Year of the minnows!

By Corné Krige

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The first round of World Cup games is now over and what an exciting round of rugby it was. There was probably only one runaway game and that was the opening game between host country New Zealand and Tonga, and that scoreline was flattering to the All Blacks. The rest of the games were all really tight affairs and the so-called minnows all ran their more favoured opponents close. The two outstanding performers for me were Romania and Japan.

Lucky Scots

The Romanians really gave the Scots a big scare and the Scots were lucky to come away with a bonus point try at the death. The Japanese played against France and, boy, did they come out fighting. They were like kamikaze pilots in defence and they really made the French work for their points. They showed that you don't need a big body to play rugby, you need a big heart and they really showed that on Saturday.

Africa's second team in the World Cup, Namibia, also played extremely well against Fiji. The boys from up north really took the game to the islanders and showed a lot of heart. Unfortunately for them, the Fijians were too strong in the end. The Namibians have been known as the whipping boys in the competition and they will take away some confidence from their brilliant display. Often, these smaller countries are thought just to make up the numbers, but I think that this year they will cause a couple of upsets. Well, there were no real upsets in round one, but the last game on Sunday nearly produced the first big shock of the tournament.

Spirited Welsh

The current defending World Champions, South Africa, came up against a spirited Welsh team who came to play. The Springboks were out of the blocks very quickly and Francois Steyn's try in the first few minutes set the game alight. If you look at the statistics, then the Boks lost in all phases except in turnovers and, of course, the most important one - the scoreboard. Peter de Villiers and the Springboks have been heavily criticised for their archaic game plan going into the tournament. Well, for the first few minutes it looked like they had opted for a more expansive style when they were throwing the ball around. After the first try, though, they went into their shell and the Welsh really started to carry the ball to (and over) the advantage line. Our defence was breached on numerous occasions and the Dragons could have closed the game out with a 77th minute penalty from James Hook. Fortunately, he missed and the Boks pulled off a heart-stopping 17-16 victory.

Credit where it's due

I always criticise Peter de Villiers, but today I will give credit where credit is due. The timing of his substitutes was absolutely spot on and probably turned the game around for the Boks. Bismarck du Plessis and Francois Hougaard had a massive impact on the game and it was ultimately Hougaard's try that clinched the cliffhanger for the Boks. So where to from here? Well the Boks will take a lot of heart from this victory and they will only get better as the tournament progresses. Fiji will be our next opponent and this should give Peter de Villiers the opportunity to start some of the regular bench players. There are concerns over injuries to Jean de Villiers and Victor Matfield, so let's hope and pray that they are not too serious. Have a great week.

ABOUT CORNÉ KRIGE

Corné Krige; former captain of the Springboks has had a successful rugby career, playing 39 tests for South African in total of 18 of which were as Captain as well as leading the Springboks in the World Cup in 2003. Corné now lives in Melkbosstrand with his wife Justine and three children. He owns his own company, CK Outdoor which specializes in Outdoor Advertising and is sports contributor to Bizcommunity's BizLifestyle section.

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