

A Wales fan wearing a daffodil hat waits for the start of the Rugby World Cup quarter-final match between South Africa and Wales at Twickenham Stadium in London on Oct. 17. (AP)



Ford, Gray win appeal against bans

Scotland duo Ross Ford and Jonny Gray are free to play in Sunday's World Cup quarter-final against Australia after having three week bans for a dangerous tackle overturned on appeal.

Scotland did not rule out using hooker Ford and Gray, who has been partnering his older brother Richie in the second row, after they were completely absolved of foul play during the 36-33 victory over Samoa last Saturday. Ford had been found guilty of a dangerous tackle and Gray of a tip tackle. Their three week ban was imposed on the same day that

Argentinian Marcelo Bosch received just a week's ban for a tip tackle.

"Having conducted a detailed review of all the evidence, including new submissions from the players and their representatives, along with all available camera angles", read the Appeal Committee statement.

"The appeal committee dismissed the finding that the players had committed an act of foul play as the player had not been dropped or driven and therefore the tackle was not dangerous", read the appeals. "The players are therefore free to play again immediately". (AFP)



ARAB TIMES, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2015

43

rugby world cup

Injured Sexton deals blow to Irish hopes

Nothing to choose between Ireland, Pumas

CARDIFF, Wales (Agencies): It remains one of the perplexing anomalies of the Rugby World Cup.

How, in seven editions, has a nation as rich in rugby history as Ireland never advanced beyond the quarterfinals?

There's myriad reasons — bad luck, bad planning, and some bad performances — but 2015 has been viewed for some time as the year that record should come to an end.

If the two-time reigning Six Nations champions thought winning all their pool games and avoiding the All Blacks in the quarterfinals meant an easy route to the last four, though, they'd better think again.

In Argentina, Ireland has a quarterfinal opponent which can now be legitimately bracketed among the powers of world rugby. Playing annually against the southern hemisphere heavyweights in the Rugby Championship since 2012 has given the Pumas more experience of top-level rugby and forced them to develop a more balanced, all-round game than simply relying on traditional forward power.

Ireland would still have been regarded as the slight favorite at Millennium Stadium — it has beaten Argentina in the last five meetings — but events over the past week mean the outcome is a lottery.

While Argentina's top players rested on the last weekend of the pool stage, Ireland was involved in a brutal Pool D decider against the French. Time will tell if it was a pyrrhic victory.

Captain Paul O'Connell and flanker Peter O'Mahony sustained tournament-ending injuries and powerhouse flanker Sean O'Brien received a suspension for a forearm swing into Pascal Pape's midriff. That's three key forwards out of contention in a matter of days.

First-choice center Jared Payne was also ruled out of the tournament last weekend.

Then there's the teams' history in the World Cup.

The Argentines have already beaten Ireland twice in virtual elimination matches — a quarterfinal playoff in 1999 and then a pool-stage decider in 2007. In their only other World Cup meeting, Ireland squeezed to a 16-15 win in 2003.

"I know Ireland has European teams (for a rivalry), but for us it has become a nice challenge, a great derby," Argentina center Juan Martin Hernandez said. "These games, they are derbies."

Advancing further than Irish greats like Keith Wood and Brian O'Driscoll ever did brings its own pressures for Ireland's class of 2015. New Zealand and France are also playing in Cardiff this weekend, but green was the dominant color in the Welsh capital on Friday.

Ireland's players said they'd never experienced an atmosphere like the game against France last week, also played under the Millennium Stadium roof, and it's sure to be a similar sea of green on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Ireland fly-half Johnny Sexton will not play in Sunday's World Cup quarter-final against Argentina after his groin injury flared up again, the IRFU revealed. The 30-year-old — who went off with the injury in the first-half of the 24-9 victory over France last Sunday — will be replaced in the starting XV by Ian Madigan, who performed well when he came on against the French.

Paddy Jackson, the third choice fly-half, moves onto the replacements' bench while the Irish have also called up Isaac Boss as cover at scrum-half, a position in which Madigan also plays.

"Post training yesterday (Friday) Johnny Sexton tightened up and although scans earlier in the week were normal a further scan yesterday afternoon revealed a very minor adductor strain," read the IRFU statement.

"It was therefore felt that it was better to withdraw him from the game rather than risk further injury."

Sexton's withdrawal caps a frenetic week for the Irish that saw captain Paul O'Connell and flanker Peter O'Mahony ruled out of the tournament through injuries sustained in the France game. Star flanker Sean O'Brien was then suspended for one game for violent play.

No 8 Jamie Heaslip, captaining the side in the absence of O'Connell, described the news as a "massive" blow, but said he had every confidence in Madigan stepping up. "They're all guys you'd like to have in your squad but that's the nature of the game," Heaslip said in reference to Sexton, O'Connell, O'Mahony and centre Jared Payne. "It doesn't change the gameplan at all. You saw last week, after Johnny came off after 25 minutes, Ian stepped right in and did a great job."



Ireland's fly half Jonathan Sexton (right), and France's wing Brice Dulin (left), battle over the ball during the Pool D match of the 2015 Rugby World Cup between France and Ireland at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, South Wales on Oct 11. (AFP)



Wales' Gareth Anscombe (center), is tackled during the Rugby World Cup quarter-final match between South Africa and Wales at Twickenham Stadium in London on Oct 17. (AP)

Springboks reach WC semis

South Africa beat Wales 23-19

LONDON, Oct 17, (AP): Fourie du Preez crossed in the left corner with five minutes to go for South Africa to defeat Wales 23-19 in an enthralling start to the Rugby World Cup quarterfinals on Saturday.

The lead changed six times in a match in which 79,500 spectators at Twickenham dared not leave their seats, and it took a moment of brilliance to finally separate teams which overcame crippling starts to the tournament to get this far.

With the scrum feed, South Africa wheeled it toward the left touchline. No. 8 Duane Vermeulen broke away with the ball and drew replacement scrumhalf Lloyd Williams and winger Alex Cuthbert. Du Preez, lingering on the open side, suddenly flashed into view and the Springboks captain received a back pass from Vermeulen and a free, curving sprint into the corner.

The try wasn't converted, but Wales suddenly needed a try to win, and didn't look like getting it in the last minutes, pinned in their own half.

So South Africa, which was shocked by Japan in its opener, advanced to only its second semifinal in this century, and awaited the winner from the following match in Cardiff between New Zealand and France.

As the South Africans celebrated, full-time left Wales players doubled over or on their knees, hearts broken yet again by the Springboks. But the Welsh could be proud of their contribution, without virtually a full backline of injured stars.

They should have had a try in the first



Wales' Gareth Davies breaks from the tackle to go on and score a try during the Rugby World Cup quarter-final match between South Africa and Wales at Twickenham Stadium in London on Oct 17. (AP)

three minutes. Rookie center Tyler Morgan stripped counterpart Damian de Allende and began a counterattack which put the ball in the hands of prop Gethin Jenkins. He had the foresight to see Morgan unmarked on the far right, but threw a high miss-out pass that missed everyone.

South Africa was under pressure for three more minutes, until No. 8 Toby Faletau was penalized for not releasing on the 22, and the Boks cleared.

In the next 10 minutes, Springboks fly-half Handre Pollard landed three penalties and his Welsh opposite Dan Biggar kicked one.

The Springboks led 9-3, and just when it appeared they might be getting away, Wales produced a try from nothing. Du Preez hit a clearing kick straight down the middle to Biggar, who launched an up and under back into South Africa's quarter.

Willie le Roux over-ran it and Biggar regathered, then passed with defenders all around him to scrumhalf Gareth Davies, who beat the cover to the right of the posts.

Biggar converted for 10-9 and a first Welsh lead. It lasted three minutes, until another penalty from Pollard.

The second quarter was played between the 22s, South Africa edging possession and Wales defending all across the field and forcing turnovers. Captain Sam Warburton was superb.

With a minute left in first-half regulation, Biggar booted a penalty from 47 meters which hit the right upright. They forced a scrum and, in injury time, Jamie Roberts straightened the attack, and Biggar was perfectly set up to land a dropped goal for a 13-12 lead at halftime.

Pollard finally missed a goalkick to start the second half, while Biggar extended Wales' lead with a penalty from 46 meters and room to spare.

Aussies face tough & painful encounter with Scotland

'Character needed to beat Scots'

TWICKENHAM, United Kingdom, Oct 17, (AFP): Australia will need all their experience and character for a "tough and painful" encounter with Scotland in the World Cup quarter-finals on Sunday, according to coach Michael Cheika.

Cheika's side will be seeking a third successive superb performance at hosts England's headquarters where they have shown their armoury to two different sides.

"It's a match that's going to be tough and painful, physical and difficult," said Cheika, who nevertheless has a side packed with experience including two new Test centurions in centre Matt Giteau and captain Stephen Moore.

A fortnight ago, orchestrated by fly-half Bernard Foley, Australia's rapier offense cut the English to ribbons in a 33-13 victory. A week later they produced a remarkable backs-to-the wall defensive display to repel a Welsh onslaught when two men down for around 10 minutes and ran out 15-6 winners.

Now the Wallabies — who will be without two influential but injured players in fullback Israel Folau and No 8 David Pocock — must confront a Scotland side that is improving fast under Kiwi coach Vern Cotter.

"There's going to be a lot of moments when we are going to be under pressure and that character is what's required at that time to help you," said the Wallabies coach. "Our goal is to improve on our performance against Wales. There's a lot of areas where we can."

Cheika said the Scots would represent the toughest challenge yet.

For the first time in three games Cheika's side have been cast in the role of solid favorites. But the son of Lebanese immigrants is dismissive of that.

Wing Adam Ashley-Cooper, who will become the third most capped Wallaby on Sunday with 112 caps, knows not to take the Scots for granted as he has on two occasions finished on the losing side.

Greig Laidlaw, now the Scotland skipper, kicked all their points in a 12-6 win in appalling weather conditions in Newcastle, Australia, in 2012 and a missed Giteau conversion proved the difference in a 9-8 defeat at Murrayfield in 2009 — their first loss to the Scots since 1982.

However, in the halfback partnership of Laidlaw and Finn Russell, the back row of Kiwi duo John Hardie and Blair Cowan and Zimbabwe-born David Denton and renowned finisher Tommy Seymour the Scots possess weapons to



Samoa's wing Paul Perez (right), is tackled by Scotland's full-back Stuart Hogg (3rd left) during a Pool B match of the 2015 Rugby World Cup between Scotland and Samoa at St James' park in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, northeast England on Oct 10. (AFP)

hurt the Wallabies.

Meanwhile, Vern Cotter has not shirked controversy nor his duty to get the message over to his Scotland charges that they had to toughen up to achieve World Cup success.

He brought in foreign-born Scots, made them all march up a mountain and now a big peak looms when Scotland face Australia in the World Cup quarter-final on Sunday.

Since he took over as Scotland's coach in May 2014, the 53-year-old New Zealander has known that not everyone would agree with his decisions, including his team selections.

"That's their right, isn't it?," he said. "Everybody has got an opinion. We are just focusing on what we think is the best thing to do to move forward. I don't expect everybody to agree."

Cotter knows about determination. He played for Counties Manukau in New Zealand and for French clubs before becoming coach of Bay of Plenty in the New Zealand National Provincial Championship.

He was Crusaders forwards coach when they won the southern hemisphere Super 12 championship in 2006 and went from there to take over Clermont in France's Top 14 the same year.

They finished second three seasons in a row before Cotter could claim a title. He switched from the heights of Top 14 to the lower levels of the Six Nations with Scotland in 2014.

Cotter said he knew it would be "a long hard trip" to the World Cup.

He sought a mixture of "battle-hardened" and "new talent" in a bid to reinvigorate a Scottish side that missed the 2014 Six Nations wooden spoon with a last-gasp drop-goal to beat Italy.

But Scotland lost every game in this year's Six Nations, including a defeat in the finale to champions Ireland — a side coached by Joe Schmidt, Cotter's former assistant at Bay of Plenty and Clermont.

Ireland won 40-10 at Murrayfield and Cotter said of the result: "There were things that were brought home with brutal clarity."

So Cotter took his pre-World Cup squad to the French Pyrenees in June.

Eric Blondeau, who worked with France's special forces, talked to them about handling stress. French commandos led the Scottish squad up a 1,800 metre mountain.

"Vern and the coaches said they want to make us comfortable in the uncomfortable situations," said 2.1 metre (6ft 10inch) lock Richie Gray of the boot camp.

"I wouldn't say he is radically different to other coaches but he is very focused on bringing us together and making us remember we are playing for our country."

Cotter took his revolution to the World Cup squad selection.

Back-row Josh Strauss and prop Willem Nell were born in South Africa. Zimbabwe-born David Denton also speaks Afrikaans. Tommy Seymour was born in the United States and Sean Maitland played for New Zealand's Under-19 and Under-20 teams.

Blair Cowan, a late replacement for the injured Grant Gilchrist, is also Kiwi-born.

The most contentious move was bringing in John Hardie, who qualifies through a Scottish grandmother but who only arrived in the country in July.

Former Scotland and British and Irish Lion prop Peter Wright said that choosing Hardie over John Barclay was an "absolute disgrace".

But second place in Pool B with three wins and impressive performances by Hardie have won over the doubters. No-one expects Scotland — who failed to get past the pool stage in 2011 — to beat Australia but a braveheart performance will bring Cotter, whose contract has been taken through to 2020, more credit.

"Overall Scotland are going in the right direction and Vern Cotter has done a very good job," said Japan's coach Eddie Jones after his side's 45-10 pool loss to the Scots.