

Sports

Kolkata: Birthplace of the Calcutta Cup, and still India's rugby hub

Battered trophy went on to become one of the most famous prizes in rugby

KOLKATA: When England and Scotland play rugby each year, the winner hoists the Calcutta Cup — a relic of the sport's roots in India, and a nod to the city where it is still thriving to this day.

In the 1870s, when the Calcutta Rugby Football Club started charging for drinks, interest among British colonialists waned and it was disbanded leaving 270 silver rupees in the kitty, or so the story goes. These were melted down to make the Calcutta Cup, the exquisite and now battered trophy still contested annually by England and Scotland, with cobras for handles and an elephant perched on top.

While the trophy went on to become one of the most famous prizes in rugby, the sport also survived in Kolkata, as the hot and bustling former capital of British India is now known. Indeed today it is the hub of rugby in India, and doing much good in the deprived city in the process, thanks in part to two British expats who gave up their careers to make Kolkata their home.

THE OTHER CALCUTTA CUP

A big name in Kolkata's sporting scene is the Calcutta Football and Cricket Club (CCFC), its walls festooned with photos of sporting captains of yore. Founded in 1792, it is the oldest cricket club outside Britain, only five years younger than the Marylebone Cricket Club at Lord's, known as the 'home of cricket'.

But the CCFC is not just about cricket. "The 'F' in CCFC is for rugby and not football," points out sports coordinator Saurav Chatterjee, as members play sports in the bar. One of the many trophies in the packed cabinets behind him is none other than the Calcutta Cup.

But this is a different trophy from the more famous

one now housed in the Museum of Rugby in Twickenham, England. Kolkata's own Calcutta Cup, smaller than its namesake, is keenly contested every year by about eight Kolkata clubs, one of several local and national competitions.

Before independence in 1947, winners included British military teams such as the King's Own Regiment. But then home-grown sides including the CCFC, the Police, La Martinere Old Boys and a team from the city's Armenian community took over.

"We have a very huge history here of rugby in Kolkata," said Ryan Galstaun, 37, a member of that community refereeing boys' and girls' sevens in sweltering heat.

'JUST FOR A LARK'

But in recent years there have been two new kids on the scene, Future Hope and the Jungle Crows. Both were started by Brits — a former bank manager and an ex-diplomat — and both have won the city's Calcutta Cup multiple times with teams made up of former street children.

The clubs are also about more than rugby, using the sport to help both boys and girls from Kolkata's poorer areas — of which there are many — on the road towards a brighter future. Paul Walsh, 50, says he started Jungle Crows in 2004 with two compatriots "just for a lark". The other two have moved on but Walsh, from Chester in northern England and now an MBE, stayed.

His Khelo Rugby project involves taking a rugby ball into poor communities, gaining children's trust and helping them in other areas, including giving them money for schooling and training. "You get the odd-



File picture shows John Barclay and the Scotland team with the Calcutta Cup.

shaped ball out, you get the rugby ball out, and it will light up any child's face," Walsh told AFP. "They're interested. So that initial enthusiasm, we just kind of build on that really."

DIRE POVERTY

"My home situation is very bad," said Vicky, 19, who

started playing rugby 10 years ago and is now at college thanks to Jungle Crows, and helping to coach the next generation. As he speaks, a group of children delightedly splatter through the mud playing British bulldog, a rough-and-tumble variant of tag, on a piece of wasteland near the Kolkata port where families live in dire poverty. — AFP

Patriots receiver Brown accused of rape

LOS ANGELES: New England Patriots receiver Antonio Brown was rocked by fresh controversy on Tuesday after being accused of raping his former fitness trainer in a federal lawsuit filed in Florida.

Brown, who signed for the Super Bowl-champion Patriots after being released by the Oakland Raiders on Saturday, was accused of sexually assaulting 28-year-old former trainer Britney Taylor in three separate incidents in 2017 and 2018.

"As a rape victim of Antonio Brown, deciding to speak out has been an incredibly difficult decision," Taylor said in a statement released through her attorneys. "I have found strength in my faith, my family, and from the accounts of other survivors of sexual assault. Speaking out removes the shame that I have felt for the past year and places it on the person responsible for my rape."

Brown later denied wrongdoing in a letter issued through his attorney, claiming that sexual relations between the two had been consensual. "Mr Brown denies all of the accuser's allegations," the statement said. "Any sexual interaction with Mr. Brown was entirely consensual."

The Patriots issued a statement Tuesday night saying they had already been contacted by the league. "We are aware of the civil lawsuit that was filed earlier today against Antonio Brown, as well as the response by Antonio's representatives."

"We take these allegations very seriously. Under no circumstances does this organization condone sexual violence or assault. "The league informed us that they will be investi-



GLENDALE: File photo taken on August 15, 2019 Wide receiver Antonio Brown #84 of the Oakland Raiders warms up before the NFL preseason game against the Arizona Cardinals at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona. New England Patriots receiver Antonio Brown was rocked by fresh controversy on Tuesday after being accused of raping his former fitness trainer in a federal lawsuit filed in Florida. — AFP

gating. We will have no further comment while that investigation takes place."

In the lawsuit filed in the Southern District of Florida, Taylor alleges that she had first met Brown in 2010 when they attended a bible study class at Central Michigan college together. The NFL star later hired Taylor in 2017, saying he needed her to help him improve his flexibility.

However according to the lawsuit, Brown twice sexually assaulted Taylor during training sessions in June 2017. He later bragged about one of the incidents in profane messages included in the lawsuit.

Taylor terminated her professional relationship following the incidents but several months later agreed to work with him again after he apologised. "Brown reached out to Ms. Taylor, expressing contrition, begging

forgiveness and pleading with her to train him again," the lawsuit reads.

"Ms. Taylor was hesitant but eventually agreed, swayed by his assurance that he would cease any sexual advances." The assurance was false, the lawsuit stated. On May 20, 2018, Brown forced Taylor face down onto a bed and raped her.

"She tried to resist him," screaming and repeatedly shouting "no" and "stop", the lawsuit says. "Brown refused and penetrated her," the suit adds. The lawsuit did not state whether Taylor had taken her accusations to law enforcement. Taylor said in her statement however she would cooperate with the NFL and other agencies. However it stated Taylor had passed a polygraph conducted by a former FBI employee relating to the allegations in her lawsuit. — AFP

independent report into secondary schools rugby released earlier this year.

The report, commissioned by New Zealand Rugby, found that while the game was booming among schoolgirls, boys were increasingly turning to alternative sports such as basketball.

"The numbers of boys playing the game at secondary school is trending downwards at an alarming rate, especially considering the overall secondary school roll has been steadily increasing," the report said.

"Decreasing numbers of players leads to fewer teams and problems in forming meaningful, viable competitions." Figures from School Sport NZ show the number of schoolboy rugby players declined from 25,841 in 2014 to 21,532 in 2018, a fall of 17 percent.

Over the same period, basketball's popularity surged 41 percent from 13,130 to 18,498 participants.

In Auckland, the number of secondary school rugby teams fell from 225 to 181 between 2013 and 2018, a trend Gall said was echoed nationwide.

The report pointed to a range of reasons for the decline, including the "fragmented and confusing" structure of schoolboy competitions, a lack of qualified coaches and concern over the physical nature of the game.

It also said the hyper-competitive nature of the sport, with schools running rugby programmes akin to semi-professional academies, was "creating disquiet and questionable outcomes".

The report's release came shortly after

controversy blew up in the Auckland IA competition, when schools threatened to boycott St Kentigern College over its recruitment policies. The row highlighted many of the concerns in Gall's report, with the wealthy private school accused of using scholarships to lure top talent that delivered it five titles in seven years.

"They're not building from the ground up, from year nine to 11. They're going after the superstars and it's brazen," Napier Boys' High principal Matthew Bertram said at the time. St Kentigern eventually backed down and signed a code of conduct imposing conditions on player recruitment. But Gall said the issue was not confined to one school.

Students cited in the report said that a win-at-all-costs mentality had detracted from their enjoyment of rugby. Gall said a major problem was in-fighting between schools, clubs and provincial unions over control of schoolboy competitions.

He said without good governance it was difficult to adopt policies to make the game more inclusive, encourage participation and place emphasis on values, rather than just winning. "It can't be done on an ad hoc basis, there needs to be more planning and strategic thinking about how to grow the game," he said.

"There needs to be a lot more cooperation... and less self-interest. "There's some provinces where the clubs are at war with each other and at war with the school and the schools are at war with the clubs and the provincial union. That can't go on." — AFP

History of the Rugby World Cup

PARIS: It is odd looking back to imagine that anyone ever thought a Rugby World Cup was a bad idea. But they did.

In a meeting of the International Rugby Board in 1984, both Scotland and Ireland voted against the idea while the English and Welsh each cast one vote in favour and one against, a precursor perhaps to the division which has marked Brexit. Fortunately, Australia, New Zealand, France and South Africa - who were members of the IRB in spite of the apartheid-induced international sporting sanction - all voted in favour and the idea was born. AFP Sports here chronicles the four most recent tournaments, from 2003 through until 2015:

2003

Hosts: Australia

Final: Australia 17 England 20 (aet) (Stadium Australia, Sydney)

Third: New Zealand 40 France 13

After four successive wins for southern hemisphere sides, there was genuine concern that the European sides would never be good enough to challenge. That fear was put to bed by an England team that had developed over several seasons and a year before the tournament had beaten both Australia and New Zealand down under. Martin Johnson's team, heavily reliant on the boot and vision of

Rugby World Cup: Players to watch

PARIS: From a Test match point-scoring stalwart to a World Cup winner, from an Olympic champion to an emblematic leaders who transcends sport as well as a fresh-faced rookie, AFP Sports looks at five players who could turn out to be the headline grabbing names of the Rugby World Cup starting in Japan on September 20:

JOHNNY SEXTON, IRELAND

The reigning World Rugby Player of the Year heads to his third World Cup having featured in only one of four of Ireland's warm-up matches due to injury.

The influential fly-half returned during the victory over Wales in early September to win his 84th cap in the number 10 jersey. Sexton trails only the man he displaced at fly half, Ronan O'Gara, as Ireland's all-time points scorer, with 770. O'Gara scored 1,083 international points. Sexton is joined by Munster's Conor Murray in forming an experienced half-back partnership under head coach Joe Schmidt.

BEAUDEN BARRETT, NEW ZEALAND

The 28-year-old, a world champion four years ago, travels to Japan along with brothers Scott and Jordie, after a difficult few months.

Jonny Wilkinson, eased through to the final where they met an Australia side which had grown during the tournament, beating the All Blacks in the semi-finals. The final was another epic which went to extra-time, Wilkinson sealing an English win with a drop goal just 20 seconds before the end. It remains the only win by a European side in eight tournaments.

2007

Hosts: France

Final: England 6 South Africa 15 (Stade de France, Paris)

Third: Argentina 34 France 10

This tournament of surprises began with Argentina beating hosts France in the opening match and ended with South Africa claiming their second title. In between Fiji beat the Welsh who consequently missed out on the quarter-finals as did Ireland who, like the French, were undone by a bold and exciting Pumas team. In the last eight, Thierry Dusautoir's French side then turned the tables on the All Blacks in Cardiff, the only occasion when New Zealand have failed to reach the semi-finals. The 2003 champions England were a mess at the start of their defence, slipping to a 36-nil thrashing by the Springboks in the pool stage but they recovered to edge Australia in the quarters and France in the semis. The final was tight and there was plenty of debate over a disallowed England try when Mark Cueto was adjudged to have brushed the touchline. Victory for the Boks while Argentina undid the French a second time to take the third-place play-off. —AFP

Barrett, a former two-time World Rugby Player of the Year, has been moved to full-back by head coach Steve Hansen to accommodate for Richie Mo'unga in the number 10 shirt and deal with an injury to Damian McKenzie. Despite persistent doubts about the accuracy of his goal-kicking, Barrett's talent and speed in open play, especially on the counter attack, make him one of the most dangerous players with ball in hand.

LEONE NAKARAWA, FIJI

The 'Octopus', as he is called by team-mate Jale Vatubua, is among four Fiji squad members at the World Cup who also won a gold medal at the Rio Olympics in 2016. The Racing 92 second-row stands 1.98m tall. His ability to use his long arms to off-load the ball can be almost undefendable. His reach also means he is dangerous disrupting opposition ball high in the air at lineouts as well as during driving mauls. With 59 caps, the 31-year-old Nakarawa is one behind Campese Ma'afu as the Pacific Islanders most experienced player heading to Japan.

SIYA KOLISI, SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's first black Test captain will look to follow in the footsteps of Francois Pienaar and Jon Smit by guiding the Springboks to a World Cup title.

The Stormers flanker, who wears the same number six as Pienaar did in 1995, has been a key part of the Rassie Erasmus-led turnaround of the national team after pitiful defeats to Italy and Wales in the space of seven days in November 2016. —AFP

Alarm at NZ's falling schoolboy rugby numbers

WELLINGTON: As the All Blacks chase a third straight World Cup in Japan, the schoolboy rugby competitions that forged many of New Zealand's stars face an "alarming" fall in player numbers amid concerns about elite schools poaching top talent.

Schoolboy rugby is a big deal in New Zealand — senior matches are televised nationally and the rivalries between some schools date back more than a century.

Before Jonah Lomu, Richie McCaw and Dan Carter became All Blacks legends, they were honing their skills for Wesley College, Otago Boys' High and Christchurch Boys' High respectively.

The prestigious Auckland Grammar boasts that 51 All Blacks have emerged from its rugby programme, while Christchurch Boys' High (46) and Wellington College (35) have similar pedigrees.

"It's part of the fabric of New Zealand society, rugby in all walks of life is, and certainly we've got strong traditions in our schools," said Peter Gall, who co-authored an