



## **NACRA NFORMATION PAGE**

**Week of October 9, 2011**

### **1 THE PICTURE**

This is Rugby World Cup season. The matches are live on TV at midnight, 2am and 4am in our region, so it is quite reasonable to expect that someone might have recorded it for later viewing.

During this period every conversation, even with non-rugby fans, should be started with "Have you seen the recent matches yet?" followed by "Do you want to know what happened?"

One should NOT greet a rugby acquaintance with "Can you believe Ireland beat Australia?!"

I have checked several rugby-related codes of conduct even one criminal code, and I am surprised to find no statement against waking a Rugby Development Officer (many time zones away) a few minutes after the final whistle of a quarter-final and starting with "Hi Scott, looks like (team X) are out of the Cup again, eh?"

I think that regularly broadcast public service announcements advising all to SAY NOTHING would help cut down on exactly the sort of unfortunate violence that I am considering.

I recall when we only received 5 Nations matches via tape delay, many hours after the match. We would play our usual touch rugby on Saturdays (yes, in the snow), and then all look forward to an evening in front of the VCR.

But then one of the players started listening to the matches on shortwave and took great joy in announcing the results before the touch game. After some shouting a rule was set that anyone that announced the scores at Saturday touch would be deemed to be a not very nice person. The transgressor promised not to say a word about the scores after the next week's 5 Nations decider between England and Scotland. And he was true to his word.

He had the score printed onto the shirt he wore for touch.

**You will find no reference to the RWC Quarter-final results in this edition of the Info Page.**

## 2 ON "MINNOWS"

Some of my favourite matches to watch in this World Cup have involved the so-called "minnows." These games are filled with many opportunities to celebrate small successes, and I come to the end of these matches stirred by the efforts of the "weaker" teams.

I have been on the receiving end of a number of big losses as a player and coach- but still felt pride and a sense of accomplishment if we played as well as we could, didn't lose our team spirit and fought to the end.

I think that such tests of body and character show the mettle of a person and the spirit of a team more than most close victories. Getting up again and again to make more tackles even when the opposition is scoring frequently is a lot more psychologically draining than pushing your limits because a victory is just within reach. If you can keep the fire going when you're constantly underwater, then you'll be unstoppable when the tide turns.

And we all revel when the underdog succeeds, even for short moments in a lost match. Disney has made an empire on touching that nerve in all of us, and Disney could gather some great movie material from the personal and team stories of the Georgians, Namibians, Russians, USA and others that were thought of as "minnows." Russia's 22 points against Australia, Georgia's immense and constant physicality, Namibia's Jacques Burger- this and previous RWCs have been loaded with inspirational performances against overwhelming opposition.

But should these teams be called minnows? Minnows have a maximum size that is still considered small, which implies that rugby's "minnows" will never be able to survive with the big fish. But some of the Pools' third place finishers like Italy, Samoa, and Tonga were previously considered minnows, and Argentina's record after the first 3 World Cups was eight losses and one win. But they're no minnow now!

Perhaps it would be more accurate to think of the "minnows" as young fish. Because young fish can grow.

## 3 DISSECTING THE POOL STAGES

There has been a lot of discussion on the format of the RWC and the demand placed on the so-called "minnows". The following article by Julia Harris on [www.planetrugby.com](http://www.planetrugby.com) discusses some of the issues and options.

The structure of the pool phase of the World Cup has come under the spotlight, with heavy criticism meted out to the International Rugby Board for the tournament schedule. We've attempted to wade through the issue and come up with a few solutions and some hard truths.

The biggest talking point thus far has been the quick turnaround time some teams have faced and it's important to state from the outset that expecting teams to play two games in the space of four days while others have a week's break is not fair.

## **Pool structure**

Having an odd number of teams in a pool meant that midweek games were always going to be necessary.

There are two points to consider on this front: firstly, should fewer teams take part in the tournament in order to even the numbers and secondly why do some teams play midweek games and not others.

Dealing with the first point, reducing the number of teams would be counterproductive in terms of the development of the game. While the 'minnows' may for the most part get hammered game after game, their presence at the tournament is an important stepping stone to becoming more competitive.

It may seem hard to believe but being seeing a side being beaten by 50+ points is more preferable than not seeing them at all. The World Cup not only gives smaller teams their best chance to gain exposure but also gives the players an important goal to work towards.

Moving on to the second point, the IRB makes 95 percent of its revenue from World Cups and a large chunk of this comes through television rights.

It's basic commercial sense that a television broadcaster would want games that will bring in the most viewers at a time and date that will maximise their viewership. More viewers means more advertising revenue which in turn makes the television rights to the tournament more lucrative, enabling the IRB to sell them for more.

Having top tier nations playing during the week would see the IRB lose revenue, it is as simple as that. The second tier teams unfortunately suffer as a result during the tournament but it is them that profit from the monies received from the World Cup.

In the words of IRB chief executive, Mike Miller: "We don't care about the minnows? If that was the case why have we invested tens of millions of dollars over the past five or six years in order to try and make them more competitive? Why did we open up and pay for a high performance centre in Samoa? Why do we pay for the Pacific Rugby Cup, the Pacific Nations Cup, why do we give them coaches, trainers, why do we provide them with gyms with analysis tools?."

## **The Samoa 'problem'**

The most vocal critic of the quick turnaround (and most other things!) has been Samoa's Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu. The centre's first Twitter rant had the sympathy of many until his ridiculous comparison to the Holocaust and even in later outbursts, Fuimaono-Sapolu raises interesting points but his obsession with extreme comparisons and an apparent persecution complex have made it hard to now take him seriously.

The Samoan's main grievance was that they had to play Wales just four days after playing Namibia. It was a tough ask but in some ways the Samoans have only themselves to blame for felling fatigued against Wales.

Firstly, if one goes back to the 2007 World Cup, Samoa did not gain automatic entry into the 2011 edition because they did not finish in the top three in their pool. As such, even though they were ranked above Tonga in the world rankings on December 1, 2008 - the rankings used to determine the seedings for the event - they were not

seeded in the draw. (A system that uses rankings from three years prior to the event is in itself problematic).

Effectively that means that in terms of the seeding and draw Samoa are one of the 'minnows' of the competition.

But there is key differences between the way the 'true' minnows and Samoa have approached the quick turnaround time between games:

Facing the prospect of playing a number of games in a short space of time, many coaches made drastic changes to their line-ups, making use of their full squads and resting players to ensure they're fresh for key games. Samoa made just two changes from the team that faced Namibia for the one that did battle with Wales four days later. With all due respect to Namibia, if Samoa want to fight for play-off places they should have the resources to beat Namibia with a below-strength side.

There are certainly a number of issues with the current schedule, what is not quite as clear is the solutions to them, with every alternative fraught with its own problems.

### **Extended schedule**

To ensure that no team has to play during the week, one could extend the length of the tournament. Taking an example from elsewhere in the sporting realm, this is perhaps not the best idea. The 2007 Cricket World Cup in the Caribbean was considered a shambles. There were a number of factors in play but central to the mess was that the tournament was too long. Having progressed from a four-week tournament in 1996 to five weeks in 1999 and then six weeks in 2003, the tournament lost much of its impact; it was hard to maintain interest with the action irregular and unsustainable.

### **Midweek games for all**

One fears we may as well cross this one off before we get started, it would take a major concession from the IRB and broadcasters to see top teams play during the week. And with some broadcasting deals already signed ahead of the 2015 World Cup, a change now may be difficult to manoeuvre.

Holding the tournament in New Zealand compounded the problem. Midweek games in England in 2015 will be more viable than this year since the time zones will allow for a greater audience. Tuesday and Wednesday games work for the Champions League in soccer...

### **Fewer teams**

As discussed earlier, decreasing the number of teams is not a wise move. Continuing the parallel with the Cricket World Cup, it was suggested after the 2007 edition that the minnows should be dispatched with. The International Cricket Council thought better of it and in this year's competition there were a number of upsets and strong showings from the smaller nations. It is only through continued appearances at a high level that teams will improve.

And contrary to what some may believe, the IRB do want the smaller nations to succeed, that's why there are twenty teams in the draw and not sixteen.

## Retain the status quo

It won't be the most popular choice, but the IRB could well stick to a similar formula in 2015. One of the greatest things about the World Cup is seeing smaller teams punch above their weight, and it would be unfortunate to see this made even harder for them. But the reality is that strong teams will always be favoured. Teams need to make strides during the four years between each tournament - and they'll be helped in doing this by the IRB's new schedule which includes tour to the Pacific Islanders, North America and Japan - and make clever decisions during it to make the most of the hand they have been dealt, unfair or otherwise.

*Article by Julia Harris*

## 4 CANUCK CHINS GO FROM BEARDED TO BARED

Canadian flanker Jebb Sinclair is feeling a little cooler around the chops after shaving off the beard that formed part of a cult-forming collection of hirsute chins among the Canadians.

So popular were the players' beards of various shades, the locals of Napier, where the Canucks spent several days and played France and Japan, wore fake beards in their hundreds as a tribute to their new-found heroes.

Adam Kleeberger's beard has sparked comparisons to a youthful Santa Claus or a badger attack. The Canadian flanker will be shedding his mass of facial hair for two good causes, and you can help.

He is asking rugby fans to get behind his Shear the Beard campaign by making donations to a fund to help rebuild the city of Christchurch, which was devastated by two major earthquakes a few months apart, and to a campaign to raise cancer awareness in Canada.

Kleeberger will be shorn on 17 October in Victoria, on Vancouver Island, where Canadian comedian Rick Mercer is to do the deed.



*Adam Kleeberger at left, Jebb Sinclair at right*

The Christchurch fund website can be reached via:

[http://donate.rugbycanada.ca/e/Shear the Beard](http://donate.rugbycanada.ca/e/Shear%20the%20Beard)

The Canadian cancer campaign website is:

<http://mobro.co/SheartheBeard>.

## 5 X-FACTOR SINGER

I know that rugby has links into all levels and aspects of society, but it is particularly pleasing to see someone in the "pop" media announce their passion for the game, and help to break stereotypes about our beautiful sport. So thanks Caitlin- you have a whole sport cheering you on!

As Caitlin Koch listened to the judge's feedback on The X-Factor, the new talent showcase on Fox, she was told, "No more rugby," by notoriously harsh judge, Simon Cowell. Regardless of what the self-aware and abrasive Cowell may want her to do, Saturday will always be a rugby day for Koch.



That said, it is probably a good idea for Caitlin to take a short reprieve from the game, at least for the time being, as she has a tendency to "scream crazy and lose voice after games," while playing scrumhalf for Buffalo women's rugby team. With the upcoming "Boot Camp" on the show, she will need all the vocal power she has.

Caitlin began singing in her local church folk group with her father when she was just three years old. Her mother became tired of watching her during the services so she sent Caitlin to her father in the folk group. Caitlin had a good voice and sang "for fun" until she was 15 when she won the Buffalo Idol. As a result of her victory she was given the opportunity to sing at HSBC Arena in Buffalo, opening up for Avril Lavigne. Her performance and her signing of a three-year recording contract with Audio Magic Studios gave her the inspiration to pursue a career as a professional singer.

Any rugby fan that happened to be watching The X-Factor must have been delighted to hear Caitlin proudly announce that she is a rugby player and coach, it was how she identified herself and an obvious point of pride for Caitlin. The sport she has grown to love does not have the same personal family background that her passion for singing does, but it has a strong foundation in her life indeed.

Caitlin began playing rugby when she was a junior at Orchard Park High School. Her decision to play came about after a falling out with the school's basketball program, and just like singing, she was good at rugby and decided to stick with it. Her competitive nature and love for the physicality of rugby allowed her to quickly excel at

the sport. She was named to the New York State Select Side and the Northeast Rugby Union Under-19 team in 2006/2007 and also played for Canisus College and said, "At one point I was seriously thinking about dropping all my other activities and focusing all my efforts on rugby and making the Women's Eagles National team."

When asked about her personal attraction to rugby, Caitlin said, "I just love the freedom you have at any position. It is the toughest sport out there, and once you get the fundamentals down you can really focus on your specific responsibilities."

Along with the plethora of skills required to compete at the highest level Caitlin enjoys the pure competition of a match. "It's sports in general, I enjoy being competitive," she said while speaking of the lessons she has learned from rugby, "The competition creates an uncommon motivation within you, you have to be yourself and not follow the crowd in order to play at the highest level."

Despite her recent propulsion into the national spotlight, Caitlin said she still plans to coach the Orchard Park High School Women's Rugby Team this coming spring, "It's not a matter of if, but when I will be coaching. People in the sport are ridiculously hard-working and I also plan on playing as soon as I can. I love it." Caitlin's passion for the sport has become contagious, at least for one other family member. Her niece will be one of her players this spring for the Orchard Park High School Girl's Rugby team.

Although it looks as if she won't be playing rugby soon, the attitude and focus she brings to a rugby match will be ever-present. Everyone has a different pre-performance ritual whether it for singing, dancing, or sports related. For Caitlin's pre-singing performance ritual she acts as if she is heading in to a physical rugby match. "I have an athlete's mindset," said Caitlin on her ritual, "I use all my energy and put it in to the performance. I pace back and forth and stretch as if backstage is a pre-match warm up." True to her love for the game, rugby never leaves Caitlin's mind.

Regardless of the path she chooses, Caitlin has an extremely promising future ahead of her. Whether she wins The X-Factor or not, she will continue to sing and as long as she is away from rugby there will be a fire inside to make her way back to the pitch. In an inspired tone she said, "If I am away from rugby for too long I will wake up in the morning and have this feeling that I need to play, I just can't get enough of it."

Article by David Halvorson Jr.

*You can find this and previous Info Pages, as well as videos, news, and content on rugby from the region and around the world, at NACRA's website ([www.nacrugby.com](http://www.nacrugby.com)) or at the NACRA RUGBY BLOG at <http://nacrugbyblog.blogspot.com>.*

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