

All Blacks fitness proved key in lung busting Test

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What a magnificent Test match! In a season where we've seen some one sided stinkers, and free flowing yawners, this was everything Test rugby should be about, it was brutal, exciting and ultimately heart breaking.

The Boks were fantastic.

The first half saw them dominate the Kiwis at the collision, drive them back on defense, and elements of doubt crept back into the All Black game. Pressure forced dropped catches, missed passes and dropped balls.

The brilliant form of the All Blacks may have a lot to do with the lack of pressure they've been under, more than a sudden improvement in their play. For sixty minutes they were beatable – barely, but the cracks were showing.

And then a series of events conspired to see the Boks grab defeat from the jaws of victory; 22-14 up with twenty to play should be an automatic victory at altitude.

Some of the most telling were:

1) The substitution of Juan Smith. He was epic in defense and at the breakdown, and not too shabby with ball in hand. The coaches claim it was injury enforced, if not, they made a serious blunder, because Spies was clearly the looser to sub. When Smith left the field, the Boks defensive resolve began to crumble.

2) Morne Steyn's missed touch finders. Those two kicks – the penalty and the grubber to the corner – shifted the momentum of the match entirely. Instead of pressuring the All Black five metres out on two occasions, probably sucking up 5 to 10 minutes of playing time, the Boks found themselves facing a powerful All Black scrum deep inside their own territory, contributing directly to New Zealand's scoring opportunities.

3) Bok fatigue. This Bok team is clearly not fit enough. When it came time to put bodies on the line in those last five minutes, they just weren't up for it anymore. The cover defense was slow on McCaw's try, and non-existent on Dagg's.

More tellingly, with one minute to play and a drop goal in range, they turned over ball because there were no forwards to the breakdown when de Villiers went to ground. The All Blacks strolled over the top to secure the ball, and ultimately victory.

This player run team clearly doesn't have the self discipline to ensure they are properly match fit. Under Jake White, this team would have closed out the game because they were superbly conditioned. Peter de Villiers is clearly too interested in being the players' mate to crack the whip and get those fat boys running.

4) Poor use of the bench. When the Boks were flagging, and out of steam, they sat with three unused players on the bench. Why play a 4/3 bench when your game plan is forward oriented?

South Africa has some spectacular forwards, but instead Chilliboy, Olivier and James watched from the sideline while Smit almost collapsed with fatigue, and Matfield lay about trying to catch his breathe whilst the Kiwis ran rampant. Play a 5/2 bench! De Villiers never uses all his backline subs anyway.

All is not lost for the Boks. They proved that their game plan, when executed with skill, is still the way to beat the All Blacks. They don't have to start afresh, they just need to get fitter, and select and sub a little smarter.

The return of Bismarck and Brussow will also have a massive effect on their breakdown dominance.

Should be a cracker of a World Cup semi!

Fanzone article written by "Kynang", originally published on The Roar Rugby. Submit your own Fanzone article to The Roar for potential publication on AllBlacks.com

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