

All Blacks Balance World Cup Ledger

The RWC final through the eyes of a Kiwi in Buenos Aires

When the 1987 Rugby World Cup kicked off I was a recent graduate from Victoria University just starting my professional career as a management accountant with the Public Trust Office. I was at Athletic Park to watch the All Blacks convincing win over the Pumas and turned 22 the day the All Blacks beat Scotland in the quarter final. When David Kirk lifted the Webb Ellis Cup at Eden Park I, along with many other Kiwis, expected that our world domination would continue for ever.

Twenty Four years later I'm a middle aged man whose hair is going grey. I'm living in Argentina and working as finance and admin manager for New York University's Buenos Aires study away site. The All Blacks World Cup ledger stands unbalanced with just a single entry in the credit column dating back to 1987.

It's a 5.00am kickoff in Buenos Aires for the RWC final and the sun won't be appearing for a while as with family and friends we drive down to NZ Ambassador Darryl Dunn's apartment building in the recycled port district of Puerto Madero. It's cool and windy as we head inside where an early breakfast of sandwiches, pastries, juice, tea and coffee awaits us. Unlike 24 years ago when I tucked into a plate of Chinese takeaways this time I'm too tense to eat so I chat to the other guests and am then one of the first to take a seat in the building's 40 seat mini cinema.

There are about 20 Buenos Aires based Kiwis present and the crowd is padded out with a similar number of Argentines and a sprinkling of French. We stand for and sing the national anthem and then silently watch the Kapa O Pango haka.

The game kicks off and its tense stuff as the All Blacks go hard but France dominate possession and play with intensity and purpose. On 14 minutes Piri Weepu drills a penalty into touch near the French goal line and from the lineout a perfectly executed planned move sees Tony Woodcock dash over for a try. Our crowd erupts, well the Kiwi supporters at least! All Blacks 5-0

France continue to play strongly with captain Thierry Dusautoir and Francois Trinh-Duc leading from the front and back respectively but the Richie McCaw led black defence holds firm. Suddenly the All Blacks' first five eighth curse strikes again and as Stephen Donald comes on all we can do is lie back and think of England – where Nick Evans is leading Harlequins to a 10 game unbeaten start to the English season. There is no more scoring in the first half and as the All Blacks head to the sheds we in Buenos Aires head back to the breakfast buffet.

The second half starts with Dimitri Yachvili missing a penalty that looked for all money like it was going over and Donald landing one that seemed to be heading outside the right hand upright. All Blacks 8-0.

The All Blacks have exactly zero minutes to enjoy the fact that France must now score twice to win as some shoddy defence sees Trinh-Duc receive the ball not so much as on a plate but gift wrapped with a silver ribbon. Several phases later Dusautoir charges over the line by the posts. Trinh-Duc converts. All Blacks 8-7.

With 30 minutes to go and France on the rise a terrible feeling of deja vu hangs over the crowd in Auckland and in Buenos Aires, could it be possible that yet again France find a way to beat the All Blacks on the rugby world's biggest stage? Surely not! I try

to draw comfort from the mathematical improbability of such a feat and when Trinh-Duc misses a long range penalty the odds of a French three-peat lengthen slightly.

The rest of the second half is a blur of big defence from the All Blacks, total effort from France, and me watching the clock as much as the rugby. Somehow time inches past and with just minutes remaining we have strong field position as well as possession. Pick and go's are the chosen method to wind down the clock but the clock seems to have stopped! Its agonising watching as the black runners crash into the white defence and the ball is slowly and painfully laid back.

The clock slips into extra time and the All Blacks are still controlling the ball. France come around offside and are penalised. Andy Ellis boots the ball into touch and the Webb Ellis trophy is coming home! Whhooooo!! We did it! We knocked the bastard off! All Black arms are raised in celebration and five million Kiwis shout and scream as McCaw hugs his good mate Ali Williams. Here in Buenos Aires we shout too but quickly fall back into our seats drained and relieved but also quietly ecstatic!

We applaud loudly as the cup is presented to Captain Richie and then slowly get to our feet to shake hands and hug our Kiwi mates and Argentine friends. We thank our French guests for a fantastic game and slowly walk out into the dawn. It's still cool out as we drive to the Buenos Aires obelisk where Argentines congregate to celebrate their famous football victories. We toot our horns and wave our flags as we do a victory lap and pose for photos. I make sure I toot extra loud when we pass a taxi!

The next morning I have a wonderful surprise when I arrive at work to find the staff dressed in black and white and the office decked out with black and white balloons and streamers in my and New Zealand's honour. 24 years of waiting are over and the All Blacks have at last balanced their World Cup ledger! Vamos los All Blacks!



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