

Sports

Wales open Rugby WCup campaign with six-try win over Georgia

Victory sent out a signal of intent to main Pool D rivals Australia

TOYOTA CITY: Six Nations champions Wales opened their Rugby World Cup campaign with a bonus-point 43-14 victory over Georgia in Toyota City yesterday. The victory not only sent out a signal of intent to main Pool D rivals Australia, who beat Fiji in their opener, but also dispelled any doubts there might have been of a hangover in the Welsh camp over the sending-home of assistant coach Rob Howley amid allegations of illegal betting.

Four slick first-half tries from Jonathan Davies, Justin Tipuric, Josh Adams and Liam Williams ensured the bonus point for Wales, who were given a stern examination by a strong Georgian scrum that came to life in the second period. "It was a good first half for us and we were pretty happy at half-time," said Wales coach Warren Gatland.

"A little bit messy in the second half but the ball was quite slippery out there and it was hard to hold on to it. We scored a few nice tries and we're happy with the bonus point." There were barely two minutes on the clock when centre Davies was played in under the posts after a rocket of a pass by scrum-half and namesake Gareth, decoys Dan Biggar and Hadleigh Parkes bamboozling a leaden-footed defence.

Biggar's conversion surprisingly came back off the posts, but the fly-half redeemed himself with a penalty shortly afterwards. Another well-drilled midfield move saw winger Adams split the defence before offloading to Gareth Davies. The scrum-half was brought down short, but Tipuric was on hand to swoop for the ball and sidestep inside Giorgi Tkhalishvili to run through unmolested for Wales' second try, Biggar converting.

The third came soon after, Adams running in from almost halfway after an inside Biggar pass off a lineout, with the Georgian defence glaringly absent. Biggar hit the extras and it was a point a minute after 22 minutes, the 35,545-strong crowd at a sultry City of Toyota Stadium scenting a rout.

'OUT OF THE BOX'

The sole bright spark for Georgia in a grim first-half display saw a rare break into Welsh territory by hooker Shalva Mamukashvili, Gareth Davies twice on hand with tapdowns to halt the foray. Skipper Alun Wyn Jones, matching Gethin Jenkins' record of 129 Wales caps, and No 8 Josh Navidi were at the heart of the effective Welsh rush defence to nullify the threat from the 'Lelos'.

And it was instead Wales who had the last word of the first 40 minutes, Liam Williams scooping up Jonathan Davies' pass to dot down in the corner, Biggar making no mistake to stretch the score out to 29-0.

The Georgians opened the second-half exactly as coach Milton Haig would have liked them, hooker Mamukashvili bundled over from an attacking line-out for a well-received try that Tedo Abzhandadze converted. Wales roared back with their own driving maul, but fresh-on-the-field Jaba Bregvadze manipulated it to a juddering halt, his dark art spotted by referee Luke Pearce who had no option but to yellow card to the replacement hooker.

A raft of replacements disrupted the flow of the game, enabling Georgia to weather the 10-minute sin-binning without conceding any points. Despite their far more combative half, it was replacement scrum-half Tomos Williams who chased down a George North grubber for Wales' fifth.

Toulon prop Levan Chilachava responded Georgia when he bombed over from short range, but Wales had the last word when North finished well after some neat footwork and an offload from Tomos Williams.

"I think we came out of the box as we went out into the first half but I'm disappointed if I'm honest with the second half," said Jones. "We let a couple of tries in and we didn't really continue in a similar vein. It's a good result but it's plenty to work on." —AFP



TOYOTA CITY: Wales' wing George North scores a try during the Japan 2019 Rugby World Cup Pool D match between Wales and Georgia at the City of Toyota Stadium in Toyota City yesterday. —AFP

Doubt cast on shock Folau rugby league return with Tonga

SYDNEY: Sacked Wallaby star Israel Folau plans a shock return to rugby league, making himself available alongside his brother for Tonga in upcoming Tests against Australia and Britain, the Pacific nation said yesterday.

The devoutly Christian fullback, who has Tongan parents, was fired by Rugby Australia in May after he posted online that "hell awaits" gay people and others he considers sinners, with court action for unfair dismissal pending.

"The chairman of the Tongan National Rugby League, Mr George Koloamatangi, today announced that both Israel and John Folau will play for Mate Ma'a Tonga in the Oceania Cup,"

the Tonga National Rugby League (TNRL) said on Facebook.

Folau, who was set to play a key role for Australia at the ongoing World Cup in Japan before his fall from grace, said he was excited by a return to the game.

"I don't want to bring any of my personal matters into this and I am grateful that the RLIF (Rugby League International Federation) have endorsed my availability," he reportedly said in a TNRL statement. "What I will do now is focus on playing great rugby league and do my talking on the field." Despite his optimism, RLIF deputy chairman Peter Beattie told the Sydney Morning Herald the dual international had not yet been given clearance to play for Tonga. "As a current member of the RLIF board ... I can assure you that this has never been discussed or mentioned around the board table," he added.

Australia's National Rugby League (NRL) also cast doubt on whether he would pull on a Tongan jersey. It said in a report on its website that "it is under-

stood there will be a strong push by members of the board of the Rugby League International Federation to veto the move at an upcoming meeting".

The NRL has previously made clear it was an inclusive sport and Folau would not be allowed to play rugby league in Australia again.

Folau, who grew up in Sydney, began his sporting career in rugby league, making his debut for Melbourne Storm as a teenager in 2007, grabbing the winning try on his debut to telegraph his arrival.

During his meteoric rise, he broke the National Rugby League's record for most tries in a debut season and won rookie of the year. Folau played 90 games in the sport with the Storm and Brisbane Broncos between 2007 and 2010, making eight appearances for Australia before switching to Australian Rules and then rugby union with the NSW Waratahs.

He made his Wallabies debut in 2013 against the British and Irish Lions and went on to win 73 caps before being

sacked. His firing proved hugely divisive. While many were outraged by his views, others, including the Christian lobby, defended his right to free speech. Folau, who made similar offending comments last year, is pursuing court action for unfair dismissal and restraint of trade, with a hearing set for next February. He is seeking up to Aus\$10 million (US\$6.8 million) in compensation, an apology and the right to play rugby union again.

"These guys (Israel and John) are great footballers and bring size, pace and skill to the team," Tonga coach Frank Endacott told reporters. "They will make a huge impact in the team and provide exciting attack options all over the park."

Folau's brother John also used to play for the NSW Waratahs but quit after his sibling was fired. He previously played league for the Parramatta Eels in Sydney. Tonga are set to play Britain in Hamilton, New Zealand on October 26 and Australia in Auckland a week later. —AFP

England look to Mitchell for inside knowledge of USA

SAPPORO: England are set to call upon defence coach John Mitchell's inside knowledge when they face the United States in their second Rugby World Cup match in Kobe on Thursday. The New Zealander was Eagles head coach when they qualified for Japan 2019. He then returned to club rugby in South Africa before joining Eddie Jones's England set-up last year.

England opened their campaign with a 35-3 Pool C win over Tonga in Sapporo on Sunday but Thursday's match in Kobe will be the United States' tournament opener. England scrum coach Neal Hatley said former All Blacks head coach Mitchell's inside knowledge would prove especially useful given England have just a four-day turnaround between matches.

"Obviously having Mitch is handy and his historical knowledge having worked with them just a few short years ago. There are a lot of players he brought through and knows well," Hatley told reporters at England's hotel in Sapporo yesterday.

"The analysis on the USA has already been done because this is their first match," he added. "We have looked at what they did in the Autumn and their Pacific Nations Cup games. Things may get changed on the back of what happened last night but the work has been done."

"It was Tonga's first game last night and this will be America's first game on Thursday. We expect them to come out like Tonga did — fizzing."

As for the short gap between matches, Hatley said: "It's a four-day turnaround, we've just got to get on with it. We've been looking at the combinations potentially but selection is pretty fluid and things change. But we have plans in place."

England were far from their best against Tonga but still secured a bonus-point win without conceding a try to the Pacific islanders. "A scratchy start but a win, a bonus-point win — objective achieved, but plenty to work on," said Hatley.

"Defensively, we were very good, held them to no tries. Ball in hand, where we have been very good, we made a few uncharacteristic errors that we will have a look at."

Meanwhile England back-row Lewis Ludlam, who came off the bench in the 54th minute at the indoor Sapporo Dome to win just his third cap, said: "It was awesome."

"I was really happy to get on the pitch and to get the five points was really good and we're off to a start now and out of the blocks. "I wasn't too nervous, just impatient and excited more than anything. I wanted to get on the pitch, get out there and show the coaches what I can do on a bigger stage," he added.

England found themselves in a physical battle on Sunday, with even powerhouse No 8 Billy Vunipola, son of a former Tonga international, knocked back in the tackle.

"They (Tonga) came flying at us, we knew that was going to be the case pre-game and watching them, they are big hitters," said Ludlam. "I think we coped with that physicality really well, both sides of the ball. Billy got smacked a few times but he also bowled a few people off him so the physicality was good out there." —AFP

Whitfield heads list of Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame inductees

TORONTO: Former triathlon champion Simon Whitfield and diving standout Alexandre Despatie are among this year's class of nine inductees to the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame, the Canadian Olympic Committee announced yesterday.

Whitfield, who announced his retirement in 2013 after 16 years racing for Canada, unexpectedly won the inaugural Olympic triathlon event at Sydney in 2000 and added a silver eight years later in Beijing.

In Sydney, Whitfield was in the middle of the field after the swimming and cycling legs but used his sprint speed to pass the leader, German Stephan Vuckovic, less than 300 metres from the finish line before pulling away for the victory.

Whitfield's triumph is credited with sparking a massive growth in the sport across Canada. Despatie became the first Canadian man to reach an Olympic podium in diving when he won a silver medal in the individual 3m springboard at the 2004 Athens Games. He repeated the feat four years later in Beijing.

Anti-doping body tells Russia to explain 'inconsistencies'

TOKYO: The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) yesterday gave Russia three weeks to explain "inconsistencies" in a cache of laboratory data handed over to investigators, raising the possibility of a fresh ban on the country in the build-up to the Tokyo Olympics.

Russia stands to be declared non-compliant by WADA if it fails to explain why evidence of some positive tests handed over by a whistleblower doesn't show up in data provided by Moscow's anti-doping laboratory in January. If Russia challenges an eventual

Emilie Heymans, who became the first female diver in the world to win medals at four consecutive Olympics, and Christine Girard, who is Canada's first ever Olympic weightlifting champion, rounded out the four athlete inductees.

Girard's bronze medal from the 2008 Beijing Olympics and gold medal from the 2012 London Olympics were awarded several years after the competition when athletes who had initially placed ahead of her were disqualified for doping.

Now a passionate advocate for anti-doping in sport, Girard shares her story and is actively involved in discussions with domestic and international anti-doping advocates.

"These individuals remind us that the Olympic Movement is about more than just victory," COC President Tricia Smith said in a statement. "It's about making an indelible impact on our communities, our nation and the next generation."

The women's ice hockey team that conceded just two goals en route to a gold medal at the 2010 Olympics and women's soccer team that in 2012 won Canada's first Summer Olympic team sport medal (bronze) since 1936 are also being inducted.

Hiroshi Nakamura, who is responsible for the establishment of judo as a competitive sport in Canada and served as head coach at five Olympics is also being inducted.

Jack Poole, who played a key role in bringing the Olympic Games to Vancouver in 2010 as chairman of the bid corporation, and Randy Starkman, an award-

suspension by WADA the case will go to the Swiss-based Court of Arbitration for Sport, whose decision will be binding on sports bodies including the International Olympic Committee.

"Forensic experts have looked at what we got from whistleblowers, what we got from Russia and they noticed some inconsistencies," WADA director general Olivier Niggli told AFP after an executive committee meeting in Tokyo. "Then they studied the differences and this came to a situation where there are some questions that need to be asked and answered." WADA has previously warned that it would take the "most stringent sanctions" if any of the data was found to have been tampered with.

Russian sports minister Pavel Kolobkov said WADA and RUSADA, the Russian anti-doping agency, would look into "inconsistencies". "Digital experts from both sides, who are already in touch, will see what the discrepancies are about and what



Simon Whitfield

winning journalist known for his coverage of amateur sports, will both be inducted posthumously.

The induction ceremony will take place in Toronto on Oct. 23 and individual inductees will be commemorated with murals that will appear in their respective local communities across Canada. —Reuters

they are connected to. As far as we are concerned, we continue to help in any way possible," he said in comments released by his ministry. Russia handed over thousands of files from its Moscow anti-doping laboratory in January, fulfilling a key condition for its reinstatement by WADA last September. RUSADA had been suspended for nearly three years over revelations of wrongdoing including a systematic conspiracy to switch tainted samples at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.

During its suspension by WADA, Russia was allowed by the International Olympic Committee to take part in the 2016 Rio Olympics, but Russian competitors at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Games had to take part under a neutral flag. However, athletics body the IAAF has maintained a ban on Russia since November 2015, although many of its athletes are given special dispensation to compete under a neutral banner. —AFP