

After overpowering Russia 30-10 in their Pool A opener, Jamie Joseph's side pulled off the shock of the tournament by stunning Ireland 19-12. A 38-19 victory over Samoa last weekend sets up the biggest game in Japanese rugby history against Scotland in Yokohama on Sunday.

The Scots will not relish facing a home side who attack with such dizzying speed and defend with the sort of tenacity they showed against a shell-shocked Ireland. Japan's 'Miracle of Brighton' — a breathless 34-32 win over South Africa four years ago — was the biggest upset in World Cup history.

Beating Ireland and Scotland to achieve a quarter-final spot would top even that. But who would bet against Japan now? — AFP



OITA: Fiji's scrum-half Nikola Matawalu takes part in a captain's run training session at the Oita Stadium in Oita yesterday, on the eve of their Japan 2019 Rugby World Cup Pool D match against Wales. — AFP

for two or three day" similar to the lengthy celebrations of the rugby-mad islanders when Fiji won the 2016 sevens Olympic gold medal. — AFP

All Blacks preparing for desperate Italy in 'do-or-die' game

TOKYO: The All Blacks face a desperate Italian side with quarter-final ambitions in their final Pool B match in Toyota City on Saturday, assistant coach Ian Foster said yesterday. The All Blacks are expected to beat Italy to advance to the quarter-finals alongside South Africa, although the Italians could still make the knockout phase if they score four tries and beat New Zealand by more than seven points.

That scenario would give Italian coach Conor O'Shea's team 15 points and leave the All Blacks on 14. "They can still reach the quarter-finals," Foster told reporters at the team hotel in Tokyo. "We're expecting an Italian team to bring everything they've got because it's a do-or-die game for them."

"And if we don't respect that, and don't understand that degree of desperation and intensity that will come, then we'll get smacked." Adding to Italy's desperation is the fact they have a crisis in their front row.

Andrea Lovotti and Nicola Quaglio were both suspended for three weeks following an ugly tip tackle on South Africa's Duane Vermeulen on Friday, while Simone Ferrari (hamstring) and Marco Riccioni (concussion) were both injured in their 49-3 loss. "There's no doubt that they will feel a little bit wounded," Foster said. "They've had a lot of disruptions and probably had a pretty tricky week, balancing players coming in and out."

Foster refused to address any speculation on the composition of New Zealand's side for the clash, with the team having mixed and matched players against Canada and Namibia. They are, however, forecast to field their strongest possible selection against Italy, and Foster said he believed the team would lift a level after they were given a dressing-down by coach Steve Hansen at half-time against Namibia on Sunday. — Reuters

Scots eye Russian springboard to Japan showdown at WCup

HAMAMATSU: Scotland are targeting a bonus-point victory, and nothing less, over Russia today to set up a Pool A showdown with hosts Japan for a spot in the quarter-finals. Coach Gregor Townsend made wholesale changes to the team that beat Samoa 34-0 last week, bringing in 14 players as he attempts to manage his 31-strong squad with only a four-day turnover before the game against Japan, in Yokohama on Sunday.

"We've got two big games coming up," said Townsend. "We've had a long rest into this game." Russia, ranked 20th in the world, have suffered three defeats in their three pool games, going down to Japan (30-10), Samoa (34-9) and Ireland (35-0) to end any slim hopes they had of progressing to the last eight.

But Townsend warned that they were expecting a tough battle in Shizuoka, highlighting Russia's strengths as their improved defence and fitness, solid scrum and territorial kicking game. "It's their last game, they'll throw everything into this," said the ex-Scotland and British and Irish Lions fly-half. "We're expecting as good a performance as they gave against Ireland, or better." Scotland capitulated 27-3 in their campaign opener against Ireland but rebounded to beat Samoa 34-0 to set up these two games crucial to escaping from the pool. And an injury-time fourth try that gifted Japan, shock 19-12 victors over Ireland, a bonus point against Samoa set up the do-or-die showdown against the Scots, should the latter not mess up against Russia. "We have to win our next two games to qualify," was Townsend's blunt assessment. — AFP