

Pride versus loyalty

Williams send-off sure to fuel Wales efforts

JULIAN GUYER

AUSTRALIA will try to end a see-saw 2011 with victory over Wales today, as they bid to repeat their recent third-place playoff win at the World Cup.

A bronze medal was not the summit of the Wallabies' ambitions when they travelled to coach Robbie Deans's native New Zealand, having won the Tri-Nations.

But a comprehensive semi-final defeat by the All Blacks, the eventual champions, left Australia with much to ponder.

Some have accused Deans of building sides that don't play to Australia's traditional strengths, but the "Wallaby way" of running rugby is set to be on show

this weekend against Wales whose preferred style is also to attack with ball in hand.

One area where Australia might benefit from a match tacked on to the end of a busy schedule is in seeing how James O'Connor performs in his first Test match start at flyhalf.

O'Connor, deputising for the injured Quade Cooper, looked good in open play and as a goal-kicker during Australia's 60-11 rout of the Barbarians at Twickenham last weekend.

Cooper has been out of action since pulling up with a knee injury in the playoff match at Eden Park, which the Wallabies won 21-18.

Australia centre Berrick Barnes, a proven and composed playmaker, has recovered from a back problem.

But fellow midfielder Rob Horne was ruled out today after a hamstring injury suffered during training on Thursday and was replaced by Anthony Fainga'a.

Lock Rob Simmons came in for Nathan Sharpe in the only change to the Wallaby pack from their October clash with the Welsh.

More incentive for the hosts comes with knowing this match will be Shane Williams's last before his Test retirement and the bulk of the Millennium Stadium crowd will be hoping the double Grand Slam winner, whose 57 tries are a Welsh record, bows out in style.

"We experienced ourselves how powerful the additional motivation of playing for a mate can be when 'Sharpie' (Sharpe) had his

100th Test in Auckland (against Wales) recently," Deans said. "There was no way any of the other players wanted to let him down.

"I have no doubts that the Welsh lads will be feeling just the same this week... Emotion plays a powerful role in competitive sport."

After winning just once in four visits to Cardiff between 2005 and 2008, Australia will bid for a third straight Millennium victory this weekend.

Wales welcome back captain Sam Warburton, who missed the 21-18 playoff defeat after being sent off in the World Cup semi-final loss to France.

His breakdown battle with opposing openside flanker David Pocock provides an intriguing sub-plot.

The Welsh are without injured locks Luke Charteris and Alun-Wyn Jones, props Adam Jones and Paul James, plus centre Jonathan Davies.

Cardiff prop Scott Andrews makes his first Wales start in place of Adam Jones in a side showing six changes from the World Cup clash, with backs James Hook and Mike Phillips unavailable due to commitments with French clubs Perpignan and Bayonne respectively.

"We know Australia will be tough this weekend," Wales coach Warren Gatland said. Against the Barbarians they made a very slow start, but as the game went on they looked very strong, especially in the second half." - Sapa-AFP

Olympics place at stake in semi-final

JONATHAN COOK

Just 70 minutes separates the South African men's hockey team from earning a place at the London 2012 Olympic Games.

SA face eight-time Olympic Games gold medallists India in the 4pm Champions Challenge semi-final at Randburg Hockey Stadium today (live on SuperSport) and are just a win away from fulfilling the stringent requirements of the SA Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (Sascoc).

SA's Olympic governing body, not satisfied that winning the Africa Olympic Qualifier tournament was proof of the team's ability to compete for a medal in London, set a further hurdle for the team. Reach the final of Champs Challenge and your ticket to London is assured.

Failing that, SA have one last chance for London if they win the final Olympic Qualifier tournament in Japan in April/May. An onerous task indeed.

If last Sunday's epic 11-goal Pool A thriller between India and SA is anything to go by, this semi-final tussle for a berth in tomorrow's 4.30pm final is set to be another heart-stopping affair.

SA lost that one 7-4 after the sides were locked 4-4 until the last 10 minutes.

Penalty corner star Justin Reid-Ross is the ace in SA's pack. Crucially, the men in green and gold can't afford to go walkabout, as they did in allowing a 3-0 quarter-final lead against Japan to degenerate into a nerve-jangling 3-2 final score.

It will require an extraordinary all-round performance from every player if SA are to beat India. No one is exempt, as too often in the preliminary rounds SA mixed the outstanding with the preposterous.

It simply can't happen against an India side that will explore and then punish any chinks in the home side's armoury. In set-piece specialist Sandeep Singh, midfielder Saravjit Singh and a host of others, India have potential match-winners who can turn a game on its head in an instant.

SA captain Austin Smith's leadership skills will be needed like never before.

The 1.30pm semi-final (also live on SuperSport) sees two sides who have already qualified for London - the Pan-American Games champions Argentina, and Belgium, who qualified in Europe - up against each other in a clash that is likely to be equally as explosive.

TV: both matches live on SuperSport.



RIDE FOR RED CAP: Kelvin du Sart (centre) heads up the Double Triple Charity Challenge, which will see 30 riders cycle from Joburg to Durban today and tomorrow. Pictured with him from left are Mandisa Nzama, a Jump Start graduate, cyclists Andrew Kenny and Graham Daniel and Thandeka Zulu from the Red Cap Foundation. PICTURE: PIERRE TOSTEE

Cyclists push the limits for charity

SPORTS REPORTER

LAST year, more than 20 cyclists completed a two-day journey from Joburg to Durban to raise funds for the RedCap Foundation. This weekend, more have joined.

In the Double Triple Charity Challenge, cyclists, many from the Mr Price cycle club, ride more than 600km in just two days. Last year, the challenge raised R26 000 and now the group hopes to increase the figure.

"The first time, we weren't sure if it was going to be possible over just two

days. For us it was about challenging ourselves and getting out of our comfort zone. Hopefully it's something that might inspire others to try to achieve something they didn't believe was doable," said Mr Price Sports Marketing Manager Graham Daniel, who was also one of the cyclists.

The RedCap Foundation was established in 2006 and carries out Social Investment initiatives for the Mr Price Group. It aims to educate and empower future generations to be inspired, healthy and engaged citi-

zens who take responsibility for building a positive society. Funds raised will primarily be used to enhance one of the RedCap Foundation's initiatives, JumpStart.

In this programme, matriculants from low-income communities are invited to experience the world of work for one week at various divisions of Mr Price.

For more information on the RedCap Foundation go to www.redcapfoundation.org/. To keep track of progress in the challenge itself, visit the Mr Price Heroes website, www.mrpriceheroes.co.za.