

Kaplan reaches magical 50-Test milestone

South Africa's Jonathan Kaplan will make history this weekend when he becomes the first referee to reach the 50 Test milestone.

Kaplan will celebrate his half century when he takes charge of the Six Nations clash between Scotland and Ireland at Murrayfield in Edinburgh on Saturday.

Kaplan, who made his Test refereeing debut in 1996, became the most-capped international referee at 47 tests in November last year when he blew the clash between France and Argentina in Marseilles.

SA Rugby's Manager of Referees, Andre Watson, paid tribute to Kaplan, describing the achievement as "truly remarkable".

"This is equal to a player playing 100 tests for his country," said Watson.

"Players play on average 12 test matches a year whereas referees get on average 4, maybe 5 appointments a year. This indicates how long Jonathan has been around on the world scene.

"I cannot think of a nicer and more humble guy to achieve this remarkable feat. He has always shown the potential to become a 'great' and he has achieved this status while he is still active, which makes him a living legend in my view. I trust the rugby world will join me in raising a glass to salute Jonny," he said.

Watson added that Kaplan was a role model for young referees and those wanting to take up refereeing.

"He is an example to young referees not only for achieving the magical number 50, but the way he performs weekend in and weekend out.

"Jonathan started out whilst still at school and his desire to get better and better eventually took him to the top of the sport. SA Rugby is presently busy with a recruitment campaign and we are looking for the Jonathan Kaplan's of the future to ensure that South Africa continues to produce world class match officials," Watson said.

Kaplan, who is already in Edinburgh, shared some refereeing memories ahead of his 50th Test.

Q: What is your best test refereeing experience and why?

A: "New Zealand vs Australia in 2000. John Eales kicked a last minute penalty to win the game and the Bledisloe Cup and Tri-Nations for Australia. At the time, I was very green in terms of test match experience so it really tested my ability".

Q: What is your worst test refereeing experience and why?

A: "Probably Scotland vs Italy at the 2007 Rugby World Cup. I just had a bad day and got some important calls wrong".

Q: What are some of your memorable refereeing moments?

A: “The 2007 Rugby World Cup semi-final between England and France where there was an awesome atmosphere, all Bledisloe Cup matches that are usually very closely contested and played at furious pace, refereeing British and Irish Lions tests in both Australia and New Zealand, and breaking the test match record in November last year (I hope my 50th will be something special too). Lastly, the scenes after Japan drew with Canada at the 2007 World Cup were hugely emotional for Japanese players and support staff with many of them openly crying their eyes out and then proudly carrying a huge flag around the field”.

Q: What humorous moments have you experienced in your career?

A: “The funniest moments are every time I get knocked over by players, the last of which happened in the Wales/New Zealand test at the end of last year where I battled to get out from under a pile of bodies”.

Q: Who have been the best players to ref and why?

A: “I enjoyed refereeing Todd Blackadder as he was a very humble man for what he achieved. George Gregan and Andrew Mehrtens, who were pretty smart players, John Eales, who always carried himself with grace, and Tana Umaga, with whom I had a strong mutual respect with and for. In South Africa, I enjoyed Corne Krige, Naka Drotske, John Smit, Helgard Muller, Victor Matfield and Tiaan Strauss for their leadership and the rapport that we have or had”.

Kaplan's 50th test will be broadcast live from Edinburgh on SuperSport 6 from 18h55 on Saturday.

The SA Rugby Referees recruitment campaign was launched in 2008 with the aim of increasing the number of amateur referees in South Africa.

“Since the launch of the campaign there has been a marked increase in the number of new referees,” said Watson.

“People interested in taking up refereeing can send their details to or visit www.sareferees.co.za,” he concluded.