

Coaches to scorch rugby’s Ashes

When Wallabies meet England in World Cup QF, it will also be a battle of wits between coaches Michael Cheika (Aus) and Eddie Jones (Eng), who both started their rugby at the same beach-side rugby club Randwick

The stuffing inside Randwick

“IF YOU cut Cheika and Jones, their blood would run myrtle green, both products of that famous Sydney club by the beach, Randwick. The coaches’ enduring connection to Randwick was evident in their emotional responses to the passing of club legend and mentor Jeff Sayle last week, bringing tears to the eyes of two of hardest men in rugby,” The Guardian wrote.

Cheika was a son of Lebanese immigrants while Jones, six years apart, was half-Japanese. Both found their footing at the egalitarian club where “lawyers rubbed shoulders with labourers.” Rugby in Sydney back in 1970s and 80s had been a snobbish scene with predominantly Anglo-Celtic population. But Randwick whisked their attention away from Rugby League since rugby union was more inclusive, the paper writes.

Their careers overlapped briefly with Jones, an 80kg hooker, the toughest player in the Sydney competition, while Cheika was an unusually big but hardnosed backrower. “Jones had another weapon, his sharp tongue, which eviscerated victims. A lover of cricket, Jones could certainly sledge for the Australian XI,” Guardian notes. Cheika doesn’t hold back either. Both played for New South Wales but not Wallabies which ignited their coaching ambitions.

Burning ambition, different paths

Jones is known for his mathematical precision. Cheika’s bombast is more passion and emotion. Their coaching paths first crossed cracklingly in 2016. Then Japan coach, Jones had just pulled off “The Brighton Miracle,” the Brave Blossoms’ shock win against the Springboks. But Cheika was named international coach of the year for taking the Wallabies from sixth place in the world to the final of the World Cup at Twickenham, which Australia lost to the All Blacks. Australia beat the ABs two months back.

In Australia for England’s three-Test tour, Jones had out-manoeuvred Cheika as England won the series 3-0, a loss that is said to still haunt the Wallabies. In subsequent years Jones coached England to another three wins against Cheika’s Wallabies, establishing a psychological advantage over the men in gold. Both crave a first world title after losing



Michael Cheika (left) is the son of Lebanese immigrants while Eddie Jones is half-Japanese. AP/Reuters

finals — Cheika in 2015 with Australia and Jones in 2003 as Wallabies coach, denied by a Jonny Wilkinson field goal in extra-time. There’s an edge of desperation and now or never to the this campaign for both.

Chirp and chomp

Cheika vs Jones is incomplete without sniping. When England’s final pool game against France was cancelled due to Typhoon Hagibis, Jones claimed his team would benefit from the two-week break compared to the Wallabies’ hard match with a physical Georgia. Cheika shot back saying England had the best prep. Jones dripped sarcasm calling Cheika best coach in the world. If England beat the Wallabies on Saturday, Jones will end Cheika’s tenure as Australia coach.

“No one would appreciate the irony more than Jones, who was sacked as Wallabies coach at the end of 2005 after losing eight of nine Tests that year. Jones cried bitter tears at a media conference following his sacking. It hurt him then and it would surprise if it

still didn’t. Time does not heal every wound,” Guardian writes.

Rugby Australia denied Jones his complete contract through to the 2007 World Cup, which might have made him the longest-serving Wallaby coach. The scorned Jones acted as a consultant to the Springboks, who won the tournament, while the Wallabies were eliminated in the quarter-final by England. Jones would now want to eliminate Australia from this World Cup. Cheika isn’t too keen to become collateral damage in this great revenge.

Aussies galore in Eng camp

Canberra Raiders coach Ricky Stuart, the club’s head of physical performance Nigel Ashley-Jones and football manager Matt Ford, joined the England team at their idyllic base — mountain-ringed Beppu on Tuesday. “Their arrival took to six the number of Australians tasked with helping England knock off the Wallabies and make their first World Cup semi-final since 2007,” Sydney Morning Herald reported adding, “Attack

coach and former Parramatta Eels fullback Scott Wisemantel has been in bed with the enemy since May last year, while veteran sports scientist and performance guru Neil Craig has known Jones since his Wallabies days in 2003 but joined the England set up in 2017.” Cheika called this Oz-cozying with England, “weird”.

It’s nothing new for England to call in so many experts from all over. Their defence coach John Mitchell is a Kiwi and former All Blacks coach. “You can dress it up anyway you want to but if you look at it from a realistic point of view, the planning for him coming was done a long time ago. Australia didn’t know they would have England in the quarter-final and England didn’t know either. That’s the way I see it,” he told SMH.

Jones has a long history of inviting in top practitioners in their fields. Melbourne Storm coach Craig Bellamy spent time with the squad before the World Cup, while Irish football legend Roy Keane and Manchester United legend Sir Alex Ferguson have also made appearances. **ENS**

Tokyo Olympic marathon and walks set to move to Sapporo over heat fears

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
LAUSANNE, OCTOBER 16

THE MARATHON and race walks at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics could be moved from the Japanese capital to Sapporo where temperatures will be “significantly lower”, the International Olympic Committee said on Wednesday.

The IOC is proposing the move because temperatures in Tokyo during the July 24-August 9 Games could reach into the high 30s Celsius. In Sapporo, more than 800 kilometres further north, they would be five to six degrees cooler during the day. “Athletes’ health and well-being are always at the heart of our concerns,” IOC President Thomas Bach said in a statement.

The plan driven by increasing summer heat cuts into a key promise of Tokyo’s bidding, first for the 2016 Olympics won by Rio de Janeiro and then its successful 2020 campaign, to deliver a “compact games” with 85% of venues in an 8-kilometer (5-mile) city center cluster.

“The new far-reaching proposals to move the marathon and race walking events show how seriously we take such concerns. “The Olympic Games are the platform where athletes can give ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ performances, and these measures ensure they have the conditions to give their best.”

The plan to change the location of the events has yet to be rubberstamped. The initiative will need the backing of all of the major stakeholders, notably the host city Tokyo, the national Olympic committees and the relevant broadcasters.

The IOC Coordination Commission for Tokyo 2020 will dedicate a special session in its meeting in Tokyo at the end of the month to measures to deal with the heat.

When Tokyo last hosted the Olympics in 1964 the marathon — won by the great Ethiopian Abebe Bikila — was run at 1:00pm but that was in the month of October, not August as will be the case next year.

Doha heat took its toll

At the recent world championships in Doha, both the men’s and women’s

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THOMAS BACH,
IOC PRESIDENT

marathons started at midnight but the heat and humidity still presented massive problems. Ruth Chepngetich won the women’s race in a sluggish 2hr 32min 43sec — 17 minutes outside Paula Radcliffe’s then world record — while 28 of the 68 starters failed to finish.

The men’s race was held in cooler conditions but Lelisa Desisa’s winning time of 2hr 10min 40sec was over nine minutes slower than the world record.

“We have been working closely with the IOC and Tokyo 2020 on the potential weather conditions at next year’s Olympic Games and will continue to work with the IOC and Tokyo 2020 on the proposal to move the road events to Sapporo,” said International Amateur Athletics Federations’ President Sebastian Coe.

“Giving athletes the best platform for their performances within the environment they are in is central to all major events. “We will work with the organisers to create the very best marathon and race walk courses for next year’s Olympic Games.”

The planned relocation of the marathon and race walks are a part of a broader scheme to lessen the effects of the weather on the athletes.

The 5,000m and longer-distance races are being scheduled for the evening athletics sessions and not in the morning sessions while all rugby sevens morning games are slated to finish before 12:00pm.

The mountain bike start time has been pushed back to start at 3:00pm.

The IOC said that the timing of other events and competitions would be “kept under review”.

Rodrigo fires Spain into Euro with late leveller

REUTERS
STOCKHOLM, OCTOBER 16

ASTUTTERING Spain qualified for Euro 2020 as a stoppage-time strike by substitute Rodrigo cancelled out Marcus Berg’s opener for Sweden in a 1-1 draw in Group F on Tuesday.

The result left Spain top of the standings on 20 points and guaranteed a spot in the top two, with the Swedes second on 15, and Romania a point further back in third.

Yet having drawn with both Norway and Sweden in their last two matches on their trip to Scandinavia, the Spaniards will have plenty of work to do if they want to be considered among the favourites at next year’s tournament. With captain Sergio Ramos suspended following his yellow card in their last game against Norway, Spain started superbly, ping-ponging the ball from side to side and probing for openings behind the Swedish defence.

Thiago Alcantara could have put the visitors ahead early on, but after rounding the goalkeeper he mis-controlled the ball and it rolled out for a goal kick.

Midfielder Rodri had a stinging shot saved shortly afterwards and it looked to be only a matter of time before the Spaniards made the breakthrough, but with goalkeeper Robin Olsen in superb form, the Swedes adjusted and began to grow into the game.

Fullback Mikael Lustig had their first shot on target in the 27th minute and striker Robin Quaison followed it up with a brilliant header that Spain keeper David De Gea clawed away for a corner.

With light rain falling throughout the game, players struggled to keep their footing on the Friends Arena surface.

Striker Berg put Sweden in front early in the second half after his initial header was saved, as was Emil Forsberg’s shot, but Berg nodded home from close range at the second attempt to give his side the lead.

De Gea left the fray injured on the hour mark and despite dominating possession throughout, Spain found it almost impossible to create the kind of chances they had enjoyed in the opening exchanges.

The crowd of over 49,000 in the stands were in fine voice as they ignored the damp weather with the final whistle approaching, but Rodrigo silenced them by snapping up a ball from a corner and rifling it home to send Spain through.

“I am very happy, the players were very good and we met a very strong rival. It was tough for us, but we corrected what needed to be corrected,” Spain coach Robert Moreno told reporters.



Writing On The Wall

A PROTESTER puts a picture of Commissioner Adam Silver, next to LeBron James’ photo on a wall during a gathering in support of NBA’s Houston Rockets’ team general manager Daryl Morey, who sent a tweet backing the pro-democracy movement, in Hong Kong. *Reuters*

My comments taken out of context: LeBron

Hong Kong: Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James told reporters on Tuesday that he believes his comments on Monday — regarding a tweet by Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey in favour of an independent Hong Kong — were taken out of context, calling the circumstances as a whole “tough.”

“I mean obviously it’s a tough situation that we’re all in right now, as an association,” said James, who added that he often feels that his words are taken out of context.

“Us as athletes, owners, GMs, whatever, so forth. I think when the issue comes up, if you feel passionate about it or you feel like it’s something that you want to talk about, then so be it,” James said Monday — after the Lakers returned from a tour in China — he believed Morey was “either misinformed or not really educated on the situation” and didn’t consider the consequences before posting his tweet.

“So many people could have been harmed not only financially, physically, emotionally, spiritually,” James said Monday.

“So just be careful what we tweet and say and we do, even though, yes, we do have freedom of speech, but there can be a lot of negative that comes with that, too.”

After backlash to James’ comments, he tweeted a follow up on Monday night, writing, “Let me clear up the confusion. I do not believe there was any consideration for the consequences and ramifications of (Morey’s) tweet. I’m not discussing the substance. Others can talk about that.”

James’ Monday comments and tweets drew plenty of criticism, including from many in Hong Kong, where protestors were seen stomping on and burning his jerseys on

basketball courts in the city.

Speaking from the Lakers’ facility Tuesday, James said he hadn’t see those images and wasn’t monitoring the backlash.

“I haven’t been paying attention to it much besides what I said and what we’re trying to do here,” he said.

James elaborated somewhat on the discussion about free speech Tuesday. “I also don’t think that every issue should be everybody’s problem, as well,” James said.

“There’s multiple things that we haven’t talked about that happen in our own country that we don’t bring up. There’s things that happen in my own community. ...

“There’s issues all over the world, and I think the best thing we can do is, if you feel passionate about it, talk about it. If you don’t have a lot of knowledge about it or you don’t quite understand it, I don’t think you should talk about it. I think it just puts you in a tough position.” James finished his media session by saying he won’t discuss the subject moving forward, with hopes of avoiding distractions around the team.

“I won’t talk about it again, because I’ll be cheating my teammates by continuing to harp on something that won’t benefit us,” James said. Morey has not been disciplined for his since-deleted tweet that included a logo and the words, “Fight for freedom, stand with Hong Kong.”

Rockets owner Tilman Fertitta spoke out against Morey and his tweet, and Rockets star James Harden said afterward, “We apologize. You know, we love China. We love playing there,” while standing next to teammate Russell Westbrook in Tokyo. **REUTERS**

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