

Japan rugby fans pose outside the stadium ahead of the Pool B match of the 2015 Rugby World Cup between Scotland and Japan at Kingsholm Stadium in Gloucester, west England on Sept 23. (AFP)



United States prop Chris Baumann does not get paid for playing rugby — he does it for the sheer love of the game.

The 28-year-old trundled over the line to score his team's second try in their opening 25-16 defeat by Samoa at the Rugby World Cup and ahead of the Americans' game against Scotland he recalled his journey to the global showpiece tournament.

"I've done a bunch of different jobs, but the one where I didn't need to work out was working at a woodmill in Steamboat Springs

(Colorado)," Baumann told reporters. "You get real big logs where you need machinery to move them, but some of the smaller ones you can move yourself."

Baumann has travelled the world to pursue his passion for rugby after giving up on his ambition to play American college football as an offensive lineman.

He has played in Scotland, New Zealand, Japan, the Philippines and Argentina as well as a spell with the Randwick club in Sydney. (RTRS)

rugby world cup

Captain Cane central to NZ long-term future

Namibia happy to achieve small steps against All Blacks

LONDON, Sept 23. (Agencies): There's no bravado from Namibia as the lowest-ranked side in the Rugby World Cup prepares to face undisputed No. 1 New Zealand for the first time on Thursday at the Olympic Stadium.

"For us, it's not a game that we think we can win, but we feel it's a game where we can do our country proud," said Pieter Rossouw, the former Springboks winger who joined Namibia in June as their attack coach.

The Namibians, the last team to get underway in the Cup, are on a hiding to nothing. They have qualified for their fifth Cup, and have yet to win a match. The 'best' loss was by 15 points. That's why they are concentrating on achieving small steps against the mighty All Blacks, to put them in good stead for their other Pool C games.

At risk of losing heavily, the Namibians have embraced playing New Zealand first up. They think the schedule serves them well: Get their hardest one out of the way first. And, who knows, if they can play well, maybe score a try or two, then they believe that will bolster their already high confidence and earn some traction into the next game against Tonga.

"We're massively excited," said Jacques Burger, Namibia's captain and



South Africa's Bryan Habana jumps during their training session at the University of Birmingham, England on Sept 22. South Africa will play a rugby world cup match against Samoa on Sept 26. (AP)

best-known face. "If we can put up a great performance, we can take a lot of confidence away from that."

"The All Blacks at the Olympic Stadium is incredible for Namibian

'We're expecting a much harder game'

Pumas face lock woes against Georgia

LONDON, Sept 23. (RTRS): Argentina have second-row concerns going into Friday's Rugby World Cup Pool C clash against Georgia with Mariano Galarza set to learn his fate on Wednesday for alleged foul play and Guido Petti recovering from a knock.

Petti was hurt scoring Argentina's try midway through the first half of their 26-16 defeat by holders New Zealand at Wembley on Sunday.

Galarza was cited for foul play after coming on as a replacement against the All Blacks and travelled to London from the team's Hertfordshire base on Wednesday morning for a disciplinary hearing.

Coach Daniel Hourcade was going to name his team to face

Georgia at midday but postponed the announcement until the evening at the team's Cheltenham hotel, near Gloucester.

"It's Georgia next, we must go into it as we started against the All Blacks," Tomas Lavanini, another of Argentina's locks who played the full 80 minutes on Sunday, told reporters.

"We're expecting a much harder game in the forwards, we know Georgia have a very rough pack and we're prepared mentally for the battle we expect," he added.

Petti said there were no major injury problems in the squad. "There's aren't many knocks, just niggles. The week is short but we'll get there in good shape," said Petti, who has been getting treatment along with number eight Leonardo Senatore, who limped off towards the end of the match.

rugby. A lot of our guys are amateurs and look up to these guys as idols. The experience for all the players — me included, because I've not played them — will be great."

By all accounts, the best-prepared Namibia comes to the Rugby World Cup. There was a hiccup in June when Danie Vermuelen, who coached them for three

years to qualification, resigned in a dispute with the national union. Team adviser Phil Davies, the former Wales lock who played in the first two Cups, took over.

The Namibians have benefited from an upgraded high performance center, improved player welfare, training with the Springboks, and games organized

against higher-ranked Russia, which was beaten twice.

Meanwhile, the rapid elevation of 23-year-old Sam Cane to captain New Zealand against Namibia at London's Olympic Stadium on Thursday is the latest chapter in the All Blacks blueprint for the future.

He's not earmarked as the next first

choice captain after the talismanic Richie McCaw finally retires but he will be the one after that in coach Steve Hansen's vision which requires constant forward planning.

"It's a great opportunity to future proof," Hansen said as he made wholesale changes to his starting line up for their second Pool C match against minnows Namibia.

The position of All Blacks captain ranks as probably the second-most important role in rugby-obsessed New Zealand behind the prime minister.

The skipper is expected to uphold the team's phenomenal record as one of the most successful sports teams in the world with a 76 percent winning rate from 532 Tests over more than 120 years.

The 12 changes to face Namibia, which meant starting an almost second XV against the southern Africans, is Hansen's way of making sure all of his squad get World Cup game time and he has cover for any eventualty ahead.

Kieran Read is the captain in waiting behind McCaw and if the defending champions suffer another horror run of injuries — they lost three fly-halves in the 2011 World Cup — then Cane is the insurance policy.

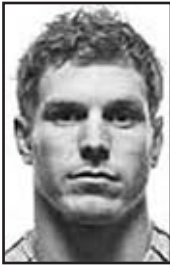
Aussies struggle to 'put' away Fiji

Wallabies fail to earn bonus point

CARDIFF, Wales, Sept 23, (AP): Australia struggled to put away a spirited Fiji side playing their second game in five days at the Rugby World Cup, winning 28-13 mainly thanks to a quick brace of first-half tries from No. 8 David Pocock at the Millennium Stadium on Wednesday.

Pocock dived over at the base of rolling mauls to help the Australians to an 18-3 halftime lead in their first Pool A game of the tournament. And when prop Sekope Kepu barged over for a third try early in the second half, Fiji faced a huge task so soon after losing to England in the opening game on Friday.

Yet flyhalf Ben Volavola's solo try in the 60th inspired the Fijians to a strong finish, with Australia pinned back in its own half in the final minutes.



Pocock

The Wallabies failed, unlike England, to earn the bonus point for four tries that could yet prove significant in a tough pool also containing Wales.

Flyhalf Bernard Foley kicked 13 points for Australia, which have won the World Cup both times it has been held in Britain — in 1991 and 1999.

The Wallabies had the luxury of a belated start to the tournament, having been holed in Bath in southeast England while their rivals slugged it out over the opening weekend.

So while Fiji arrived in Cardiff battle-hardened but potentially sore from a 35-11 loss to England at Twickenham, the Australians were fresh and buoyed from winning the Rugby Championship this year.

Fiji was expected to fade in the second half — as Japan did against Scotland hours earlier after its quick turnaround from the weekend. It didn't happen.

Sniffing another upset, the neutrals under the Millennium Stadium's closed roof were firmly behind the Flying Fijians, with chants of "Fiji, Fiji" sweeping the stadium after each break or big tackle. Imagine what could have transpired with a few more days' rest.

Pocock's brace of tries proved crucial, pushing Australia ahead by halftime in a first half it shaded.

They both came from the same source — attacking lineouts after Australia turned down penalty kicks at goal. Pocock is a recent convert to the No. 8 shirt but he looked at home there as he controlled the ball at the base of mauls before diving over the tryline in the 27th and 31st minutes.

Kepu ran through Tuapati Talemaitoga's attempted tackle to scurry over in the 43rd and Australia looked set for a bonus-point win.

Fiji summoned up energy out of nowhere, and produced some wonder-

Coach urges NZ to raise the 'bar'

LONDON, Sept 23. (RTRS): Coach Steve Hansen has challenged the All Blacks to raise the bar in their second Rugby World Cup match against Namibia on Thursday, despite fielding a second-string side against the lowest-ranked team at the tournament.

New Zealand opened their title defence with a hard-fought 26-16 victory by their first-choice team over Argentina at Wembley and move across London to the Olympic Stadium to face the Africans in Pool C.

"One of the things that we pride ourselves on is trying to improve our performance from the previous one," Hansen told reporters on Wednesday.

"We have a line in the sand as far as the game against Argentina goes. The group going out on Thursday have to change that line to a higher performance level. It does not matter who we are playing."

Like every coach of a rugby heavy-weight facing one of rugby's less powerful nations, Hansen was asked what lessons he has drawn from Japan's upset of the Springboks last weekend.

"We can't just assume that Namibia will lie down because they won't. They will be proud men and will come out and give it everything they have got," he added.

"We will give Namibia total respect because that's what they deserve as another playing nation. Rugby is a funny thing and sport is a funny thing. If you don't prepare properly then you can get a hiding."

Although the 20th-ranked Namibians have never won a match in four previous appearances at the Rugby World Cup, they do have a player that most teams at the World Cup would happily draft into their team in loose forward Jacques Burger.

"He is a pretty special player," Hansen said. "He is totally committed. If you are going to be in his part of the park and you are carrying the ball then you'd better get ready to get smashed."

Dan Carter opened the tournament at flyhalf against the Pumas and Beauden Barrett will wear the New Zealand number 10 shirt against the Africans, which leaves Colin Slade as clearly the third choice stand-off.

Slade gets a chance to show his versatility at fullback on Thursday and is happy to have a game, even if not being able to press his claim in his favourite position is a little frustrating. "I leave it up to the coach, mate," Slade said. "I'm comfortable anywhere and just looking forward to the challenge. It's not ideal but you roll with it."

"We prepare well enough every week, regardless of whether we are playing. If I get that opportunity I am ready to go."

ful offloads and one-handed passes that thrilled a near-capacity crowd. Volavola's try was a delight, sidestepping Rob Simmons and dummying past another lock in Kane Douglas to battle across the line and between the posts.

By the end, Australia was hanging on. A bigger win is expected against Uruguay on Sunday.



Australia's Tevita Kuridrani is tackled by the Fiji defence during the Rugby World Cup Pool A match between Australia and Fiji at the Millennium Stadium, Cardiff on Sept 23. (AP)

Habana warns Springboks

SA make 8 changes for Samoa clash

Joseph doubtful for showdown

BIRMINGHAM, England, Sept 23. (RTRS): South Africa coach Heyneke Meyer rung the changes on Wednesday as he named his side for Saturday's Rugby World Cup clash with Samoa but captain Jean de Villiers was spared the axe.

More than half the team from the shock 34-32 defeat by Japan in Brighton were dropped in a major overhaul as South Africa sought to deal with the fallout from the embarrassing setback in their opening match of the tournament.

The casualties includes veteran hooker Bismarck du Plessis, fullback Zane Kirchner, centre Jesse Kriel, who loses his place at outside centre to De Villiers, and the halfback pairing of Ruan Pienaar and Pat Lambie.

Also dropped were lock Lood de Jager, winger Lwazi Mvovo and Pieter-Steph du Toit, who played at flanker against the Japanese.

Damian de Allende comes in at inside centre with De Villiers moved wider while veteran scrumhalf Fourie du Preez will start his first test in more than a year, partnered by 20-year-old flyhalf Handre Pollard. They have played together just once before in June last year.

Willie le Roux at fullback and JP Pietersen on the wing were form choices for Saturday's Pool B match at Villa Park while the returns of Eben Etzebeth and Duane Vermeulen after injury were expected.

Team: 1-Tendai Mtawairira, 2-Adriaan Strauss, 3-Jannie du Plessis, 4-Eben Etzebeth, 5-Victor Matfield, 6-Francois Louw, 7-Schalk Burger, 8-Duane Vermeulen; 9-Fourie du Preez, 10-Handre Pollard, 11-Bryan Habana, 12-Damian de Allende, 13-Jean de Villiers (captain), 14-JP Pietersen, 15-Willie le Roux.

Replacements: 16-Schalk Brits, 17-Trevor Nyakane, 18-Frans Malherbe, 19-Lood de Jager, 20-Siya Kolisi, 21-Ruan Pienaar, 22-Pat Lambie, 23-Jesse Kriel. Meanwhile, mental focus must be much higher for South Africa as they anticipate a

Burgess can start against Wales: England backs coach

BAGSHOT, United Kingdom, Sept 23. (AFP): England backs coach Andy Farrell will have no qualms about Sam Burgess starting in the tournament hosts' crunch World Cup match against Wales at Twickenham on Saturday, even though the rugby league convert is still an international novice in the 15-man game.

Burgess has played just 112 minutes of Test rugby union spanning three matches but the centre could be on the field come kick-off against Wales if Jonathan Joseph is ruled out with a chest injury suffered in England's opening 35-11 opening win over Fiji last Friday.

The 26-year-old Burgess has played just one season of rugby union since helping the South Sydney Rabbitohs win Australia's NRL Grand Final, where he won the man-of-the-match award after playing on with a broken cheekbone.

But ex-England captain Will Carling, himself a former centre, said before the World Cup started he felt Burgess had been unfairly rushed into the Test squad.

Farrell, who like Burgess made his name in rugby league, was adamant the Bath powerhouse, who has made just one Test start so far, would have no problems settling into England's 1st XV.

bruising clash with Samoa in their second Rugby World Cup Pool B match after the shock defeat by Japan, veteran winger Bryan Habana warned on Tuesday.

"Our mental capacity and focus must be both on a higher level and much improved," he told reporters as the Springboks tried to pick themselves up after an embarrassing setback in which

"We were confident when we picked the 31-man squad that everyone could do a job for us and we have to make sure everyone is comfortable in starting," Farrell said at England's training base in Bagshot, south-west



A man plays bagpipes outside the stadium ahead of the Pool B match of the 2015 Rugby World Cup between Scotland and Japan at Kingsholm Stadium in Gloucester, west England on Sept 23. (AFP)

of London, on Tuesday. "Everyone was talking about whether Sam was or wasn't going to be ready, but we know what we see every week in training and we back everyone if they were to be picked in the starting line-up."

Finding a settled midfield pair has proved a problem for England ever since their 2003 World Cup-winning partnership of Will Greenwood and Mike Tindall came to an end.

Indeed current England coach Stuart Lancaster has got through 13 different centre combinations alone since taking charge in 2012.

England have the experienced Brad Barritt, best known as a defensive midfielder in their squad, along with talented Exeter playmaker Henry Slade who, by contrast, has just one cap in his name after impressing alongside Burgess in a warm-up win over France at Twickenham last month.

But given how a desire to make sure the team is defensively solid often trumps attacking flair in matters of England team selection, it would not be a surprise to see Owen Farrell, the son of Andy and primarily a fly-half, shifted to midfield to play alongside Saracens team-mate Barritt when Lancaster names his team to play Wales on Thursday.

They lost 34-32 to Japan in the biggest upset in Rugby World Cup history.

"We have had a hard talk and a hard look at each other as individuals and where we stand," said Habana of the post-Japan match analysis.

"We are trying to be as positive as possible after what was a rather depressing weekend."

"It's about now bouncing back. We all realise how much we let everyone down. But there is still something special within in this squad and so we want to bounce back and install hope again. It will take small steps but it starts on Saturday."

"Our past games against Samoa have always been physical and of a high intensity."