

The All Blacks will host Springboks and Pumas only every second season from 2021

Gregor Paul

The Rugby Championship will be revamped in 2021 with an old-fashioned tour theme being injected that will see the All Blacks play the Springboks at home only every other year.

The shift in format will put an end to the All Blacks having to travel to Argentina and South Africa in one calendar year.

Instead, they will play two home tests against one of the Pumas or Boks and two away tests against the other.

The Wallabies will do the same in mirror image, with the fixtures reversing the next year to ensure whichever side the All Blacks played at home in 2021, they play away in 2022. It is hoped this will generate a

greater sense of occasion for fans, as the Boks will be in New Zealand only every second year, and likewise, the All Blacks will only play biennially in South Africa.

Australia and New Zealand will continue to play each other home and away every year, as will South Africa and Argentina.

The move is also designed to introduce a retro theme where international sides can feel they are on an old-fashioned tour.

While unlikely, the possibility will exist of the All Blacks travelling with an extended squad to play midweek fixtures in either Argentina or South Africa.

Sanzaar is hopeful that playing back-to-back tests in this format will give the tournament a more compelling edge and potentially make it a

harder competition to win.

Since Argentina joined in 2012, the All Blacks have won six of the eight titles. They didn't win in 2015 or 2019 – years in which the competition was truncated because of the World Cup.

When played in its true format where each team plays the others home and away, the All Blacks have often been declared champions after five games and sometimes even after just four.

Arguably, some of their dominance has come on the back of a favourable schedule where they play three home tests in succession.

The format has been consistent since 2012 – with the All Blacks opening their campaign in Australia, before playing a return in New Zealand the following week.

They then play Argentina and South Africa in consecutive weeks at home, then both teams away.

Only once in the six occasions the tournament has run in full has the title still been up for grabs when the All Blacks have played their final test in South Africa.

The change is also being driven by a desire to cut the travel burden on players.

Since 2012, the All Blacks have found it an extreme challenge to play in Argentina one week and South Africa the next and then head to Europe a few weeks after they return from the Republic.

Playing in either South Africa or Argentina and being based there for two weeks will reduce air travel for all teams and cut some of the expense.

this – it's rugby clubs getting together to help out one of the family."

He said the Blues organisation wanted to make the most of this situation to host a late afternoon game.

"It gives our fans an ideal opportunity to bring the family to Eden Park to enjoy some great rugby in the afternoon and be home by early evening."

"It's Pasifika weekend in Auckland, so we're bringing a taste of island culture to Eden Park. It'll be a great afternoon with music and giveaways to celebrate."

"We've had to move quickly and we need to recognise the excellent support from Eden Park with all these changes, while we have also been communicating with our provincial unions, with pre-season club rugby under way," said Hore.

Lam's leading lights: Former Blues transforming Bristol



Liam Napier comment

Pat Lam's Bristol Bears savoured a special outing in Bath over the weekend with Steven Luatua and Charles Pritau paving the way for their first win at the Rec for 14 years.

Lam beamed with pride following the tense 19-13 victory, the historical significance of the result at Bristol's West Country neighbour's home patch evoking joyful scenes from all involved with the Bears.

Bristol have now pulled off the Premiership double over Bath this season and their fourth win in a row, their first at the Rec since November 2006, lifts them to third on the table. Not bad for a side navigating their way through their second season since promotion to English rugby's top flight.

Lam's vision, and the deep pockets of Bristol owner Steve Lansdown, are beginning to come to fruition. Steven Luatua and Charles Pritau

Luatua is fast morphing into an inspirational captain.

In this match, he returned from a neck injury to snaffle turnovers, provide a superb offload that led to one of Bristol's three tries and tackled himself to a standstill while playing out of position at openside.

After an injury-disrupted season, Pritau has returned with impetus to be named man of the match from fullback against Bath.

In his last two outings, Pritau has made 43 runs for 312 metres, six clean breaks, and beaten an astonishing 25 defenders.

Even on boggy English pitches in the middle of winter, his magic feet remain lethal.

Bristol set the goal of finishing within the top six to qualify for next season's European Champions Cup competition.

They're well on their way to achieving that feat, and potentially challenging for this year's Premiership title.

"I'm very, very proud of the guys," Lam said.

"That's the result of a lot of work. We had a pretty physical week, we had to create a game plan because



Steven Luatua is fast morphing into an inspirational captain at Bristol.

Photo / Getty Images

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Bristol coach Pat Lam

we were coming down to the toughest conditions in the Premiership.

"We talked about not getting bored of the game we needed to play to win. We selected the group accordingly and it was a very big win."

"Bath are going well because they're winning games on this field and we did a lot of work as coaches, looking at the way we play and we started the week by saying, 'we've got to be excited boys, to come down and play the rugby we need to win'."

"Not necessarily the rugby that you want to [play], but it's about the teamwork, graft. And we set that mindset right at the beginning and the boys stuck to it."

Elsewhere in the Premiership, Jacob Umaga scored a try and Jimmy Gopperth kicked 11 points as Wasps beat London Irish 36-26 away from home.

Chris Boyd's Northampton Saints slipped to fourth after losing 27-21 at home to Saracens.

Over in the Pro14, former Hurricanes lock Sam Lousi left his mark – but not in a positive way. The Tongan international, who played three seasons for the

Hurricanes before moving to Wales this season, seems destined for a lengthy spell on the sidelines after his moment of madness cost Brad Moore's Scarlets in their 29-10 loss to Munster.

Lousi was sent off in the 34th minute after landing a one-two punch combination – the like rarely seen in the modern game – on Munster first-five JJ Hanrahan and lock Ffion Wynneley.

Lousi, the 28-year-old league convert, could now be banned for months.

Schmidt returns to box

After largely laying low following Ireland's disappointing World Cup, Ireland's former Kiwi coach Joe Schmidt is again gaining prominence. First he popped up in Spain, helping their national team, and he is now helping French club Clermont, his old club, on a short-term basis.

Schmidt was in the coaching box for Clermont's 32-15 win at Agen in the Top14 on Saturday.

Clermont coach Franck Azéma praised Schmidt's impact, and Bath are rumoured to have logged their interest in hiring his services.