

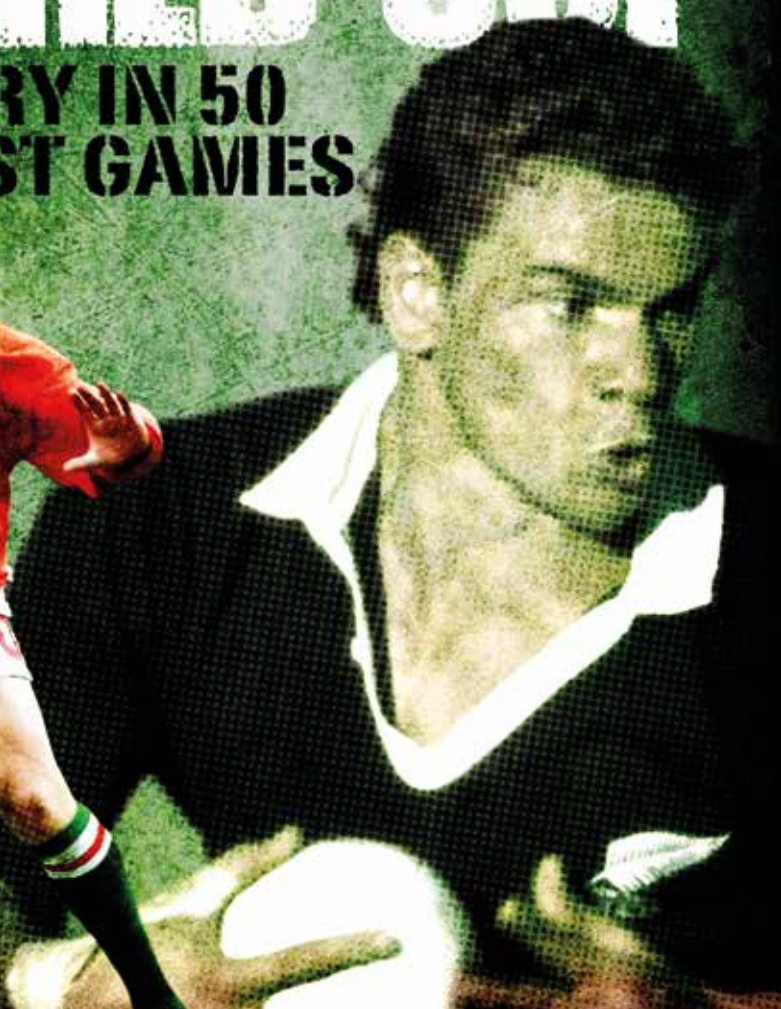


RUGBY WORLD CUP

**A HISTORY IN 50
GREATEST GAMES**



ROB CLARK



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INTRODUCTION

When the Rugby World Cup was first mooted, in the mid-1980s, it was very much a Southern Hemisphere-driven initiative, not least to stave off the growing influence of rugby league which, in Australia at least, was threatening the very existence of the amateur code – as it then was. The Five Nations teams were lukewarm about the prospect, and tales which came out of the English, Scottish and Welsh camps in particular indicated that they weren't approaching the first competition, in 1987, with perhaps total dedication to the cause.

In the 28 years since the first Rugby World Cup, the tournament has grown spectacularly, beyond the wildest dreams of even its most ardent proponents. According to World Rugby, attendance figures have grown from 604,500 in 1987 to almost 1.5m in 2011, while income from gate receipts, broadcasting rights and sponsorship have also grown exponentially between 1995 (the first World Cup from which there are accurate figures) and 2011. The 2003 final between Australia and England remains the most-watched rugby match in the history of Australian television.

It is now, arguably, the third biggest global sporting event, behind only the summer Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup and, like them, its four-yearly cycle is well established, giving just the right amount of time for the increasingly popular, and populated, qualifying competition to take place, and for the excitement and anticipation to build. If there is one lesson rugby could learn from football it would be not to seed the tournament too long in advance of it starting – the 2015 edition has thrown up the ludicrous situation of host nation England, two-time winners Australia and fifth-ranked Wales (who reached the semi-finals in 2011) all featuring in Pool A, with only two of the three able to qualify for the knockout stages. It seems unfortunate that the tournament will lose a potential winner before even reaching the quarter-final stage.

That apart, the growth of the Rugby World Cup can justifiably be called a phenomenon. From its beginnings in 1987 when the places were filled by the seven International Rugby Board (now in its new guise as World Rugby) members plus nine invited nations, it now boasts a qualifying tournament which in 2015 involved 80 teams as far flung as Guam and Finland, and St Lucia and Vanuatu. The 2015 qualifying competition began less than six months after the 2011 World Cup Final had taken place, and the first match, between Mexico and Jamaica, was refereed by Craig Joubert, one of the world's top referees and the man who had taken charge of that 2011 final between New Zealand and France.

The Rugby World Cup has had to cope with the advent of professionalism and the reintroduction into the sporting arena of South Africa. It has had to appreciate that a sport which grows ever more physical by the year requires sufficient rest and recovery time between matches, and a sensible amendment to the increasingly rigorous concussion protocols – which allows for temporary replacements along the same lines as blood injury replacements – will be in force at this year's competition. It has had to address the issue that the big rugby-playing nations, the so-called Tier 1 countries, tend to dominate when it comes

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to the latter stages of the sport's most coveted prize, and organisers have tried hard to level some aspects of the playing field, including persuading the Tier 1 nations to play midweek games to allow the smaller nations similar rest periods, which, again, will happen in 2015.

In among the ongoing issues, however, the Rugby World Cup has thrown up the most incredible matches, some of the greatest tries we could ever hope to see, and brought to the attention of the wider sporting public the names of the biggest stars in the game. This year's RWC will see games spread throughout England (and occasionally in Wales), and many steps have been taken to spread the gospel.

As for the on-field action, who can ever forget the performances of France? Upsetting the Australians in the first Rugby World Cup with the late drama of that Serge Blanco try? Doing the same to New Zealand in the course of scoring 31 unanswered points on the way to their 1999 semi-final victory, and so nearly repeating that feat four years ago when they could, and probably should, have beaten the All Blacks in their own Auckland backyard. Not to mention the 2007 quarter-final when the whole New Zealand nation was outraged that they could possibly be victims of a forward pass ...

Who can fail to be thrilled by the sight of the Pacific nations playing their own particular brand of off-the-cuff rugby? Not just Samoa's two wins over Wales, but Fiji and Tonga's performances as well. We delight too at the occasional presence of Portugal and the Ivory Coast, alongside the likes of Georgia and Romania who continue to confound the odds – and lack of resources in those countries – and qualify on a regular basis.

And always, of course, there are the players. The scything runs of John Kirwan and Serge Blanco, the brilliance of Rupeni Caucaunibuca, the speed and strength of Jonah Lomu, the startling pace of Takudze Ngwenya, the drop kicks of Joel Stranksy, Jannie de Beer and Jonny Wilkinson. And that's without mentioning the likes of Zinzan Brooke, David Campese, George Gregan, Peter Fatialofa, Sean Fitzpatrick, Grant Fox, Bryan Habana, Gavin Hastings, Christopher Lamaison, Jason Leonard, Brian Lima, Victor Matfield, Gareth Rees, Jason Robinson, Joost van der Westhuizen, Shane Williams and Keith Wood. Not to mention the leadership of World Cup-winning captains David Kirk, Nick Farr-Jones, Francois Pienaar, John Eales, Martin Johnson, John Smit and Richie McCaw. I could continue, but instead why not read on and enjoy reliving some of those great moments for yourselves.

So far and so fast has the Rugby World Cup developed that it is easy to forget 2015 will be only the eighth time it has been held. And yet already it is a sporting occasion to rank with the biggest and the best. Long may it continue.



22nd May 1987

Venue: Eden Park, Auckland

Attendance: 20,000

New Zealand 70 Italy 6

New Zealand

John Gallagher
John Kirwan
Joe Stanley
Warwick Taylor
Craig Green
Grant Fox
David Kirk (capt)
Richard Loe
Sean Fitzpatrick
Steve McDowall
Murray Pierce
Gary Whetton
Alan Whetton
Michael Jones
Wayne Shelford

Italy

Serafino Ghizzoni
Massimo Mascioletti
Oscar Collodo
Fabio Gaetaniello
Marcello Cuttitta
Rodolfo Ambrosio
Fulvio Lorigiola
Guido Rossi
Giorgio Morelli
Tito Lupini
Franco Berni
Mauro Gardin
Piergianni Farina
Marzio Innocenti (capt)
Giuseppe Artuso

Half an hour had gone in the first Rugby World Cup (RWC) and hosts and favourites New Zealand were leading 9-0 when debutant flanker Michael Jones scored the first try. Benefiting from a strike against the head at a scrum by Sean Fitzpatrick (the young hooker was playing in place of captain Andy Dalton and played so well that a fit-again Dalton was unable to reclaim his place in the final), Jones scored from a neat pass back inside from Grant Fox when it appeared as if the fly half was going to go wide.

There could scarcely be a more fitting scorer of the first World Cup try as Jones is undoubtedly one of the best back-row forwards ever to have played the game, possibly *the* best.

Interestingly Jones had in fact played a game for Western Samoa (as they then were) in 1986, a match against a Wales touring side which Western Samoa lost 14-32. Jones was born in Auckland and went to both school and university in New Zealand, but qualified as his mother was Samoan. Although he was to coach Samoa from 2004–07, Jones switched allegiance in his playing days in order to compete at the first World Cup since Western Samoa were not invited to take part (of which more later). Jones's combination of pace, fitness, physicality and handling ability were to become legendary and he virtually redefined the role the openside flanker through his series of top-class performances at the 1987 RWC.

Jones would go on to play 55 matches for New Zealand, and missed many more for which he would have been chosen through a combination of injury (an inevitable by-product of the way he played) and his religious beliefs, which meant he wouldn't play on a Sunday. By comparison the great Fitzpatrick, whose career spanned a similar period, acquired 92 caps. Jones suffered two

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serious knee injuries, in 1989 and 1997, and numerous other knocks. Most notably Jones was to miss the 1991 RWC semi-final against Australia, which New Zealand lost, because it was on a Sunday, and with it their crown. That New Zealand were prepared to accommodate Jones's refusal to play on Sundays tells you all you need to know about how highly he was valued. Jones himself was slightly embarrassed that he would always be first choice, however well his cover played when he was unavailable. But at the same time he wasn't prepared to compromise his principles. 'I made up my mind on the subject when I was 16 or 17 and I'm so grateful to the coaches and players I was involved with who accepted it,' he once told the *New Zealand Herald*. 'But you don't put God in a box in deciding what you do and don't do on Sundays.'

But on this day in May 1987 in Auckland all that was still some way off. What was right here, right now was the explosive nature of a back-row forward who combined the traditional strength of that position in terms of being first to the loose ball and supporting his pack, with the speed and handling skills of a back. The sheer stats of 16 tries in 55 appearances does not begin to tell the tale of a man who was so ubiquitous that spectators occasionally wondered if there were two of him on the park simultaneously. Indeed there might as well have been for when injuries robbed Jones of his prodigious pace he simply switched from openside to blindside and concentrated on tackling and defensive duties, at which he proved equally adept.

Jones's opening try at the 1987 Rugby World Cup has been immortalised in a sculpture which is on display at Eden Park, where it all began. Created by a local artist Natalie Stamilla, it is based on a photograph taken by Stamilla's father, Geoff Dale, a press photographer at the time. It is a fitting, and lasting, tribute to both the moment and the man, a player former New Zealand coach John Hart called 'almost the perfect rugby player'.

Michael Jones rightly takes the plaudits for being the first man to score a World Cup try, but it wasn't, of course, the first try of that first match. After 14 minutes Australian referee Bob Fordham was left with little option but to award a penalty try after Italian captain Marzio Innocenti had dived into a scrum to prevent the All Blacks going for the pushover try which appeared to be there for the taking. Maybe it was a simple rush of blood to the head from Innocenti – as a doctor he could no doubt tell us – but there certainly wasn't much doubt about his guilt. Italian protests were notable for their absence.

Thereafter Italy fought hard throughout the first half to keep the score respectable. They somehow held out a succession of scrums on their line until finally Kirk spotted a small gap on the blindside and scooted over for New Zealand's third try, to put them 17-0 ahead. An Oscar Collodo drop goal, calm as you like from fully 40 metres, shortly before half-time and penalty straight after the resumption from a similar distance saw Italy trail only 17-6. But New Zealand began to apply relentless pressure and slowly that told on the Italians, who in those days were not part of the Northern Hemisphere's Five Nations Championship and had had little exposure to the level of play which was routine for the All Blacks.

First, centre Warwick Taylor (who won 24 caps for the All Blacks) went over and then Craig Green added a quickfire double (he was to score four more in

the later pool game against Fiji), and by the halfway point in the second half the score was up to 36-6. Immediately after Collodo's penalty, Serafino Ghizzoni dropped Fox's kick-off behind his own line, leading to a five-metre scrum. New Zealand moved the ball quickly from left to right; Taylor shipped the ball on to Kirwan and to John Gallagher and then looped round to retake the ball and go over in the corner. Green, who had looked a threat throughout with his pace, then got in on the act. An explosive break from Kirk took the play from one 22 to the other and after a couple of phases of play they ran a tap penalty which resulted in a scrum virtually on the Italians' line and all it took was quick ball, a swift pass from right to left by Kirk and Green ran in unopposed.

Green's second try was a result of quick accurate passing down the line, and Fox's conversion took the score up to 33. Still the tries kept flowing, with prop Steve McDowall the next to go over, then in the 68th minute captain and scrum half David Kirk combined with fly half Grant Fox to put the powerful winger John Kirwan over in the corner. Fox nailed the conversion, his fifth successful kick out of eight, a relatively low return from one of the most metronomic kickers in the game.

Then from the Italian kick-off came the moment which seared the Rugby World Cup into the public consciousness. Kirk caught the ball deep in his own 22, passed to Fox who, deciding against the kick to safety given that his side were by now leading 48-6 and the game was well won, shipped it quickly on to Kirwan. Kirwan took off down the centre of the pitch and just continued his run. There was the odd feint, the hint of a swerve, but once Kirwan had got away from initial Italian attempts to tackle him, he mostly ran straight and found himself in space so kept running.

'I remember thinking I'd just go for it,' Kirwan later recalled, 'and thankfully all my mates just stepped aside and left me to it. I kept on going and before I knew it I'd made it all the way through.' It's a fairly modest description of one of the great solo tries, and one which captured the imagination worldwide.

Kirwan added that the All Blacks were 'failing to click as a team' in that first match, but captain David Kirk disagrees, 'Many say it was not until John's wonder try that we came to life, but I don't remember it like that. I thought we played pretty well from the beginning and we were always in command.'

It's often forgotten that Kirwan was within a hair's breadth of one of the most memorable hat-tricks of all time. The Italian restart from his second try went straight into touch, Kirk took a quick throw-in and the big winger was off and running again. He possibly could have made it to the line himself but with just one cover tackler he took the more sensible option and turned the ball back inside for Kirk to claim his second try of the afternoon. And it was thoroughly deserved after Kirk had done incredibly well to get up in support of the flying Kirwan.

A disheartened Italy were to concede two further tries in the dying minutes, the first to Stanley who finished off a scintillating running move from Gallagher and Green, and the last of the day to Alan Whetton, who was on the shoulder of Green to take a short pass from Green and plunge over.

In spite of the score, the All Blacks did make quite a few handling errors, but these were put down to a combination of the wet weather and the new ball, a

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Mitre brand with which the players were not familiar. And there was also plenty of evidence that their traditional running and handling skills, support play and all-round knowledge of the game was going to make them the team to beat.

Off the pitch it had been a low-key start for the World Cup in many ways. Auckland, known as the City of Sails, is a rugby hotbed and Eden Park a fabulous stadium, but the kick-off time for this first match – 3pm on a Friday – was a strange choice. Rugby had never been played on a Friday in New Zealand before, and as it was a normal working day it wasn't that surprising that the ground was only half-full.

Looking at the pictures, both still and video, it's remarkable how accessible the players and pitch were – cameramen and indeed fans were gathered only just beyond the white lines and there is very little sense of it being a major sporting occasion. And the less said about the rather bizarre BBC Rugby World Cup theme tune, the better, though for the true fans among you, it can still be found on YouTube. In any case, fans in Europe weren't able to see any of the games live on TV, not even the final, because the satellite links of the day simply weren't up to the task.

For all the slightly amateurish aspects of the start of the tournament – TV coverage missed Fox's conversion of the penalty try because it was showing repeated replays of the Innocenti offence which had led to referee Fordham's decision – it's easy to forget that rugby union was indeed an amateur sport in those days. Many of those involved, players and officials, on and off the pitch, were not getting paid. Nevertheless, the action was sufficiently compelling to get the tournament off to a solid start, and a new era in world rugby had begun.



23 May 1987

Venue: Lancaster Park, Christchurch

Attendance: 17,000

France 20 Scotland 20

France

Serge Blanco
Patrice Lagisquet
Philippe Sella
Denis Charvet
Patrick Esteve
Franck Mesnel
Pierre Berbizier
Pascal Ondarts
Daniel Dubroca (capt)
Jean-Pierre Garuet-Lempirou
Alain Lorieux
Jean Condom
Eric Champ
Dominique Erbani
Laurent Rodriguez

Scotland

Gavin Hastings
Matt Duncan
Keith Robertson
Douglas Wyllie
Iwan Tukalo
John Rutherford
Roy Laidlaw
David Sole
Colin Deans (capt)
Iain Milne
Derek White
Alan Tomes
John Jeffrey
Finlay Calder
Iain Paxton

What must France and Scotland have been thinking when they lined up for their Pool 4 match on the second day of the 1987 Rugby World Cup? Each had travelled to the other side of the world only to face one of their most traditional rivals from opposite sides of the English Channel, players with whom they were already very familiar. In fact the two sides had produced a cracker of a game in that year's Five Nations Championship, with France just edging it 28-22 thanks in large part to a hat-trick from the mesmeric winger Eric Bonneval.

That match had taken place in front of over 49,000 fanatical Frenchmen at the Parc des Princes in Paris, so it must have seemed a little surreal to be facing the same opponents in front of a little over a third of that many fans – only 17,000 were in the ground for the 1pm kick-off on the first Saturday of the World Cup.

To further add to the sense of familiarity, 25 of the 30 players who had started the Five Nations match also started this World Cup game. Somewhat surprisingly France had changed both their wingers, Bonneval and Philippe Berot, who between them had scored all four of their country's tries in the Five Nations clash, and also second rower Francis Haget. In their place came Patrice Lagisquet, Patrick Esteve and Alain Lorieux respectively. Scotland meanwhile switched only two, and in a little quirk of fate, they were also the two try-scorers from the Five Nations meeting: Keith Robertson was called into the centres in place of Scott Hastings and Derek White took over from John Beattie (though White played in the second row and the versatile Iain Paxton switched to number eight).

France, who had won the grand slam earlier that year, went into the match as favourites and duly outscored the Scots on the try count – three to two – as they

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had earlier in the year but the reliable kicking of Gavin Hastings kept the game tight throughout.

The first score of the match came from an electrifying break by the effervescent Finlay Calder less than two minutes into the match. Juggling a ball he had won at the tail of a line-out, Calder just retained control and then seared through the French defence before putting the supporting White over. Unfortunately Hastings missed a relatively straightforward conversion; perhaps given that the match was only just over a minute old, he just hadn't warmed up. Even worse for Scotland, the exceptional fly half John Rutherford suffered a serious knee injury shortly afterwards and was out of not just this match but the entire tournament.

The French hit back, also off a line-out, in traditional French mode with quick hands through the backs and a loop round from the great Philippe Sella gave them an overlap which Sella finished comfortably in the right-hand corner. France made it look easy again a few minutes later when scrum half Pierre Berbizier sold a dummy and waltzed through. And France looked to have scored again when the two wingers combined; first Esteve blazed infield, then Lagisquet went wide and looked to have scored in the same corner as Sella earlier only to have the 'try' ruled out by New Zealand touch judge Tom Doocey. Doocey indicated that Lagisquet had hit the corner flag before he had got the ball down, and it was therefore touch in goal. Under the rules then in force, that meant a 22 drop-out, which enabled Scotland to clear their lines. The replay showed it to be a reasonable, if hairline, decision.

More drama followed as Serge Blanco took a quick tap penalty while both Berbizier and Matt Duncan were receiving treatment for injuries. Blanco ran 60 metres for a cheeky score which the cameras failed to properly pick up, but although there were some boos from the crowd, the Scots seemed to accept that it was a perfectly fair play and there was little sign of complaint from them, either at the time or after the game.

At that point Scotland, who had long led but in the second half had been fighting an increasingly desperate and energy-sapping defensive action, looked a spent force. The smart money would have been on France scoring more rather than Scotland fighting back. The smart money would have been wrong. This was a good Scotland side, combining the experience of the likes of John Rutherford and Roy Laidlaw in the backs, and Colin Deans and Iain Paxton in the forwards with a number of players who would become all-time greats of Scottish rugby during the course of their careers – Gavin Hastings, John Jeffrey, Finlay Calder and David Sole among them.

Scotland had given as good as they got in the scrums and line-outs throughout and had competed ferociously at the breakdowns. They somehow found one last effort and put together a series in French territory which ended with a try for Matt Duncan in the right-hand corner. Quick hands from Laidlaw and White gave the powerfully built Duncan just enough room to get over, holding off Sella.

Duncan's score came almost five minutes into injury time and Hastings's failed attempt at a conversion was the last kick of the match and left it tied at 20-20.

France v Scotland, 23 May 1987

‘Scotland played very well,’ said the great Sella. ‘It was good for our team too because it woke them up for the bigger matches later in the tournament.’

With Romania and Zimbabwe making up the rest of Pool 4 it always looked likely that both countries would progress to the quarter-finals, and so it proved. Scotland scored 11 tries in their 60-21 win over Zimbabwe then rounded off their group matches with another nine – including a hat-trick for John Jeffrey – in their 55-28 win over Romania. Even those 20 tries did not prove sufficient to snatch top place in the group from France, however. In expansive mood the French matched those 55 points against Romania but went two better against Zimbabwe in a 13-try, 70-12 win.

It’s worth remembering that Romania were a handy side in the 1980s. They had recorded wins over France (twice), Wales and Scotland in their own country, and drawn 13-13 with Ireland at Lansdowne Road. The year after the 1987 World Cup they travelled to Wales and won 15-9 in Cardiff. Sadly, the revolution in 1989 – which saw the overthrow and later execution of their country’s long-standing Communist leader Nicolae Ceausescu – also led to a decline in the nation’s rugby fortunes. Leading clubs Dinamo Bucharest and Steaua Bucharest were police and army sides respectively and they lost both funding and personnel as a result of the coup.

Florica Murariu, the tough-as-teak back-row forward who had scored a try against Wales in Bucharest in 1983 and led his country in the Cardiff victory, was an army officer who was shot dead at a roadblock.

But in 1987 the political upheavals were still in the future and Romania were a force to be reckoned with. For Scotland to put 55 points on them was impressive, even if they did concede 28 in reply (two of the three Romania tries that day were scored by Murariu).

What that meant for Scotland was a return to Christchurch for a quarter-final against an increasingly menacing All Black side, a fate which Scotland captain Colin Deans later said he had felt was always on the cards. ‘We went with the intention of winning it,’ he said. ‘That was the plan. We had world-class players in key positions and we played what was in front of us. We knew we had to top the group, but lost out on try difference.’ Deans was at least happy with the venue for that quarter-final, describing the Lancaster Park pitch as ‘like a bowling green’ such good condition was it in.

In the first quarter-final Scotland put in what is often described as a ‘brave’ performance; meaning, essentially, that they were run off their feet but never gave up. Scotland had little answer to the power of the All Blacks and though they tackled their hearts out, they could never break the shackles; New Zealand scored tries by Alan Whetton and John Gallagher, both converted by Grant Fox who added two penalties to one from Hastings. New Zealand just kept possession and stifled the life out of the battling Scots. ‘They play at a higher level,’ admitted Deans, ruefully. His New Zealand counterpart David Kirk was more damning. ‘We beat Scotland comprehensively. They offered nothing,’ was his pithy comment.

The contrast between the way the two sides viewed the contest: New Zealand approached the quarter-final in the same vein as their coach had expressed before the match. ‘When the death or glory time arrives, you don’t