

Sports

All Black legend Dan Carter in shock Super Rugby comeback

A chance to mentor some young players

WELLINGTON: Two-time All Blacks World Cup winner Dan Carter announced a shock Super Rugby comeback with Auckland Blues yesterday at the age of 38, saying he realized during coronavirus lockdown how much he missed the game. Carter, a three-time world player of the year, has been a free agent since returning to New Zealand in March from Japan, where a virus-enforced shutdown ended his lucrative stint with Kobe Steelers. "Two things from the lockdown that I realized was that I really enjoyed spending more time with my family and that I miss rugby," Carter said. "For me it is a chance to mentor some young players and to give back to New Zealand rugby," he added. The signing comes as New Zealand's Super Rugby teams prepare to start a domestic tournament next week, after COVID-19 halted the southern hemisphere championship in March.

Carter has not played in his homeland since his international retirement in 2015, when he helped the All Blacks seal back-to-back World Cup titles at Twickenham. Blues head coach Leon MacDonald said Carter signed a short-term deal as cover for injured fullback Stephen Perofeta. He joins a squad already containing Beauden Barrett, his successor as All Blacks playmaker. As a replacement player, Carter will reportedly be on a minimum contract worth NZ\$1,800 (US\$1,155) a week, a huge cut from the millions he earned playing club rugby in France and Japan.

"It definitely not about money, he's not getting

rich doing it," MacDonald said. As the Blues already have Barrett - himself a two-time world player of the year - Carter may fill the role of super-sub off the bench. "I have not played for several months so it will take me a little bit of time to get game-ready," he said. Former All Blacks coach Graham Henry had no doubt Carter still had the ability to play at the top level, despite his age. "It's marvelous, he'll add a huge amount of experience but he's also been playing very well in Japan," Henry told Radio New Zealand. All Blacks halfback and former teammate Aaron Smith tweeted: "The goat (greatest of all time) is back in Super rugby!"

MacDonald indicated Carter would be behind Barrett and rising star Otaire Black in the pecking order. "If he gets back into playing form that warrants selection, then he could help us as a utility back in midfield or fullback," he said. Carter played the first of his 112 Tests for the All Blacks in 2003, scored a record 1,598 points during his international career and was the world player of the year in 2005, 2012 and 2015.

He played for French club Racing 92 after retiring from Test rugby following the 2015 World Cup, before signing a two-year deal with Kobe Steelers in 2018. The South Island native already has three Super Rugby titles from his 13-year stint with the Canterbury Crusaders and remains the competition's top points-scorer with 1,708. Often described as the best fly-half to play the game, Carter revealed in his autobiography that

a neutral venue had arisen from a determination to resume competition as soon as possible.

"The uncertainty forced us to come up with a plan that at least allows us to get us back in front of our fans," Garber said. "Clearly given our absence from the sports scene, it was crucial for us to get back." The players union statement meanwhile referenced the wave of protests against police brutality and racism which have erupted across the United States following the death of an unarmed African-American man in police custody in Minneapolis last week. "We recognize that we are all moving forward - as players, as fans, as societies, as a world - into a future that looks much different than the one we envisioned a few months ago," the MLSPA added.

'Semblance of normalcy'

"There are problems we face collectively that are both more urgent, and more important, than competing on the field. "We are grieving, we are fed up, we expect change, and we expect action. This change won't come on the field, but it will come partly through the force and determination of all who seek justice and equality. "We hope our return to the field will allow fans a momentary release and a semblance of normalcy."—AFP



New Zealand's fly half Dan Carter

he turned down an approach from the Blues in 2009 after his Crusaders-supporting grandmother Pam Carter opposed the move.

However, Nanna Carter said yesterday that she had no problems with the latest deal and would support the Blues over the Crusaders when her grandson was playing for the Aucklanders. "I don't care where he plays as long as he

plays," she told stuff.co.nz. "I miss him playing. I'm thrilled. I heard it on the news this morning and I thought 'Good on you Dan'." The Blues claimed the last of their three Super Rugby titles in 2003 and have not made the playoffs since 2011. Once regarded as a regional powerhouse, they have been the worst performing New Zealand Super Rugby team since 2014.—AFP

MLS players union agrees new deal

LOS ANGELES: Major League Soccer and the league's players union reached agreement on a labor deal on Wednesday, clearing the way for a return to play next month following the coronavirus shutdown. The MLS Players Association said the body had ratified a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) that would run through the 2025 season. "Today's vote also finalizes a plan to resume the 2020 season and provides players with certainty for the months ahead," the MLSPA said.

The agreement means Major League Soccer will return next month at a tournament which will be staged at a single location at Disney World in Orlando, Florida. MLS Commissioner Don Garber said on a video-conference call with reporters that the league was expected to suffer a \$1 billion revenue hit from the COVID-19 pandemic. He said the league's decision to restart at

Lakers sweep Celtics, end NBA 2K skid

NEW YORK: After losing each of their first eight matches of the NBA 2K League season, Lakers Gaming finally found a team they could beat. The Lakers topped Celtics Crossover Gaming 2-0 in a best-of-three series on Wednesday, dropping the Celtics to 0-4 on the year. In the night's other Week 5 matches, NetsGC swept Heat Check Gaming 2-0, Cavs Legion GC defeated Pistons GT 2-0, and Kings Guard Gaming edged Blazer5 Gaming 2-1.

The league's top four teams - Raptors Uprising GC (6-0), Warriors Gaming Squad (5-0), T-Wolves Gaming (5-1) and Wizards District Gaming (5-1) - were all idle Wednesday. Originally due to begin its season March 24, the NBA 2K League postponed play because of the coronavirus pandemic. On April 27, the league announced an initial six-week, online-only schedule, with all 23 teams playing eight total

matches from their home markets. Action finally began May 5. Each match is a best-of-three, with the outcome of each three-game series counting as one win or one loss in the standings. The Lakers opened their Wednesday series with an 80-48 win over the Celtics thanks to 44 points and 10 assists from Sten "SAV" Valge-Saar. The Celtics' Albano "oFAB" Thomallari scored 20 points.

SAV put up 26 points and 14 assists as the Lakers closed out the sweep with a 75-67 victory. Antonio "Dweq" Valladares added 22 points and 16 rebounds for the Lakers. oFAB paced the Celtics with 36 points and seven assists, and teammate David "TooxCool" Urena contributed 18 points and 15 boards. Josh "Choc" Humphries racked up 27 points and nine assists for the Nets in a 75-65 triumph over the Heat in Game 1. Kory "Chess" Taylor added 21 points for the Nets, and Aziz "Shuttles" Salem amassed 11 points, 19 rebounds and nine assists. The Heat got 31 points from Glenn "GlennRatty" Wilkerson and 19 rebounds from Juan "Hotshot" Gonzalez. The Nets closed out the series with a 68-65 victory. Choc had 22 points and 15 assists, and Shuttles finished with 20 points and 15 rebounds. GlennRatty poured in 26 points for the Heat.—Reuters