

FUKUOKA, IRB Pacific Nations Cup: Japan vs. Australia A Preview

Japan v Australia A

Sunday, 8 June 2008 Level 5 Stadium, Fukuoka, Japan.

Kick-off: 2:05 PM (Japan time.) Referee: W. Roos (South Africa)

Recent encounters: Japan versus comparable Australia A sides. Australia A 71 d Japan 10, 6 June 2007, Townsville. (PNC) (Test status for Japan) Australian PM’s XV 61 d Japan 19, 4 November 2006, Tokyo. (Non-Test status) Australia A 66 d Japan 15, 8 June 2003, Tokyo. (Test status for Japan) Australia A 63 d Japan 5, 5 June 2003, Osaka. (Test status for Japan)

Full Tests between Japan and Australia. Australia 91 d Japan 3, 8 September 2007, Lyon. (RWC) Australia 42 d Japan 23, 3 June 1987, Sydney. (RWC) Australia 50 d Japan 25, 17 August 1975, Brisbane. Australia 37 d Japan 7, 2 August 1975, Sydney.

Preview Japan head coach John Kirwan has picked a near full strength side for the opening round of the Pacific Nations Cup encounter against Australia A in Fukuoka on Sunday, 8 June 2008. The front row of Tatsukichi Nishiura at loose head, Yusuke Aoki as hooker and Tomokazu Soma at tight head is the same combination that turned out last week against the Classic All Blacks in the wet in Tokyo. However, there is a slight adjustment in the second row with the experienced Hitoshi Ono coming back into the line-up to partner Toshizumi Kitagawa who retains his place in the starting fifteen. Ono missed the CAB game as well as the last two Asian Five Nations matches but with 26 tests behind him he is the second most capped forward in the squad behind captain Miuchi and so his guile will be needed against the Australians. The backrow is also the same unit that faced the CAB in Ryu Koliniasi Holani on the blind side, Hare Makiri on the open side and captain Takuro Miuchi at No8.

In the backs, Fumiaki Tanaka and James Arlidge are again the preferred halves with the young Tanaka proving himself at halfback against Justin Marshall, Mark Robinson and the pressure of the CAB pack last Saturday. After the match against the CAB, JK had the following to say about his halfback, “He was the smallest guy on the field but he has the biggest heart in the world.” Thus, JK has entrusted him with the job this week in marking Josh Holmes and possibly Patrick Phibbs later in the match. Ryan Nicholas and Yuta Imamura are again at inside centre and outside centre respectively backing up from the tough CAB game while the try scorers against the CAB in Hiroto Onozawa and Kosuke Endo are again the wingers. In fact, the only change in the run on backline is at fullback with Go Aruga dropping out of the XXII with Shaun Webb moving from the bench to the fullback position.

On the bench, Taku Inokuchi is the back-up hooker while Yuta Inose is the reserve prop. Both were also on the bench for the CAB game but their services were not required so they will be keen for some game time this week. The Toyota pairing of big man Tomoaki Taniguchi and Takashi Kikutani will cover the second row and back row. Tomoki Yoshida is the reserve halfback and utility back Bryce Robins will again start from the bench. Tongan born wing Christian Loamanu is back in Japanese colours for the first time since the Rugby World Cup in France last autumn and he too will be hoping to take to the field at some time during the match.

Phil Mooney, the new coach of Australia A this year, taking over from Laurie Fisher, has chosen a strong line-up to take on the full Japan side. Mooney has just finished his first year in charge of the Reds but he also took the Australian U19 team to the 2006 IRB U19 World Championship, coming home as champions. The most experienced players in the side are Brumbies fullback Mark Gerrard, captain Morgan Turinui, now playing with Mooney’s Reds after a long career in his home state of New South Wales and prop Guy Shepherdson.

Pek Cowan, Sean Hardman and Shepherdson are the starting front row with Van Humphries and Peter Kimlin making up the tight five as locks. Humphries is no stranger to Japan as he played with IBM and then Kintetsu before returning to Queensland last season. Good form in the Super 14s has seen him play his way into the side. Mitch Chapman, Matt Hodgson and Julian Salvi make up the relatively youthful back row.

In the backs, Josh Holmes will start ahead of Pat Phibbs as halfback. At 186cms and 91kgs Holmes is as big as a back rower and a full 20cms taller than his rival Tanaka, which should make for an interesting contest. At 20 years of age, Ben Lucas is the youngest player on the field but he has been given the task of directing play from the five-eighth position. Timana Tahu still only in his first year of Rugby Union will partner Turinui in the centres while Frances Fainifo and Matt Carraro are the wings with Gerrard at fullback. The Australians have a lot of big men in the backline but JK has also picked size for the Japan backs as a good counter.

On the bench, Tai McLissac is the reserve hooker with Salesi Ma’afu the back-up prop. Two metre tall Al Campbell is the reserve second rower with the Reds’ Poutasi Luafutu, another 20 year old, covering the back row. Halfback Phibbs will start from the bench and Tyrone Smith, brother of Wallabies flanker George and versatile Sam Norton-Knight covering the rest of the backline positions.

Last year, the Australia A side dominated proceedings in Townsville, running out 71-10 winners. However, with good preparation in the Asian Five Nations and the Classic All Blacks allowing the combinations to come together and also playing at home, JK will be hoping to catch the Australians off guard as they take to the field as a unit for the first time this season.

Other Round 1 Matches

Fiji v Samoa

Saturday, 7 June 2008

Churchill Park, Lautoka.

Referee: K. Brown (NZ)

Fiji

1- Graham Dewes, 2- Sunia Koto, 3- Jone Railomo, 4- Ifereimi Rawaqa (World), 5- Kele Leawere, 6- Semisi Naevo (NEC), 7- Aca Ratuva, 8- Netani Talei, 9- Mosese Rauluni captain, 10- Waisea Luveniyali, 11- Vilimoni Delasau, 12- Kameli Ratuva, 13- Sireli Nagelevuki (Stormers), 14- Timoci Nagusa and 15- Taniela Rawaqa.

Reserves: 16- Vereniki Sauturaga, 17- Viliame Seuseu, 18- Wame Lewaravu, 19- Akapusi Qera (Gloucester), 20- Aporosa Vata, 21- Jonetani Ralulu and 22- Marika Vacacegu.

Squad members not used: Alefoso Yalalayatabua, Deryck Thomas (Yamaha), Vereniki Goneva, Maleli Kunavore and Michael Tagicakibau.

Head coach: Ilivasi Tabua.

Manu Samoa

1- Evile Telea, 2- Mahonri Schwalger, 3- Census Johnstone, 4- Filipo Levi captain (Ricoh), 5- Chad Slade, 6- Raymond Stowers, 7- Bell Sasulu, 8- George Stowers, 9- Notise Tauafao, 10- Roger Warren, 11- Henry Fa'afili (Biarritz), 12- Samasoni Moala, 13- Paletuatoa Toelupe, 14- David Lemi and 15- Esera Lauina.

Reserves: 16- Muliufi Salanoa, 17- Hiroshi Tea, 18- Semo Sititi, 19- Jonathon Fa'amatua, 20- Eliota Sapolu-Fuimaono, 21- Gasolo Salima and 22- Neli Sasulu.

(Extended) Squad members not used: Loleni Tafunai, Taligatuli Moala, James Johnstone, Luti Pese, Ruperake Petaia, Kane Thompson, Iosefa Tekori, Daniel Leo, Alapasa Cordtz, Ati A'ua, Henry Tuilagi, Uale Mai, Dominic Gabriel, Ki Anufe, Reupena Levasa, Anitelea Tuilagi, Solomona Tavita, Peni Sapau, Lolo Lui, John Vui and Gavin Williams.

Head coach: Taula Lepale Niko Palamo. (New) Appointed in January 2008 to replace the outgoing Michael Jones who had coached the national side for the past 4 years. Palamo formerly coached the Samoan U19 and Sevens sides and was appointed as the first full-time Samoan coach with a view to taking the team through to the 2011 RWC.

Former NZ rugby league star Henry Fa'afili has been included in the squad. He is now playing in France with Biarritz and has the aim of playing for the country of his birth at the 2011 RWC.

Filipo Levi was named the new captain of Samoa replacing Semo Sititi in the job. He is set to captain Samoa for the first time in the opening game against Fiji in Lautoka. Levi currently plays for Ricoh in Japan and before that played with the Highlanders and Otago in NZ.

New Zealand Maori v Tonga

Saturday, 7 June 2008

North Harbour Stadium, Albany.

Referee: Paul Marks (Australia)

New Zealand Maori

1- Keith Cameron (Otago), 2- Hikawera Elliot (Hawke's Bay), 3- Clint Newland (Hawke's Bay), 4- Ross Filipo (Wellington), 5- Jason Eaton (Taranaki), 6- Liam Messam co-captain (Waikato), 7- Tanerau Latimer (Bay of Plenty), 8- Thomas Waldrom (Wellington), 9- Piri Weepu (Wellington) 10- Callum Bruce (Waikato), 11- Hosea Gear (Wellington), 12- Tamati Ellison co-captain (Wellington), 13- Jason Kawau (Southland), 14- Zar Lawrence (Bay of Plenty) and 15- Shannon Paku (Wellington).

Reserves: 16- Aled de Malmanche (Waikato), 17- Ben May (Tasman), 18- Issac Ross, 19- Daniel Braid (Auckland), 20- Chris Smylie (North Harbour), 21- Tim Bateman (Canterbury) and 22- Glen Horton (Otago).

Squad members not used: Stephen Brett (Canterbury), Jacob Ellison (Wellington), Hoani MacDonald (Southland), Dwayne Sweeney (Waikato), Hayden Triggs (Manawatu)

Head coach: Donny Stevenson. Assistant coach: Milton Haig. (Both new)

'Ikaile Tahi Tonga

1- Toma Toke, 2- Viliami Ma'asi, 3- Tonga Lea'aetua, 4- Josh Afu, 5- Emosi Kauhenga, 6- Hale Pole Tu'uuhoko, 7- Otenili Langlangi (aka: Nili Latu) captain (NEC), 8- Lotu Filipine (IBM), 9- Soane Havea, 10- Fangatapu 'Apikotoa, 11- Vungakoto Filimone Lilo, 12- Epeli Taione, 13- Hudson Tonga'uiha, 14- Samisoni Pone and 15- Sione Mone Tu'ipulotu.

Reserves: 16- Semisi Telefoni, 17- Sateki Mata'u, 18- Samiu Ika, 19- Tevita Fifita, 20- Enele Taufua, 21- Vaea Poteki and 22- Tupou Palu.

Squad members not used: Makoni Finau, Sione Timani, Soane Patita, Pat Boone, Isileli Matakaiongo Tupou and Sione

Lavaka.

Head coach: Quddus Fielea.

On Friday 23 May, Tonga's Tautahi Gold beat Upolu Samoa from Samoa 11-3 in the final of the 2008 IRB Pacific Cup in Apia Park, Samoa giving a Tongan side the cup for the first time.