

Sports

Canada inspired by Uruguay's shock win at Rugby World Cup

Uruguay cling to their early lead to beat Fiji 30-27

OITA: Uruguay's shock win over Fiji has inspired Canada who are looking for a similar upset when they open their World Cup campaign against Six Nations wooden-spooners Italy in Fukuoka today. Canada came within a whisker of shocking Italy at the 2015 World Cup when they raced to a 10-0 lead before being overhauled 23-18.

After Uruguay clung to their early lead to beat Fiji 30-27 yesterday, Canada reflected on their disappointment of four years ago. "We don't want to go through that heartbreak again," Canada captain Tyler Ardron said, adding there were positives in waiting for nearly a week to have their first game.

"It was quite nice to have that time to watch the other teams and see Italy play a game already. You've got an idea of how they're going to play, but just to make sure your ideas are right and to see what they've changed coming into a World Cup is pretty helpful," he said.

Canada only scraped into the World Cup via the repechage and with a world ranking of 22 they are eight places behind Italy. But the mood in their camp was upbeat with centre Nick Blevins saying an upset "can be done" while fullback Peter Paffrey said they wanted to be "identified as a team that is a nightmare

to play against".

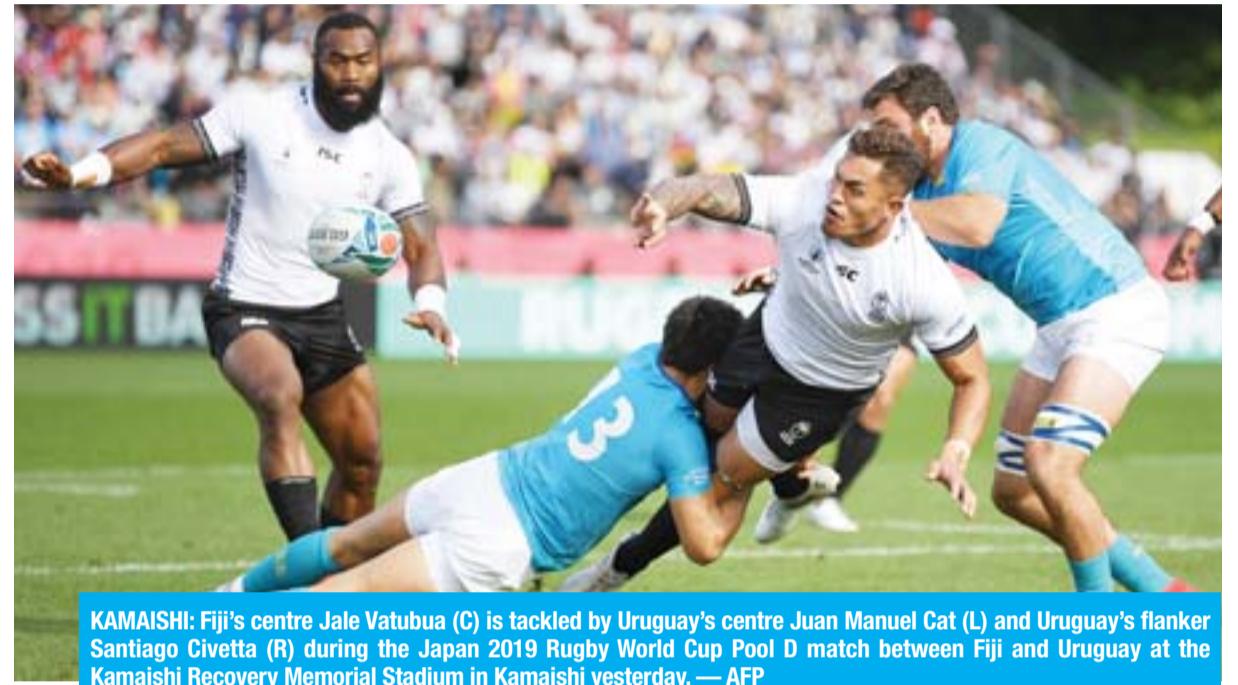
Italy go into the match as Pool B leaders courtesy of their seven-try, bonus-point win over Namibia, putting the Italians a point ahead of tournament favourites New Zealand who only touched down twice in overcoming a much tougher opponent in South Africa.

But the 47-22 scoreline flattered Italy and it was Namibia who finished strongest, although the were too far behind on the scoreboard for their late try to have any serious impact.

With a short turnaround between matches, and against a fresh Canada, coach Conor O'Shea has made 10 changes to the starting line-up, including resting influential captain Sergio Parisse.

"It was a choice we made before the first match to balance out the teams over the two matches. I have confidence in all our players and all our players are worth a place in the team. This is the best team for the match," O'Shea said.

"Sergio wanted to play and that is the same for all the players. Two matches in four days meant we had to use all our squad. He would be ready to play and was magnificent for us against Namibia but I want him at 100 per cent for every match." — AFP



KAMAISHI: Fiji's centre Jale Vatubua (C) is tackled by Uruguay's centre Juan Manuel Cat (L) and Uruguay's flanker Santiago Civetta (R) during the Japan 2019 Rugby World Cup Pool D match between Fiji and Uruguay at the Kamaishi Recovery Memorial Stadium in Kamaishi yesterday. — AFP

'Miracle of Brighton' inspires USA in World Cup clash with England

KOBE: United States coach Gary Gold yesterday said his "severe underdogs" would take heart from Japan's stunning 2015 Rugby World Cup victory over South Africa as they prepare to take on heavyweights England.

Gold said all the pressure would be on the 2003 champions, who have made 10 changes from the team that beat Tonga 35-3 on Sunday, with only a four-day turnaround between games in Pool C. Japan beat South Africa 34-32 in 2015 in the biggest upset seen at the Rugby World Cup, while other major surprises include Tonga's 19-14 win over France.

"It certainly has changed the mindset," Gold told reporters at the Kobe Misaki Stadium yesterday. "Japan v South Africa and Tonga v France is one that comes to mind, from 2011."

Gold added: "We don't really have anything to lose. Expectation is quite low, nobody will give us a chance. Conversely, that puts pressure on a team like England."

"The England players — that'll be going through their mind, maybe not for very long, but it'll be going through their mind — 'What if, what if, what if?' 'The pressure's really on them not us.'"

Gold said a rare opportunity for the USA to test themselves against three top-flight teams in quick succession — France and Argentina are also in Pool C — was a chance to show they belonged on the world stage.

"What it does, from our point of view, is that it allows us an opportunity to show that we have improved and that we hopefully can go toe-to-toe, even in the form of large periods of the game against a team like England," he said.

"We've put the pressure on ourselves in terms of performance. We want to come out of this game with credibility. We believe in our-



KOBE: England's rugby team captain George Ford takes part in the team's Captain Run at Kobe Misaki Stadium in Kobe yesterday, a day before their Japan 2019 Rugby World Cup match against the US. — AFP

selves, we think we're a good rugby team and we're certainly improving. We want to give England a good run for their money."

Gold, whose coaching CV includes stints in charge of Premiership clubs Bath and Worcester, said that even a much-changed England would be formidable opponents.

"I genuinely don't think there are any weaknesses in this England team. They defend particularly well, their set piece is outstanding, they've got good ball-in-hand play. "George (Ford) runs the show brilliantly from 10 (fly-

half). Their nines (scrum-halves) kick very well. Believe me, we've tried to find it."

Meanwhile Gold, a former coach of the Kobe-based Kolbeo Steelers, said Jones's influence on Japan had been considerable. "The work that Eddie has done has helped put rugby on the map (in Japan). I think the Rugby World Cup is just going to accelerate that even further," he said.

"I'll really be surprised if they don't qualify for the quarter-finals of this Rugby World Cup," added Gold. — AFP

Athletics World Championships a key test for Qatar

DOHA: Qatar is preparing to welcome thousands of fans and competitors for the World Athletics Championships starting tomorrow, an event seen as a staging post towards the 2022 football World Cup.

The 10-day event in the capital Doha will be a key test ahead of the football extravaganza in the gas-rich Gulf monarchy, although the track and field showcase will play out on a far smaller scale.

World Cup organisers and football fans will be anxious to see if Qatar can overcome problems encountered at a recent World Cup qualifying fixture, stubborn Doha traffic and unfinished public transport to deliver a smooth championships.

An ongoing diplomatic spat between Qatar and several neighbours could threaten to overshadow the competition, as well as possibly dent the numbers of spectators and competitors.

This is how Qatar has prepared for the tournament in key areas:

SECURITY

Qatari pro-government media has heavily publicised recent training exercises staged by the US FBI in Doha to equip Qatari officers with "crisis and disaster management" skills. The city was ranked the world's second safest by CEOWORLD magazine last month behind Abu Dhabi, capital of regional rival the United Arab Emirates.

VENUES

Ahead of the opening ceremony, hundreds of volunteers were marshalled around Doha's Khalifa stadium by police while technicians hoisted vast lighting rigs into place in the venue's intricate lattice-work roof.

Chief organiser Dahlan al-Hamad said at a recent sports integrity event in Doha that "Qatar is 100 percent ready for the championship — we are very excited". The stadium, which will host most events, was first opened in 1976 but totally overhauled ahead of a relaunch in 2017 and has since successfully hosted Diamond League events.

The city's Corniche waterfront will be used for the marathon, being staged for the first time at midnight when the temperature will be lower. The route will also host the men's and women's 20 kilometre race walks and the mixed 50 kilometre race walk.

Construction teams worked around the clock to finish assembling the elaborate scaffold towers that line the route's central reservation and will support floodlights for the midnight marathon.

TRANSPORT

Qatar has invested heavily in transport infrastructure since being named 2022 World Cup hosts in 2010. It now boasts one of the world's

largest hub airports and Qatar Airways is currently rated the best by an industry body.

But it is unclear if the multi-billion-dollar metro system's yellow line will be ready in time to shuttle spectators to the two new stations near the Khalifa stadium, al-Aziziyah and Sports City, both of which are shaped like Bedouin tents.

In the absence of a rail option, fans will access the stadium by road. The area is already popular with motorists and home to a mall, raising the prospect of traffic jams ahead of popular events.

Officials were pushing to overhaul several key bottlenecks and junctions across the city ahead of the high-point of the athletics calendar.

FANS

While the Khalifa stadium can hold 46,000 people, it will be configured for fewer fans during the World Championships with organisers hoping to attract around 14,000 spectators to the highest-profile events.

Tickets are "selling well" according to an official, and members of Qatar's expatriate work force — Kenyans and Americans in particular — are expected to turn out. It remains to be seen though how many fans from neighbouring Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates will make it to Doha for the event.

The three countries, along with Egypt, have enforced a boycott of Qatar since June 2017 and their citizens are technically banned from travelling to the peninsula state. The Riyadh-led coalition accuses Qatar of backing extremist groups and Iran, charges it denies — raising the spectre that politics could partially overshadow the athletics. Nonetheless Saudi will send three athletes, Egypt five, the UAE one, and Bahrain 21 competitors in total. — AFP

India should withdraw from Commonwealth Games: Olympic boss

NEW DELHI: India should withdraw from the Commonwealth Games due to the "low level of competition" in the tournament, the president of the country's Olympic body told AFP yesterday.

Indian Olympic Association president Narinder Batra's comments come after the South Asian nation threatened to boycott the next edition of the multi-sport event in Birmingham in 2022 over shooting being scrapped from the programme.

"I don't use the word boycott in sports. What I am trying to say is that India as a country, in sports, should withdraw out of Commonwealth totally," Batra told AFP. He said regardless of whether shooting is included in the final programme, India should end its association with the competition played among mostly former British colonies. "I feel there is not sufficient level of competition, leaving aside two or three sports. It doesn't leave anyone anywhere with this low level of competition," Batra added. "India should be participating in world events and world championships, which earn Olympic ranking points."

India topped the table for shooting at last year's edition in Australia, taking home 16 medals including seven gold for a total tally of 66 medals — the third-best performing nation in the Games.

In contrast, the nation of 1.3 billion people came back with two just medals, including one silver and one bronze, from the 2016 Rio Olympics. Batra said he was open to talks with Commonwealth Games officials on including shooting.

Batra reiterated India's interest in bidding for the 2032 Olympics and 2026 Youth Olympics. "We are serious about the 2032 Olympics and 2026 Youth Olympics but then you have to follow a process," said Batra. "And to get these events into India you need to win in the Olympics." — AFP

Wallaby Hodge to miss W Cup pool stage after three-match ban

TOKYO: Australia were dealt a blow ahead of their Rugby World Cup Pool D showdown against Wales when long-range goal-kicking winger Reece Hodge was banned yesterday for three matches for a high tackle in the Wallabies' opening game against Fiji.

Fiji were leading 11-7 when Hodge charged into Peceli Yato, leaving the Fiji flanker concussed. The Wallabies wing went on to score a try and kick a penalty as Australia won 39-21. Hodge was cited after the match and went before an independent disciplinary committee in Tokyo yesterday.

The ban means the 25-year-old Melbourne Rebels player, capable of slotting in anywhere in the backline, will miss Australia's remaining three Pool D games against Wales on Sunday, Uruguay in Oita on October 5 and Georgia in Shizuoka six days later.

The disciplinary committee "deemed that the incident was an act of foul play and warranted a red card in line with the high tackle sanction framework", World Rugby said in a statement. It added that the tackle was "reckless, rather than deliberate", but contact with the head meant a high degree of danger.

Given Hodge's "exemplary disciplinary record, good character and conduct at the hearing, the committee reduced the six-match entry point by three matches".

Fiji's shock 30-27 defeat by Uruguay on Wednesday has now shaped Pool D into a straight contest between Australia and Wales to seal the winner and runners-up spots to reach the quarter-finals, for which Hodge would be eligible. Assistant coach Nathan Grey said earlier Wednesday that the Australian management were "pretty confident the judicial system will look after itself".

"We'll have to deal with that whatever the outcome is," Grey added. "You'd be crazy as a management not to manage both ways, so whether he's there or not, we'll be ready to go." Full-back Kurtley Beale said he was "confident Reece will have a fair hearing", adding that the players had not discussed it.

"As a player, you want your teammate to play. I think Reece has done a fantastic job on the wing. To his credit, he really threw himself into those tackles. He's got no malice in trying to go out there and do wrongdoing." Hodge's potential absence, Beale said, would be more than made up for by Dane Haylett-Petty, who enjoyed an eye-catching cameo against Fiji off the bench. "We're confident as a back three, whoever's in those positions, we will get the job done," Beale said. — AFP