

Sports

'No second chances' as Erasmus names strong Bok team for Italy

'We have to win this to get into the quarter-finals'

SHIZUOKA: South Africa coach Rassie Erasmus warned there were no second chances as he made three changes to the team that lost to New Zealand in their World Cup opener for the "do-or-die" Pool B match against Italy on Friday.

Prop Tendai Mtawarira, hooker Bongsi Mbonambi and lock Lood de Jager all come in for the Springboks' must-win game in Shizuoka.

A second-string Springbok side hammered African neighbours Namibia 57-3 on Saturday, a match for which many of the team that went down 23-13 to the All Blacks were rested.

"This is a do-or-die game for us," Erasmus said. "We have to win this to get into the quarter-finals. The players feel it. I'm sitting here feeling butterflies because we've lost to Italy recently — they will really be up for this."

"Italy will be the really slippery game for us, like Japan was for Ireland," he said, in reference to the World Cup hosts' shock 19-12 victory over the Irish.

Mtawarira, Mbonambi and de Jager replace Steven Kitshoff, Malcolm Marx and Franco Mostert respectively, who are all expected to make an impact after being named on the bench.

Two players drop out from the New Zealand match-day 23 completely with Trevor Nyakane out of the World Cup with a torn calf and Jesse Kriel nursing a hamstring injury.

In a sign of the Boks' approach to the match against Italy, who have beaten Namibia 47-22 and Canada 48-7 in their opening two games, Erasmus named just two

back replacements on the bench.

"Italy have a very good pack and put a lot of effort in their set phases," said Erasmus.

"People may think it is a gamble to have only two back replacements but we want to have plenty of ammunition for what is likely to be a major forward battle. "It's a 23-player game these days and the players who come on will be expected to contribute almost as much in game time as those who start among the front-rows."

"But for this game we are asking the players we have chosen to start to set the tone."

The Springboks have met Italy 14 times before, with South Africa winning 13, although that solitary defeat (in Florence in 2016) was with a team featuring 10 of Friday's Bok selection.

"Italy have had their eyes on this match for a couple of years and will have planned and schemed how to bring us down once again," said Erasmus.

"This is a defining match for them and while we were focusing on the New Zealand game, they will have had their eyes on this one as the key to the quarter-finals for them."

"That means we have to be at our absolute best if we are to beat them — we are at the stage already where there are no second chances. That's a message we have been emphasising to the players this week."

South Africa (15-1)

Willie le Roux; Cheslin Kolbe, Lukhanyo Am, Damian de Allende, Makazole Mapimpi; Handre Pollard, Faf de



SHIZUOKA: Italy's captain Sergio Parisse takes part in a training session at the Kusanagi Sports Complex Ball Game Field in Shizuoka during the Japan 2019 Rugby World Cup. — AFP

Klerk; Duane Vermeulen, Pieter-Steph du Toit, Siya Kolisi (capt); Lood de Jager, Eben Etzebeth; Frans Malherbe, Bongsi Mbonambi, Tendai Mtawarira

Replacements: Malcolm Marx, Steven Kitshoff, Vincent Koch, RG Snyman, Franco Mostert, Francois Louw, Herschel Jantjies, Francois Steyn. — AF

Sexton shakes off injury for World Cup return against Russia

KOBE: World Player of the Year Jonathan Sexton will captain Ireland for the first time after being recalled for their Rugby World Cup match against Russia tomorrow following a thigh injury.

The 34-year-old fly-half missed Ireland's shock 19-12 defeat by hosts Japan in Shizuoka on Saturday, which threw Pool A wide open, with a knock he suffered in the opening 27-3 win over Scotland.

British and Irish Lions star Sexton was one of 11 personnel changes and two positional switches made by Joe Schmidt following a five-day turnaround, in what is the New Zealander's last tournament before he steps down as Ireland coach.

"It's a massive honour. I spoke to Joe this morning, so I only found out myself over the last few hours," Sexton told reporters after Schmidt announced the team yesterday. "I haven't even had a chance to tell my family or anything, but I'm sure they're going to be very proud as well."

The Leinster playmaker added: "It's something that I've thought about since I was a kid, something I've made a lot of decisions around trying to get there one day. "It has taken a while but it was worth the wait and I'm incredibly proud."

"I want to be captain now of a good performance and a good win in a World Cup game, so that's my main focus. "I have a big responsibility in the team anyway, so nothing has changed," insisted Sexton, who said he was also fit enough to resume his role as Ireland's first-choice goal-kicker.

Schmidt, explaining why he had made so many alterations, said: "There might be 13 changes because we do need to make sure everyone is ready and involved as much as possible, to get everyone up to speed."

"It's pretty tough with a six-day and then a five-day turnaround, there's always going to be a bit of attrition. We're looking to freshen it up and give guys an opportunity."

"It's great, because we've got some guys who would



KOBE: Ireland's players take part in a training session at the Steelers Training Ground in Kobe yesterday, during the Japan 2019 Rugby World Cup. — AFP

have been very, very keen to be involved who will get an opportunity tomorrow." Schmidt gave Jordi Murphy an immediate start at No 8, with the back-row having only recently arrived in Japan to replace the injured Jack Conan in the 31-man squad.

"He trained unbelievably well today," Schmidt said. "He is straight off the flight, he got in late Sunday. "We are just asking for him to do the best he can for us. The one thing with Jordi is that you seldom get anything other than that. He's a really good performer for us and we'd have a lot of confidence about him being able to slot straight in."

Meanwhile centre Garry Ringrose and flanker Peter O'Mahony will both be starting their third game in 11 days when Ireland face Russia in what are set to be sweltering conditions under the closed roof of the Kobe Misaki Stadium.

Ringrose will partner the returning Bundee Aki in midfield, with Chris Farrell ruled out due to concussion and Robbie Henshaw still to regain full fitness following

hamstring trouble.

Up front, Ireland will field an all-Munster front-five against Russia. They will now look to beat both Russia and Samoa in their two concluding group fixtures and may well need bonus points from both to be certain of gaining one of the two quarter-final spots on offer from a tightly-contested Pool A.

Ireland will have to make history if they are to be crowned world champions for the first time, as every side that has lifted the Webb Ellis Cup has gone through the tournament unbeaten.

Ireland (15-1)

Rob Kearney; Andrew Conway, Garry Ringrose, Bundee Aki, Keith Earls; Jonathan Sexton (capt), Luke McGrath; Jordi Murphy, Peter O'Mahony, Rhys Ruddock; Jean Kleyn, Tadhg Beirne; John Ryan, Niall Scannell, Dave Kilcoyne. Replacements: Sean Cronin, Andrew Porter, Tadhg Furlong, Iain Henderson, CJ Stander, Joey Carbery, Jack Carty, Jordan Larmour. — AFP

'We want to nail this': All Blacks to show no mercy to Canada

OITA: New Zealand playing Canada may be a mismatch, but for All Blacks captain Kieran Read today's clash in Oita is a vital step towards their target of a third consecutive World Cup. When they last met at the 2011 World Cup — since when the two-time defending champions are unbeaten at the World Cup — it was a 79-15 rout, and an even higher scoreline is on the cards this time.

Read, who featured in the lop-sided game eight years ago, has shown no mercy towards the rugby lightweights, saying this match is about the All Blacks getting it right. "As a captain, we want to nail this game. You want to stay in as much structure as you can but if opportunities present themselves, hopefully the guys can take them," he said, with wings Rieko Ioane and Jordie Barrett given a chance to prove themselves.

The All Blacks made 11 changes to the side that beat South Africa in the Pool B heavyweight clash a week ago, and when the names coming in include Sonny Bill Williams and Ioane, while Ben Smith can only make the bench, it highlights their depth of talent. "You gain confidence, trust of guys alongside you, it builds your game," Read said, when questioned on what the revamped All Blacks

could get out of playing a team like Canada.

"Certainly we want to go out there make sure that individually we're all in a good state. For us now, it's making sure that we just perform to the best of our ability." Smith's exclusion comes as coach Steve Hansen wants to see more from his twin playmakers Richie Mo'unga and Beauden Barrett who will be paired for only the fifth time.

"They haven't played a lot of Test matches together so they just need a bit more time together. I'm not saying it's not clicking or anything. It's just time," Hansen said.

Ioane, who has touched down a remarkable 23 times in 26 Tests, has been overtaken in the All Blacks pecking order by Sevu Reece but in an ominous warning to Canada, Hansen said he is pushing to get his starting spot back.

"We know that he's also capable of playing wonderful rugby and it's important he plays well... Once he does that, and I'm sure he will, the pressure comes back on the selectors," Hansen said. Jordie Barrett, the youngest of the three brothers who will make history as the first sibling trio to start a World Cup match for New Zealand, is another under instructions to set the game alight.

The 22-year-old utility is seen to have a bright future although his impetuosity has at times let him down. "It's not his confidence that he has to get right, it's his understanding. He wants to do everything at 100 miles an hour," Hansen said. "He's got two brothers that are ahead of him and when you're in a contest with your siblings you're always in a hurry because you want to prove not only to yourself but also your siblings and everybody else that you're better than they are." — AFP

Defence coach warns Scotland against Russia relapse at Rugby WCup

KOBE: Scotland's defence coach has insisted the team cannot afford to let their standards slip against Russia after getting their bid for a Rugby World Cup quarter-final place back on track.

The Scots revived their last-eight hopes with a convincing 34-0 bonus-point win over Samoa in Kobe on Monday after starting the tournament with a miserable 27-3 loss to old rivals Ireland.

They now find themselves in what would appear to be a three-way fight with Ireland and Japan for one of the two places in the knockout phase on offer from a tightly-contested Pool A where Samoa may yet have a say in the issue.

Scotland's concluding group match against Japan, whose shock 19-12 win over Ireland threw the pool wide open, in Yokohama on October 13 could be a make-or-break fixture for both sides. But four days earlier, Scotland face outsiders Russia, against whom they are likely to need another bonus-point success if they are to set up a winner-takes-all clash with tournament hosts Japan.

"The reality of where we are is it is knockout now," Scotland defence coach Matt Taylor told reporters at the team hotel on Tuesday. "Every game now is like a quarter-final."

"We have to turn up and play Russia with the right mindset and do a good professional job. Hopefully if we do that, we set ourselves up for a really good game against Japan." The Australian added: "I will be very disappointed if we don't show the same aggression and mindset because we know if we don't show up, or put in a performance like we need to, we are out. — AFP

Japan win great for Rugby World Cup: Schmidt

KOBE: Joe Schmidt admitted Japan's stunning Rugby World Cup win over Ireland was "fantastic for the tournament" — even though he wishes his side had not been on the receiving end of the 'Shock in Shizuoka'.

Four years on from their 'Miracle of Brighton' victory over South Africa at the 2015 World Cup in England, Japan again upset the formbook with a 19-12 defeat of Ireland in Shizuoka last Saturday.

"If it wasn't us that lost the game, I'd say, 'Wow, that's fantastic for the tournament,'" Ireland coach Schmidt told reporters yesterday.

"Everywhere we've gone, the Japanese people have been incredibly excited about the game. They're delighted with us, obviously, and I think loads of interest has been spiked by that."

Japan's victory appears to have set up a three-way contest with Ireland and Scotland for the two quarter-final places on offer from a tightly-contested Pool A.

"It's great for our pool if you're an independent observer because it's thrown the pool wide open and everyone's chasing Japan in our pool now," said Schmidt.

The Ireland boss has made 11 personnel changes and two positional switches to his side for Thursday's match in Kobe against group minnows Russia, with fit-again fly-half Jonathan Sexton, the reigning World Player of the Year, captaining his country for the first time.

Ireland may require bonus points, achieved by scoring four tries in a match, as well as wins against both Russia and Samoa to be certain of making the last eight. But Schmidt warned against forcing the issue.

"We have to stay around our performance-oriented goals, because for us we can't put anything on the scoreboard without getting the things we need to put in place; that we build the pressure or that we create the opportunities from," the New Zealander said.

"I felt the first 20 minutes last weekend was very good, we got the right field position and turned a few balls over which was frustrating. "But we converted two tries on the back of some really good line breaks and maybe that was to our detriment because we kind of stepped back after that and didn't play with the same front-foot. "You can't afford to do that against a quality opposition."

Schmidt, however, revealed his frustration with French official Jerome Garces, a touch judge on Saturday, who will be the referee for the Ireland-Russia match.

"We were penalised for offside four times and we've now got the feedback that three of those were incorrect calls... It's pretty hard to keep getting off the line and onto the front foot when you are getting those calls."

"Two of them were from an AR (assistant referee) who is going to be refereeing us on Thursday, so we know we're going to have to be on our best behaviour."

Tournament rules state roofs on grounds such as the Kobe Misaki Stadium, the venue for Thursday's match, must remain shut for World Cup fixtures.

Sweltering conditions have made ball-handling difficult, with Scotland's 34-0 win over Samoa at the ground on Monday notable for numerous knock-ons by both sides.

"Yeah we watched the game last night and it looked very sloppy," said Sexton, who missed the Japan defeat with a thigh injury. "It's something we're going to have to be mindful of. — AFP