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THE WORLD CUP IN NEW ZEALAND



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# RUGBY HEAVEN

September 29, 2011

## READ'S PAIN GAME



### READ MISHAP NOT SERIOUS, SAY ALL BLACKS

DESPITE APPEARING to be in pain when he aggravated his troublesome left ankle at training yesterday, Kieran Read should still play against Canada on Sunday.

The All Blacks No 8 was photographed receiving attention from team physiotherapist Pete Gallagher at yesterday's "closed" training at Rugby League Park, while doctor Deb Robinson and forwards coach Steve Hansen looked on with concern, pictured.

Sunday's final pool match in Wellington is expected to mark Read's comeback appearance after he hurt the same ankle against the Wallabies in Brisbane a month ago.

Although the sight of Read receiving attention may have caused coach Graham Henry's heart to flip, a team spokeswoman last night said the mishap was not serious.

"He did have a bit of soreness and the ankle was iced, but he is expected to fully recover."

After training, scrum coach Mike Cron also said he did not believe the injury would prevent Read from playing.

It was always expected the injury would provide some discomfort during his rehabilitation, but earlier this week, Read declared himself fully fit and said he had been running at full pace.

Photo: Getty Images

## 'Players must be involved' in decisions, says Nichol

By TOBY ROBSON  
in Wellington

FED UP, in the dark and under duress.

Rugby's professional players say the IRB must reform itself, and its flagship tournament, if they want to avoid the potential World Cup disaster floated by New Zealand Rugby Union boss Steve Tew.

International Rugby Players' Association executive director Rob Nichol has revealed the game's top players only signed the current RWC terms of agreement after an IRB threat of a

lockout.

"We had said all along that, no matter what, we will take the field, but we are unhappy with the commercial model and we might not sign it," he said yesterday.

"I have correspondence that shows RWC told us they would lock us out if we did not sign ... we had to decide, 'Do we sign up or put the tournament at risk?' We signed."

All Blacks hooker Keven Mealamu said he would be "devastated" if he was denied the chance of playing at the tournament and Nichol confirmed IRPA would never consider a

boycott or strike.

However, he said Tew's claim that teams may not be able to compete in 2015, unless there was major change at the top of the game, was reality.

"It's costing the top 10 nations, by the IRB and national unions' own numbers, between \$35 and \$50 million worth of lost profit to compete in Rugby World Cup," Nichol revealed. "That's after the IRB distributions over a four-year period are taken into account. It's costing not just the professional level of the game, but the amateur level.

"If we don't fix this model it's not

that we don't want to go, but we won't be able to afford to go. That would be sad. What we have here is a model we inherited from many years ago."

Tew wants the commercial model changed to allow national unions to leverage the tournament's earning power through sponsors, as is the case with soccer's Fifa World Cup.

Nichol acknowledges the IRB's commitment to a review of the commercial model in May, but says the "stalemate" in the game will continue as long as the players are excluded from the negotiation table.

"They risk coming up with their

model in May, 2012, and the players saying, 'no we don't like that'.

"From a players' perspective we've said, 'that's great and it's good they have recognised there's an issue, and will do some work around it, but for goodness sake involve the players.'"

He said frustration levels had peaked in the buildup to the tournament, when revenue-sharing proposals, and even efforts to gain a per diem for amateur players, had been roundly rejected.

Change to the cup's commercial model needed to be accompanied by constitutional reform at the top of

the game, Nichol said.

That meant "self-interested" national union representatives being replaced by "skilled independents" on the IRB board.

"It's a very political and structurally flawed environment because you have the national unions trying to keep the IRB away from the players, because the national unions say, 'we contract and pay the players'.

"The very people they [the IRB] are governing, are in fact governing them. Even if the IRB management wanted to involve us I don't think the national unions, by and large, would

let them.

"The national unions don't want the players around the table because we aren't in full agreement about what the commercial model should look like."

Nichol believed there was risk associated with talking about the issues so publicly, but after eight years of little progress, felt there was little other choice.

"We appreciate Steve [Tew] and the NZRU supporting on this issue, but we don't want them to push so hard they get off side with their fellow national unions."

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