

CHAMPIONS September/October 2023

RUGBY WORLD CUP



**FULL MATCH
SCHEDULE AND
PLANNER**

**SPECIAL
EDITION**

**Rugby World Cup Pool B
preview: Squads, fixtures,
star players and more**

**Power Rankings heading
into the 2023 Rugby
World Cup**



SCHEDULE AND PLANNER

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DOMINANCE
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**RUGBY WORLD
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MEET THE HEAD
COACHES IN
CHARGE OF EACH
NATION**

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NANTES
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CHAMPION

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Sat/Sun	21/22 Oct	Paris	Semi Finals SF 1 or SF 2	Cat 2	ZAR 29,995
Sat/Sun	21/22 Oct	Paris	Semi Finals SF 1 or SF 2	Cat 3	ZAR 23,995
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- Full payment for all tickets are required within 24 hours of confirmation. Thx for your support



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RUGBY WORLD CUP POOL B PREVIEW: SQUADS, FIXTURES, STAR PLAYERS AND MORE



Rugby World Cup Pool B sees reigning champions South Africa face off against Ireland, Scotland, Tonga, and Romania as they battle for a place in the knockouts. Ahead of the tenth edition of the Rugby World Cup, Planet Rugby previews each of the pools, with the 'group of death' next up.

SOUTH AFRICA SQUAD

RUGBY WORLD CUP 2023

FORWARDS

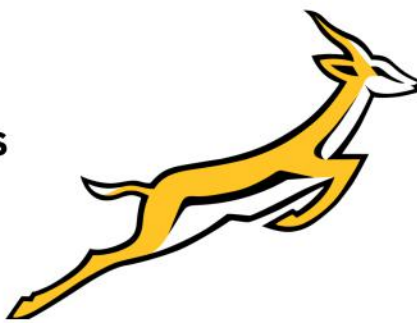
Steven Kitshoff - Vincent Koch
Frans Malherbe - Ox Nche
Trevor Nyakane - Malcolm Marx
Bongi Mbonambi - Eben Etzebeth
Marvin Orie - RG Snyman
Jean Kleyn - Pieter-Steph du Toit
Kwagga Smith - Siya Kolisi (c)
Marco van Staden
Duane Vermeulen - Franco Mostert
Jasper Wiese - Deon Fourie

BACKS

Faf de Klerk - Jaden Hendrikse - Grant Williams
Cobus Reinach - Manie Libbok - Damian Willemse
Jesse Kriel - Andre Esterhuizen - Kurt-Lee Arendse
Damian de Allende - Cheslin Kolbe - Willie le Roux
Makazole Mapimpi - Canan Moodie



South Africa
World ranking: 2
Nickname: Springboks
Head coach:
Jacques Nienaber
Captain: Siya Kolisi



SA RUGBY

Squad:

Forwards: Ox Nche, Steven Kitshoff, Vincent Koch, Frans Malherbe, Trevor Nyakane, Bongi Mbonambi, Malcolm Marx, Eben Etzebeth, RG Snyman, Marvin Orie, Jean Kleyn, Marco van Staden, Siya Kolisi, Pieter-Steph du Toit, Kwagga Smith, Duane Vermeulen, Jasper Wiese, Deon Fourie, Franco Mostert

Backs: Faf de Klerk, Jaden Hendrikse, Grant Williams, Cobus Reinach, Manie Libbok, Damian de Allende, Andre Esterhuizen, Jesse Kriel, Cheslin Kolbe, Kurt-Lee Arendse, Canan Moodie, Makazole Mapimpi, Willie Le Roux, Damian Willemse

Rugby World Cup record: Pl 43, W 36, D 0, L 7, 87% win rate.

Best Rugby World Cup finish: 3x champions (1995, 2007, 2019)



Key Player – Eben Etzebeth: Simply a world-class second-rower, the 113 Test cap stalwart is one of the best players in the world. The Springboks place a big focus on their pack, and Etzebeth is a crucial cog up front. He is the most capped player in the Boks squad and has been in outstanding form over the past 24 months.

Player to watch – Manie Libbok: The only out-and-out fly-half in Springboks' squad, there is a massive weight on the playmaker's shoulders for the tournament. A wonderfully talented number 10, Libbok could ignite the Boks' attack into life.



Ireland
World ranking: 1
Nickname: n/a

Head coach: Andy Farrell
Captain: Johnny Sexton

Squad:

Forwards: Ryan Baird, Finlay Bealham, Tadhg Beirne, Jack Conan, Caelan Doris, Tadhg Furlong, Iain Henderson, Rob Herring, Ronan Kelleher, David Kilcoyne, Jeremy Loughman, Joe McCarthy, Peter O'Mahony, Tom O'Toole, Andrew Porter, James Ryan, Dan Sheehan, Josh van der Flier

Backs: Bundee Aki, Ross Byrne, Craig Casey, Jack Crowley, Keith Earls, Jamison Gibson-Park, Mack Hansen, Robbie Henshaw, Hugo Keenan, James Lowe, Stuart McCloskey, Conor Murray, Jimmy O'Brien, Garry Ringrose, Jonathan Sexton

Rugby World Cup record: Pl 40,
W 24, D 0, L 16, 60% win rate.
Best Rugby World Cup finish:
Quarter-finalists (7 times)

Key Player – Josh van der Flier:
The current World Rugby Player of the Year has been a key cog in Ireland's pack for several seasons now. The brilliant openside flanker was crucial in his side's Six Nations campaign earlier this year and their series victory over New Zealand last July.

Player to watch – Mack Hansen:
The elusive winger is renowned for his quirkiness off the pitch but will be out to make an impression on it in France. The hard-working speedster has all the attributes to be a star at the World Cup, having become a regular starter for the number-one ranked side since making his Test debut in 2020.



Scotland
World ranking: 5
Nickname: n/a
Head coach:
Gregor Townsend
Captain: Jamie Ritchie



SCOTLAND

Squad:

Forwards: Ewan Ashman, Jamie Bhatti, Dave Cherry, Luke Crosbie, Scott Cummings, Rory Darge, Jack Dempsey, Matt Fagerson, Zander Fagerson, Grant Gilchrist, Richie Gray, WP Nel, Jamie Ritchie (c), Pierre Schoeman, Javan Sebastian, Sam Skinner, Rory Sutherland, George Turner, Hamish Watson

Backs: Darcy Graham, Chris Harris, Ben Healy, George Horne, Huw Jones, Blair Kinghorn, Ali Price, Cameron Redpath, Finn Russell, Ollie Smith, Kyle Steyn, Sione Tuipulotu, Duhan van der Merwe, Ben White

Rugby World Cup record: Pl 42, W 24, D 1, L 17, 57% win rate.

Best Rugby World Cup finish: Fourth place (1991)

Key Player – Finn Russell: The brilliant fly-half has a whole box of tricks that he will look to make use of in France.



A talisman of the Scotland team, most of what Townsend's charges do well on attack comes through the sensational number 10. Russell seemingly has the ball on a string in attack and is an exceptional kicker, too.

Player to watch – Duhan van der Merwe: One of the most dangerous wingers in the game, Van der Merwe beats defenders for fun and is regularly on the scoresheet for the Scots. He has an unbelievable turn of pace, and while he is a poacher by nature, he is capable of scoring some truly astonishing tries.

Tonga

World ranking: 15

Nickname: Ikale Tahi

Head coach: Toutai Kefu

Captain: Sonatane Takulua



Squad:

Forwards: Sosefo 'Apikotoa, Adam Coleman, Sione Havili Talitui, Vaea Fifita, Siegfried Fisi'ihoi, Fe'ao Fotuaika, Solomone Funaki, Tanginoa Halaifonua, Tau Koloamatangi, Paula Latu, Sam Lousi, Steve Mafi, Siua Maile, Samiuela Moli, Paula Ngauamo, Semisi Paea, Ben Tameifuna, Sione Vailanu

Backs: Pita Ahki, Malakai Fekitoa, George Moala, William Havili, Fine Inisi, Solomone Kata, Otumaka Mausia, Manu Paea, Salesi Piutau, Augustine Pulu, Sonatane Takulua, Kyren Taumoefolau, Afusipa Taumoepeau, Anzelo Tuitavuki

Rugby World Cup record: Pl 29, W 8, D 0, L 21, 28% win rate.

Best Rugby World Cup finish: Pool stage (8 times)

Key Player – Vaea Fifita: The former All Blacks back-rower has used World Rugby's change in its eligibility laws to represent his country of birth in what will be his second World Cup. The incredibly talented forward has played across the back-five for Tonga. His speed, aggression, lineout ability and defensive prowess makes him one of the most dangerous forwards at the Rugby World Cup.

Player to watch – Pita Ahki: Another player who has switched nations ahead of the World Cup having represented New Zealand sevens. Ahki is a well-rounded inside centre capable of tearing any defence to shreds. His playmaking ability is a massive boost for Tonga, and he has proven pedigree at high levels, having helped Toulouse win the Champions Cup and Top 14.



Romania

World ranking: 19

Nickname: The Oaks

Head coach: Eugen Apjok

Captain: Cristi Chirica



Squad:

Forwards: Alexandru Savin, Gheorghe Gajion, Thomas Crețu, Alexandru Gordaș, Costel Burțilă, Iulian Harțig, Ovidiu Cojocaru, Robert Irimescu, Florin Bărdașu, Adrian Motoc, Marius Iftimiciuc, Ștefan Iancu, Cristi Chirica, Andre Gorin, Vlad Neculau, Dragoș Ser, Cristi Boboc, Florian Roșu, Damian Strătilă

Backs: Gabriel Rupanu, Florin Surugiu, Alin Conache, Gabriel Pop, Lama Sioeli, Tudor Boldor, Nicolas Onuțu, Marius Simionescu, Taliauli Sikuea, Taylor Gontineac, Jason Tomane, Tangimana Fonovai, Tevita Manumua, Hinckley Vaovasa

Rugby World Cup record: Pl 28, W 6, D 0, L22, 21% win rate.

Best Rugby World Cup finish: Pool stage (8 times)

Key Player – Cristi Chirica: The Romanian captain is a powerhouse back-rower who is crucial to The Oaks if they are to cause an upset in Pool B. He is an excellent ball carrier and will regularly take two defenders with him and is a hard-hitting loose forward.

Player to watch – Hinckley Vaovasa: Romania will be looking to make a mark with their pack, but in the backline, they have an exceptional talent in Vaovasa. Much like Ahki, Vaovasa has a great mix of physicality and playmaking skills, and will be a tricky customer when he gets his hands on the ball.



SPRINGBOK LEGENDS PREDICT SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE DOMINANCE AT THE RUGBY WORLD CUP

BY COLIN NEWBOULT

South African greats Jean de Villiers and Victor Matfield believe that it will be a clean sweep for the southern hemisphere sides in the quarter-finals of the Rugby World Cup.

The former Springbok duo delved into the draw and predicted everything from the pool stage qualifiers to the eventual winner. They mapped out the respective teams' path through and came up with a last-eight, which sees England taking on Australia, France hosting South Africa, New Zealand facing Ireland and Argentina going head-to-head with Wales.

De Villiers and Matfield picked the four Rugby Championship outfits over their Six Nations counterparts to create semi-final contests between South Africa and Australia, and New Zealand and Argentina.

The last time the World Cup last-four was completely made up of southern hemisphere sides was in 2015 when the All Blacks faced the Springboks, and the Wallabies took on Los Pumas.

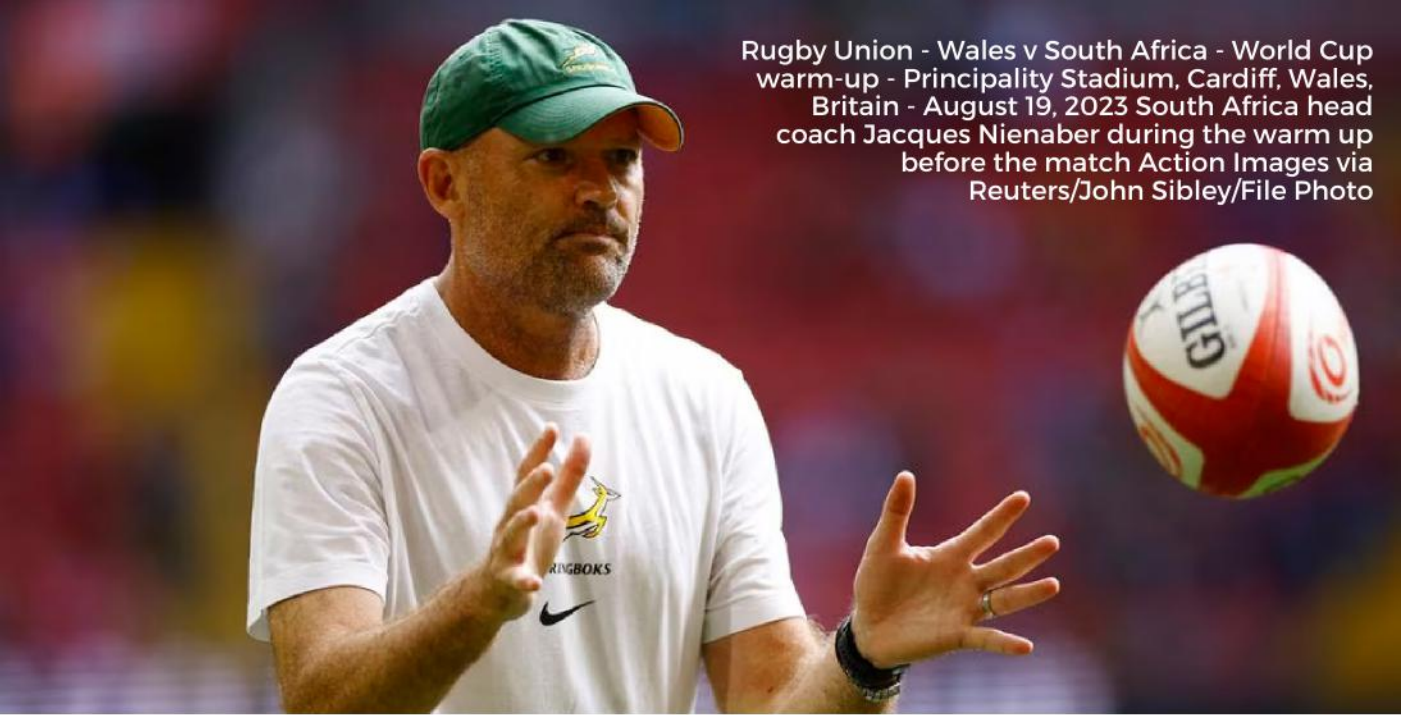
"There's going to be a lot of 2015 (about it). They pushed to have northern hemisphere teams winning the World Cup this year, and I don't think that's going to happen," De Villiers told Betway South Africa.

"I think there will be four southern hemisphere teams in the semi-final."

Matfield was in full agreement, stating: "I'm with you", while De Villiers revealed the reasons behind his thinking. They believe that the Boks will finish top of Pool B, which has been nicknamed the 'pool of death' as it features fellow top five teams Ireland and Scotland. The group also contains a Tonga outfit that several former All Blacks and Wallabies have boosted.

South Africa taking on New Zealand in Rugby World Cup warm-up.





"I think Ireland is a massive threat, and Scotland is a massive threat, while Tonga can cause an upset, but the fact that we're playing Scotland first puts us in a very strong position," De Villiers said. "All the focus will be on Scotland. We get a win there, and then suddenly all the pressure goes to Ireland as they need to beat us and Scotland."

"It might work to our advantage the way that the games have been rolled out. If we beat Ireland as well, then it becomes Ireland versus Scotland to go through."

If the Boks are to reach the semis, De Villiers predicts that they would have to oust the hosts in the quarter-final, with Les Bleus finishing below New Zealand in Pool A.

The French are a much-fancied side, but the former centre insists that the injury to Romain Ntamack has altered his thinking. "If you asked me previously, I would have been in two minds, but with Ntamack out, we're going with New Zealand and France as the runner-up," the former centre added.

Should the Boks get through that, then they will have an easier semi-final on paper, which De Villiers and Matfield insist will set up a match against the All Blacks in the showpiece event.



Issue 5 / September 2023

CHAMPIONS

MAGAZINE

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14 October 2023

17H00 WINNER POOL C
RUNNER-UP POOL D
21H00 WINNER POOL B
RUNNER-UP POOL A

15 October 2023

17H00 WINNER POOL D
RUNNER-UP POOL C
21H00 WINNER POOL A
RUNNER-UP POOL B

Friday 20 October 2023

21H00 WINNER QUARTER-FINAL 1
WINNER QUARTER-FINAL 2

Saturday 21 October 2023

21H00 WINNER QUARTER-FINAL 3
WINNER QUARTER-FINAL 4

Friday 27 October 2023

21H00 RUNNER-UP SEMI-FINAL 1
RUNNER-UP SEMI-FINAL 2

Saturday 28 October 2023 FINALS 21H00

South Africa

Sunday 10 September:

South Africa v Scotland –

4.45 pm

Stade Vélodrome, Marseille

Referee: Angus Gardner (RA)

Assistant Referees:

Nika Amashukeli (GRU),

Jordan Way (RA)

TMO: Ben Whitehouse (WRU)

Sunday 17 September:

South Africa v Romania –

2 pm,

Stade de Bordeaux, Bordeaux

Referee: Mathieu Raynal (FFR)

Assistant Referees:

Angus Gardner (RA),

Pierre Brousset (FFR)

TMO: Brett Cronan (RA)

Saturday 23 September:

South Africa v Ireland –

8 pm,

Stade de France, Paris

Referee: Ben O’Keeffe (NZR)

Assistant Referees:

Mathieu Raynal (FFR),

James Doleman (NZR)

TMO: Brendon Pickerill (NZR)

Sunday 1 October:

South Africa v Tonga –

8 pm,

Stade Velodrome, Marseille

Referee: Luke Pearce (RFU)

Assistant Referees: Matthew Carley

(RFU), Christophe Ridley (RFU)

TMO: Brett Cronan (RA)

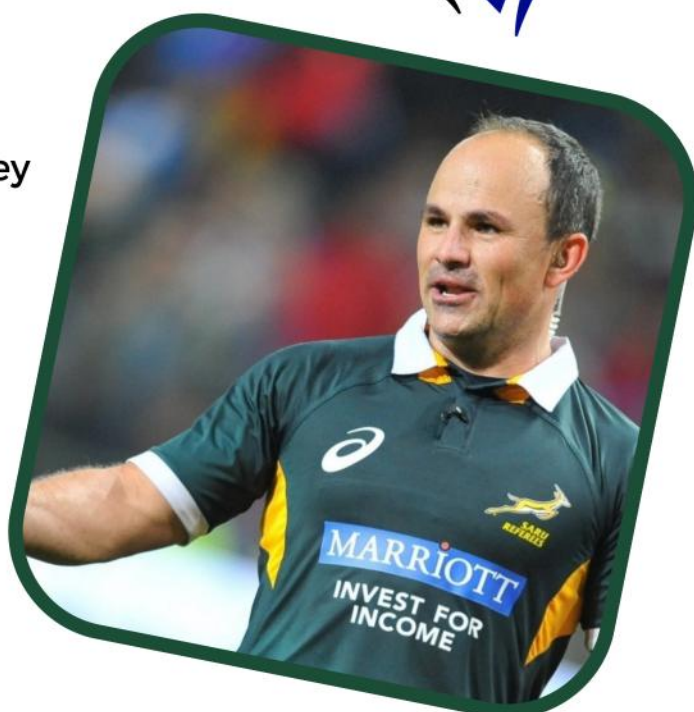
**SOUTH AFRICA’S JACO PEYPER WILL
REFEREE THE RUGBY WORLD CUP
2023 OPENING MATCH BETWEEN
HOSTS FRANCE AND NEW ZEALAND
AT STADE DE FRANCE ON 8
SEPTEMBER 2023**

RUGBY WORLD CUP FIXTURES POOL B KICK OFF TIMES / STADIUMS REFEREES

JARED WRIGHT



SA RUGBY





IRFU

Ireland

Saturday 9 September:

Ireland v Romania –
2.30 pm,
Stade de Bordeaux, Bordeaux

Referee: Nika Amashukeli (GRU)
Assistant Referees: Wayne Barnes,
Andrea Piardi (FIR)
TMO: Brendon Pickerill (NZR)

Saturday 16 Sept:

Ireland v Tonga –
8pm,
Stade de la Beaujoire, Nantes

Referee: Wayne Barnes (RFU)
Assistant Referees: Matthew Carley
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Saturday 7 October:

Ireland v Scotland –
8 pm,
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Referee: Nic Berry (RA)
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TMO: Ben Whitehouse (WRU)

Sunday 24 September:

Scotland v Tonga –
4.45 pm,
Stade de Nice, Nice

Referee: Karl Dickson (RFU)
Assistant Referees: Nika Amashukeli (GRU),
Craig Evans (WRU)
TMO: Ben Whitehouse (WRU)

Saturday 30 September:

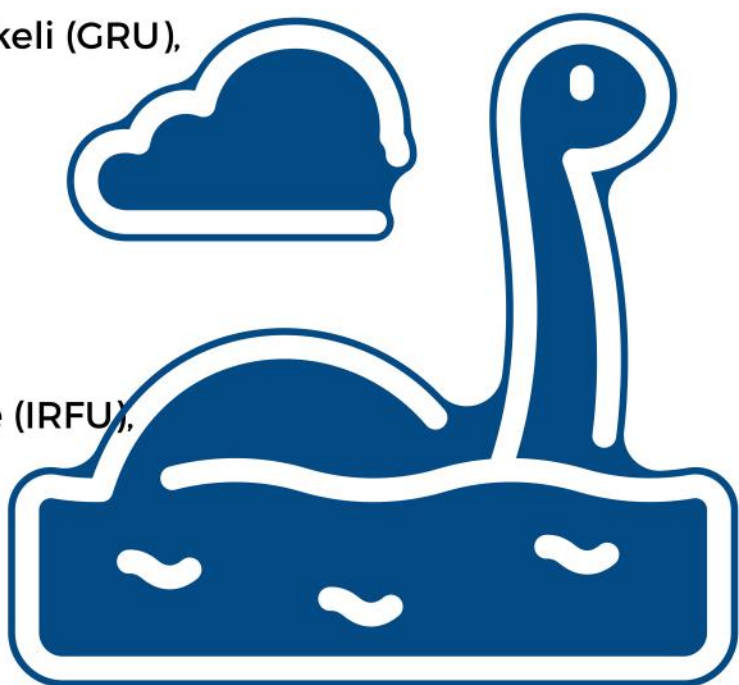
Scotland v Romania –
8 pm,
Stade Pierre Mauroy, Lille

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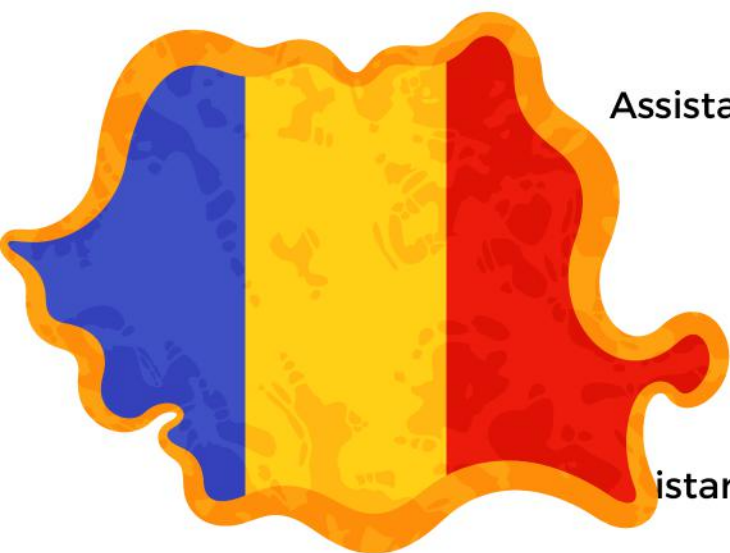
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**RUGBY
ROMANIA**



Romania

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TMO: Brian MacNeice (IRFU)





Match Schedule



Please send your request to info@destinations2travel.co.za

#RWC2023

MATCH PLANNER

FRI	SAT	SUN	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	SEPT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	OCT	

BORDEAUX
STADE DE
BORDEAUX

IRE
v
ROU
15:30

WAL
v
FIJ
21:00

SAM
v
CHI
15:00

RSA
v
ROU
15:00

LILLE
STADE PIERRE
MAUROY

FRA
v
URU
21:00

ENG
v
CHI
17:45

FIJ
v
GEO
17:45

ENG
v
SAM
17:45

TGA
v
ROU
17:45

LYON
OL STADIUM

MARSEILLE
STADE
VELODROME

ENG
v
ARG
21:00

RSA
v
SCO
17:45

FRA
v
NAM
21:00

WAL
v
AUS
21:00

URU
v
NAM
17:45

RSA
v
TGA
21:00

QF 1
POOL C
W
v
RU
17:00

QF 3
POOL D
W
v
RU
17:00

NANTES
STADE DE LA
BEAUJOIRE

IRE
v
TGA
21:00

WAL
v
POR
17:45

ARG
v
CHI
15:00

WAL
v
GEO
15:00

JPN
v
ARG
13:00

POOL PHASE

NICE
STADE DE NICE

ENG
v
JPN
21:00

ITA
v
URU
17:45

SCO
v
TGA
17:45

IRE
v
SCO
21:00

SAINT-DENIS
STADE DE
FRANCE

FRA
v
NZL
21:00

AUS
v
GEO
18:00

RSA
v
IRE
21:00

QF 2
POOL B
W
v
RU
21:00

QF 4
POOL A
W
v
RU
21:00

SAINT-ÉTIENNE
STADE
GEOFFROY
GUICHARD

ITA
v
NAM
13:00

AUS
v
FIJ
17:45

ARG
v
SAM
17:45

AUS
v
POR
17:45

FIJ
v
POR
21:00

TOULOUSE
STADIUM DE
TOULOUSE

JPN
v
CHI
13:00

NZL
v
NAM
21:00

SF 1
WQF 1
21:00

SF 2
WQF 3
21:00

BRONZE
FINAL
21:00

FINAL
21:00

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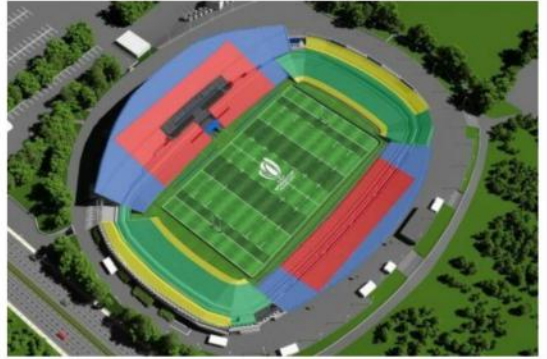
St Denis, Paris



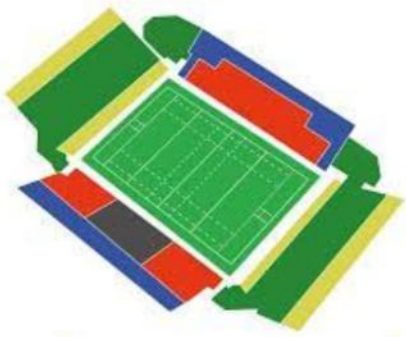
Nouveau Stade de Bordeaux Stadium



Toulouse Stadium



Stade Marseille



Stade St Etienne



stade-pierre-mauroy Lille



Stade Mantes





Planet Rugby's Power Rankings ahead of the Rugby World Cup.
Ahead of the Rugby World Cup, here are our power rankings based on the teams' form ahead of the tournament, including their recent performances in the warm-up matches.

1 South Africa

As already mentioned, the top four is incredibly close, but the Springboks top the charts after a resounding win over fellow top four side, New Zealand. South Africa finished their preparations with two record victories, both of which were against teams they have historically had close encounters with.

20 Romania

A change in the coaching box so close to the World Cup has not helped The Oaks, as they come in as the lowest-ranked side in our power rankings. They were beaten 17-31 by the USA ahead of the tournament before suffering heavy defeats to Georgia (56-6) and Italy (57-7).

19 Chile

The South Americans are making their Rugby World Cup debuts, meaning they come into the tournament flying under the radar. They did have some promising displays ahead of the tournament, albeit defeats, as they lost by a point to Uruguay and by two to Namibia and an Argentina XV.

18 Namibia

The African side coached by former Springbok coach Allister Coetzee did notch up a narrow 26-28 win over Chile before the World Cup. However, they also fell to a 43-30 defeat at the hands of a youthful Bulls team.

17 Portugal

A modest ranking for Portugal, who are entering just their first Rugby World Cup since 2007 and just their second overall. They had a solid Rugby Europe campaign early this year before defeating USA (46-20) earlier this month and putting up a strong fight against Australia A, who they lost 17-30 to, with a late scoring flurry in the final 10 minutes bloating the scoreline in Australia's favour.

16 Uruguay

Wins over Chile and Namibia and a thumping 33-13 victory over a strong Argentina XV will give Los Teros confidence ahead of the Rugby World Cup. Their lack of tier one opposition has impacted their power ranking, but Pool A contenders will be wary of the South Americans who stunned Fiji four years ago.

15 Tonga

Ikale Tahi's preparations have been far from ideal after a reasonably strong start to the year.

They defeated Australia A in their Pacific Nations Cup opener but lost their next three fixtures against Fiji, Japan and Samoa. The result against the Brave Blossoms was the closest of the three, but they would have hoped for better. Tonga managed to claim back-to-back wins over Canada to round off their preparations but also lost centre George Moala to suspension for most of the tournament.

14 Japan

The Brave Blossoms head into the World Cup somewhat under the radar as they have failed to reproduce their 2019 form.

Jamie Joseph's side lost to Samoa and Fiji in the Pacific Nations Cup and narrowly beat Tonga. In their final preparation game, Italy swept them aside 42-21.

Things haven't quite clicked for the 2019 hosts, but Pool D will certainly be interesting if it does.

13 Georgia

The Lelos are coming in two places lower than their official world ranking, but they should certainly not be underestimated.

Georgia's scrum struggled against Scotland in their final warm-up game, and while they did front up defensively in the first half, they were torn apart in the second.

That loss to Scotland came off the back of solid wins over Romania and the USA, so the lift in tempo may have taken the Georgians a bit by surprise.

12 Italy

The Italians are perhaps unlucky to feature outside of the top 10, but the earlier defeats in the Summer Series to Scotland and Ireland have played their role in their power rankings.

Kieran Crowley's side did show their ruthless edge by pummelling Romania and Japan, which meant they didn't drop any further down. Their 12th-place power ranking is an upgrade on their current world ranking of 11th.

11 England

England players dejected after conceding try against Fiji in Rugby World Cup warm-up.

England players dejected after conceding try against Fiji in Rugby World Cup warm-up.

A win over Argentina in the Red Rose's Rugby World Cup opener would likely move them back into the top 10, but right now, England are at one of their lowest points in history, and their power ranking reflects that. They were comfortably beaten by Wales in Cardiff and avoided back-to-back defeats by the skin of their teeth a week later.

Ireland then barely got out of third gear in a 29-10 win in Dublin before Steve Borthwick's side were handed their first-ever defeat by a tier two nation, Fiji, at the home of English Rugby. With their captain Owen Farrell suspended and the team lacking cohesion based on their performances in the warm-ups, they are ranked three places lower than their official world ranking.

10 Samoa

Just above England are fellow Pool D rivals Samoa.

Seilala Mapusua has the Pacific Islanders steaming into the World Cup after a strong performance against the world number one side, Ireland.

A botched lineout cost Samoa a stunning victory in Bayonne, albeit against a change Ireland team, but that was far from the only positive result over the past 24 months.

Fiji were the only side that defeated Manu Samoa in the Pacific Nations Cup this year, while they won the tournament in 2022 and went on to beat Georgia and Romania.



9 Australia

The gaps between 12th and 9th on our list are marginal, but the Wallabies took the lead with a strong showing against France in their last preparation game, although it resulted in defeat. Eddie Jones has lost all five of his first games in charge of Australia, but there has been notable developments that have culminated in their ranking. The signs of improvement against strong opposition gives the Wallabies an edge, but they could plummet if they fail to defeat Fiji in their World Cup opener.

8 Wales

Warren Gatland's charges can count themselves lucky that they are not lower down on the list with other poor showings, meaning they are the best of the worst tier one nations.

They finished their Summer Series with a 2-1 record, but that one is concerning as it was the biggest defeat Warren Gatland has overseen with Wales.

7 Fiji

Fiji celebrate win against England at Twickenham.

Fiji celebrate win against England at Twickenham.

The Flying Fijians are fairly ranked on the world rankings and are pressing for a higher placing on our power rankings.

Simon Raiwalui has been superb since taking over the side, turning the pack into the real weapon that it always promised to be while also flexing Fiji's depth en route to a Pacific Nations Cup sweep.

The historic victory at Twickenham may just be the start of what is a memorable year for Fijian Rugby; we will have to wait and see.



6 Argentina

Los Pumas are under threat of switching positions with Fiji, who were saved by a resounding 3-62 victory over Spain in the final warm-up game.

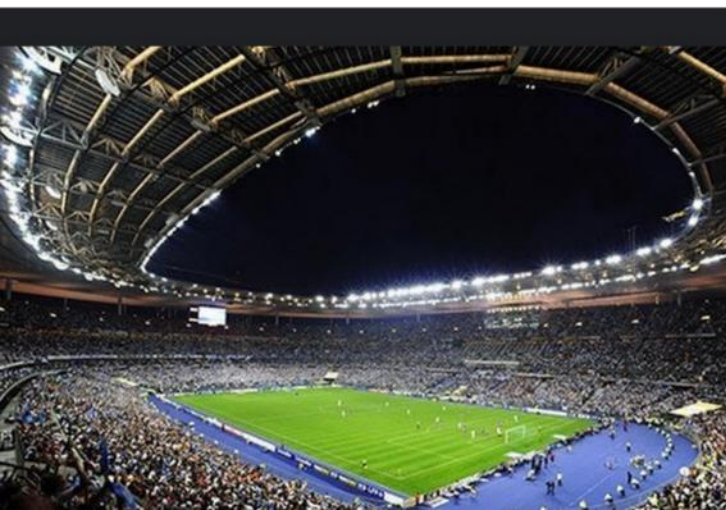
Michael Cheika's charges finished the Rugby Championship with just one win over the Wallabies after a heavy defeat to New Zealand. They did run the Springboks close in their third clash of the year but were well beaten at home a week later. Argentina are bubbling under heading into the World Cup, and if things click, they could go incredibly deep into the tournament.

5 Scotland

The Scots are a well-drilled outfit and, like Argentina, are a team that could cause a few upsets at the World Cup.

They secured a comfortable win over the Azzurri in their first warm-up game before coming from behind to defeat France 25-21 at Murrayfield. However, they could not go back-to-back against Les Bleus a week later. Gregor Townsend's side were held scoreless in the first half against Georgia but comprehensively scored five tries in the second to win 33-6.

Most impressively, they dominated the Georgian packs, which will give them confidence against the Springboks.



4 New Zealand

A record defeat at Twickenham has seen the All Blacks drop to fourth in the world rankings, which is reflected in our power rankings too. Ian Foster's side were flying high and had not lost a game since August last year. However, the manner in which they were swept aside at Twickenham has resulted in the drop as, unlike Ireland last week, they were fielding their best available team.

The record defeat was a hammer blow before their World Cup opener against France but one that might do them well as it exploited the holes in their game that no other side really exploited this year.

3 Ireland

Just above the All Blacks in our power rankings is the official world number one side, Ireland.

Andy Farrell's outfit comfortably won their warm-up games against Italy and England but came close to a shock defeat to Samoa in their final match.

While they were still able to get over the line, it showed that Ireland can be exposed, particularly when their frontline players aren't starting. Samoa also got the upper hand in the scrums in the fixture. Our top four is incredibly tight and, on form, Ireland are just behind the top two.

2 France

Saint Denis, France. 27th Aug, 2023. Damian PENAUD of France celebrate his try with Antoine DUPONT of France during the Summer Nations Series 2023, rugby union match between France and Australia on August 27, 2023 at Stade de France in Saint-Denis near Paris, France

Damian Penaud and Antoine Dupont celebrate.

The warm-up matches proved costly for France, who lost Romain Ntamack for the World Cup after an injury in the second game against Scotland. They then lost prop Cyril Baille and centre Jonathan Danty for the opening game.

Outside of the injuries, Fabien Galthie will be pleased with the results as France were able to claim wins over Scotland and Australia despite both oppositions putting up a good fight.

Their ruthlessness on attack is unmatched in world rugby at the moment, but the defence is still leaking tries that it should not, meaning they just miss out on the top power ranking spot.





HEAD COACHES JACQUES NIENABER (SPRINGBOKS), ANDY FARRELL (IRELAND) AND GREGOR TOWNSEND (SCOTLAND).

RUGBY WORLD CUP POOL B: MEET THE HEAD COACHES IN CHARGE OF EACH NATION

DYLAN COETZEE 29 AUG 2023 6:44 AM

THE RUGBY WORLD CUP IS EVER SO CLOSE AND IS SET TO BE THE MOST COMPETITIVE EDITION OF THE GLOBAL SHOWPIECE YET. THERE IS STILL SO MUCH TO DISCUSS AHEAD OF THE ACTION. NEXT UP IS A CLOSER LOOK AT THE COACHES IN POOL B.

South Africa – Jacques Nienaber

The Springbok head coach has possibly the most interesting journey to taking the helm of such a big team. As a player, his rugby never

His first involvement with a team after high school was as a physiotherapist for the University of Free State and in 1997 he joined the Cheetahs. This period was key as Nienaber had started working with Rassie Erasmus in both of those set-ups – a partnership which would prove to be crucial for his future.

By 2004, he transitioned to strength and conditioning coach at the Cheetahs with Erasmus moving to head coach a year later alongside his partner.

When Erasmus was drafted in by the Stormers in 2008 he took Nienaber with him as his defence coach. From 2011 he would double up with a role assisting the Springboks at the World Cup that year. He also worked with Erasmus as part of a Mobi-Unit which helped coaches around the country.

Erasmus would take a role in Ireland with Munster and Nienaber kept the trend and joined him as defence coach in 2016. Not long after the struggling Boks called on Erasmus to pull them out of a slump and the same as always applied with Nienaber joining as defence coach.

South Africa achieved a remarkable World Cup win in 2019 after which Nienaber was named as head coach of the Springboks – his first-ever head coaching position. The tactician is now about to lead the side in their World Cup defence in France.

Ireland – Andy Farrell

The England-born coach had a very successful career as a dual international for the country. The bulk of his playing days were spent in rugby league with Wigan where he made a whopping 370 appearances between 1991 and 2004 and also represented Great Britain and England.

He signed for Saracens in 2005, making the switch to rugby union and went on to play for England at the 2007 Rugby World Cup where he primarily featured at centre before he hung his boots in 2009.

He stepped into the coaching fray a year later as skills coach for Saracens. He was then drafted into Stuart Lancaster's England set-up as an assistant coach. After impressing in that role he was brought on to the British & Irish Lions coaching team as defence coach in 2013.

After the 2015 World Cup, Eddie Jones changed his entire coaching staff on arrival which saw Farrell moving to Ireland as the team assistant under Joe Schmidt. Farrell was then named as Schmidt's successor after the 2019 tournament where he has been in charge ever since.

Farrell has created a very powerful Ireland team littered with achievements including a three-match Test series win in New Zealand, world number one status and a Grand Slam to match. He will be hoping his side break the poor run Ireland has had in past World Cups.

Scotland – Gregor Townsend

A true Scotland rugby man through and through. Townsend, who played in several backline positions including fly-half, centre and full-back, had a lengthy playing career lasting 17 years with stints around the world for teams like Northampton Saints, Brive, Castres, Montpellier and the Sharks. He also represented Border Reivers in two different spells. This culminated in a whopping 82 caps for Scotland and two for the British & Irish Lions.

His second stint at Border Reivers was at the end of his career and he operated in a player/coach capacity. However, the club was disbanded in 2007 two years after his return. This opened the door for an assistant job with Scotland 'A' before a similar role with the national side in 2009 where he stayed until 2012.

Townsend's first head coach role was with Glasgow Warriors where he spent five years from 2012 before he stepped into the top job in Scotland in 2017 where he has been since.

The coach has created a fearless Scotland team that continues to improve and break boundaries, making them an interesting watch during this year's tournament. Townsend earned a spot on the 2021 British & Irish Lions tour to South Africa as an assistant.



SCOTLAND – GREGOR TOWNSEND



IRELAND – ANDY FARRELL

Tonga – Toutai Kefu

Despite being born in Tonga, Kefu never represented his country during his playing days but instead played in Australia. He was a powerful number eight that earned over 100 caps for the Queensland Reds in eight years, which in turn led to an impressive 60 Tests for the Wallabies. He left Australia in 2004 and finished his career off at Kubota Spears in Japan, retiring in 2010.

Almost immediately he stepped into the coaching fold with the top job for Sunshine Coast Stingrays in the Queensland Premier League. It helped him get an invite to be an assistant coach for Tonga at the 2011 World Cup including a memorable win against France in the pool stage.

In 2012, Kefu returned to his former club Kubota Spears in Japan as head coach where he spent the next four years until 2016 when he was offered the head coaching role with the Tongan national side.

Since then, he has developed the Tonga side quite well and he is looking to make the most of World Rugby's eligibility changes which allow players the chance to represent two different nations provided conditions are met. This has seen the likes of Charles Piutau and Malakai Fekitoa amongst others to play for the side.

Romania – Eugen Apjok

The coach was a full-back during his playing days and managed three caps for Romania after representing CSM Stiinta Baia Mare, a club he would form a life-long connection with. Two years after his final Test Apjok transitioned from player to coach as CSM Stiinta Baia Mare in 2003 where he would lead the team to a ridiculous eight titles in 15 years. In 2011, he worked with the Romania national team as assistant where he helped the team qualify for the 2015 World Cup. Apjok took over the team late in 2022 and is looking to lead the Oaks in a very difficult pool in this year's tournament.



ROMANIA – EUGEN APJOK

TONGA – TOUTAI KEFU





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