

All Blacks victory was one of our best ever — Henry

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Ken Borland

Coach Graham Henry said New Zealand's 29-22 win over South Africa on Saturday was one of their best ever. (Reuters)

The All Blacks trailed 22-17 with two minutes left but tries by captain Richie McCaw and replacement wing Israel Dagg enabled them to snatch victory and seal the Tri-Nations title with a match to spare.

"It doesn't get any bigger than that, it was a huge game played at a very special stadium. I felt so proud of what these boys have achieved, if you had to go to war these are the guys you would take with you," Henry told reporters.

"The character and guts they showed was superb, their heart was outstanding. To come from behind at altitude against the world champions, who were right on the button mentally, was pretty significant.

"We were up against 94,700 people as well as the Springboks and I can't imagine too many of our wins rank up with this one," added Henry.

The test was played at the same stadium used for last month's World Cup soccer final and was watched by the largest crowd officially recorded in a South African rugby international.

"It's an amazing stadium, the atmosphere was incredible with all that din and you can either let that get on top of you or keep talking to each other," said McCaw.

"Sometimes you can feel really alone out there if things aren't going your way but as rugby players you want to test yourselves in these sort of situations."

FIELD POSITION

Despite the parlous position they were in, McCaw said his team always felt they could win.

"In the second half we managed to get a bit of field position and I never really felt we were struggling," he added.

"I always felt the points would come, we just needed to get into the right places and you need guys that don't drop their lips, that keep their composure.

"I'm very privileged and proud to lead an All Blacks team like this, there are guys all around who've played a helluva lot of test matches and that makes my job a lot easier," added McCaw.

The All Blacks also paid tribute to South Africa captain John Smit on the day he became the first Springbok forward to play 100 tests.

"My heart goes out to John, he always comes off the field a gentleman and it's an amazing achievement to reach 100 tests and I was very proud to be part of it," said forward Keven Mealamu.

"He's been one of the most successful captains in history. To put that many caps together is a

massive achievement.”

Henry praised All Blacks conditioning coach Nic Gill, saying he deserved credit for the way the team managed to snatch victory in the dying minutes.

“Nic Gill doesn’t often get credit but he’s got this team in great shape and it showed in the last 10 minutes, their fitness is superb,” Henry said.

“We finished stronger and they showed the ability to hang in there, the ability to do the job under all sorts of stress.”

(Editing by Tony Jimenez. To query or comment on this story email sportsfeedback@thomsonreuters.com)