

All Blacks rally to score an improbable 10

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The All Blacks might have the good grace to be faintly embarrassed about their win last night - bungling for 65 minutes before finding the killer blow to land the most dramatic and late win.

Their belief and patience was astonishing. Their fitness incredible and when the Wallabies were dying on their feet, what they got was a rampant All Black team playing continuity football that suggested fatigue is a thing of the past for them.

The pain for the Wallabies will be acute - they know they had the All Blacks on the end of the line but couldn't get the hook out of the water - couldn't land the big fish they so desperately crave. They were 22-9 up with 15 minutes to go and lost.

It's 10 defeats in a row and the Wallabies will know they had no better chance to end the misery. But what can they do? When they thought they had it win, Kieran Read and Richie McCaw combined beautifully down the blind to set the skipper up for a score.

Then it was Read himself who bashed over five minutes later to give the All Blacks the one point advantage they needed to win their 15th on the trot.

That the All Blacks won this game will be a phenomenal relief. They really didn't look like they had it in them.

Without Daniel Carter, they simply aren't the same team. The composure, the rhythm, the confidence - they were all missing and there is no kind way of putting this, Aaron Cruden was gash.

He was put out of his misery after 60 minutes - a signal to the All Black forwards that they needed to forget all about the backs and get on with it themselves.

The lineout descended into temporary shambles after Keven Mealamu limped off with his stiff calf having flared. Corey Flynn was a disaster at first, seemingly throwing with eyes shut.

The lineout in disarray is a story most New Zealanders thought the All Blacks had put behind them. At least Flynn came good and restored some confidence, which had been in short supply from the start.

It would have been hard for the All Blacks not to feel a little tentative about their prospects when Cruden's opening kick-off was so obviously a nervous nudge - a mid-handicapper choking down on an iron just to get the ball away off the first tee.

It was an immediate reminder that Carter wasn't there and that a critical part of the All Black game was going to suffer. Never mind scrums and lineouts, it has been at kick-offs where the All Blacks have had it all over the Australians.

Where Carter stroked the ball to the precise point given his forwards a chance to collect, Cruden poked away, flat and without confidence until later in the first half when he started to find his range.

Not being able to win the ball back in the air was just one of issues blighting the All Blacks'

performance. For the first time this season their passing was too often wild and forced. The clinical edge that has been the hallmark of their season was strangely absent.

This was a team that had been afforded ample rest and recovery and the expectation was they would be firing; hungry, urgent and swarming all over the Wallabies.

They were anything but urgent in the first 40 minutes. Long hopeful passes were being slung without conviction; hands were being thrust at the ball, snatching with a hint of panic and the tackling, so watertight and relentless in every other test, was too often high and a little soft.

There were real concerns when Conrad Smith, a man who barely makes any mistakes, was brushed off by Kurtly Beale twice in 10 minutes. When Mils Muliana then failed to get the ball away before Lachie Turner wrapped him up a metre short of the line, there was more surprise. The All Blacks blowing golden opportunities ... that was so 2009.

It was more understandable that Victor Vito got himself lost on defence when Ben McCalman broke from the base of a scrum. Vito drifted wide and the Wallaby No8 blasted through the big hole before feeding James O'Connor, who had a clear run to the tape as Israel Dagg had also dropped off the chase.

As enraged as Graham Henry would have been to see such a basic error, he knows that the very reason Vito and Dagg were out there was to give them exposure to test football. For all their obvious talent - and there were plenty of flashes of that with Dagg pulling a magnificent chip and Vito running strongly - they lack experience and as a consequence will make mistakes.

Australia 22 (J. O'Connor, A. Ashley-Cooper tries; M. Giteau 3 pens; K. Beale pen) New Zealand 23 (R. McCaw, K. Read tries; P. Weepu 2 cons, 3 pens).