

# Henry is proud of All Blacks.

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JOHANNESBURG - Teams who are really good at what they do often make it look a lot easier than it actually is – as the All Blacks displayed by securing the Tri-Nations title by bagging their fifth consecutive win of the competition.

All Black coach Graham Henry was, however, quick to point out that fitness played a huge role in his team's 29-22 victory over the Springboks on Saturday.

In the historic match played at the FNB Stadium in Soweto the New Zealanders showed that rumours of them training to play 100 minutes and not only the required 80, where indeed true.

Henry praised fitness coach Nic Gill for the work he has been doing with the team.

"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," he added.

What made this strong finish even more spectacular was that it was done at altitude where teams often fade in the closing stages.

But Henry's men used this contest as a dress rehearsal for next year's World Cup and apart from their physical attributes, the win also brought the team closer as far as mental preparations are concerned.

The All Black mentor described the victory as one of the greatest moments of his career.

"It doesn't get any bigger than that," he said. "It was a huge game played at a very special stadium. I felt so proud of what these boys have achieved.

"The character and guts they showed was superb. Their heart was outstanding. To come from behind at altitude against the world champions was pretty significant."

Skipper and match winning fetcher Richie McCaw's influence was just as important as he once again led by example by making his presence felt at the breakdowns.

McCaw said that he felt sorry for Springbok skipper John Smit losing in his 100th Test, but added that rugby can be a cruel game.

The way his men kept fighting to the final minute – in front of a pretty hostile crowd – was one of the most pleasing experiences the All Black captain has had in his career.

"The big thing was to keep believing and we kept going when we were up against it," said McCaw.

And although he understands that a lot can happen before the big spectacle next year, McCaw viewed Saturday's win as a very important step towards ensuring they are ready for matches that are bound to be as demanding as the Soweto Test.