



The International Rugby Board consolidates the position of its flagship tournament, the Rugby World Cup, among the world's top sporting events.



From the first blow of the whistle by referee Paul Honiss to start the opening match between host nation Australia and Argentina in Sydney, it was history in the making for the 2003 Rugby World Cup (RWC).

The game continued to uphold its longstanding traditions – and there are quite a few – but the fifth edition of the RWC set new standards day after day, from October 10 through November 22.

Honiss' whistle was the same blown to kick off every RWC since the tournament was first staged in 1987 – a historic piece in sporadic use since 1905 . But by the end of day one, after the 'Wallabies' had defeated the 'Pumas' 24-8, the first figures revealed an unprecedented public

interest downunder and around the globe. 81,350 had come to the stadium and joined in on the 'Waltzing Mathilda' chorus. 2.77 million TV viewers had watched the tournament opener on Australia's Channel 7. The official website, rugbyworldcup.com, had registered 44.2 million hits in one day. And the world had just started to tune in.

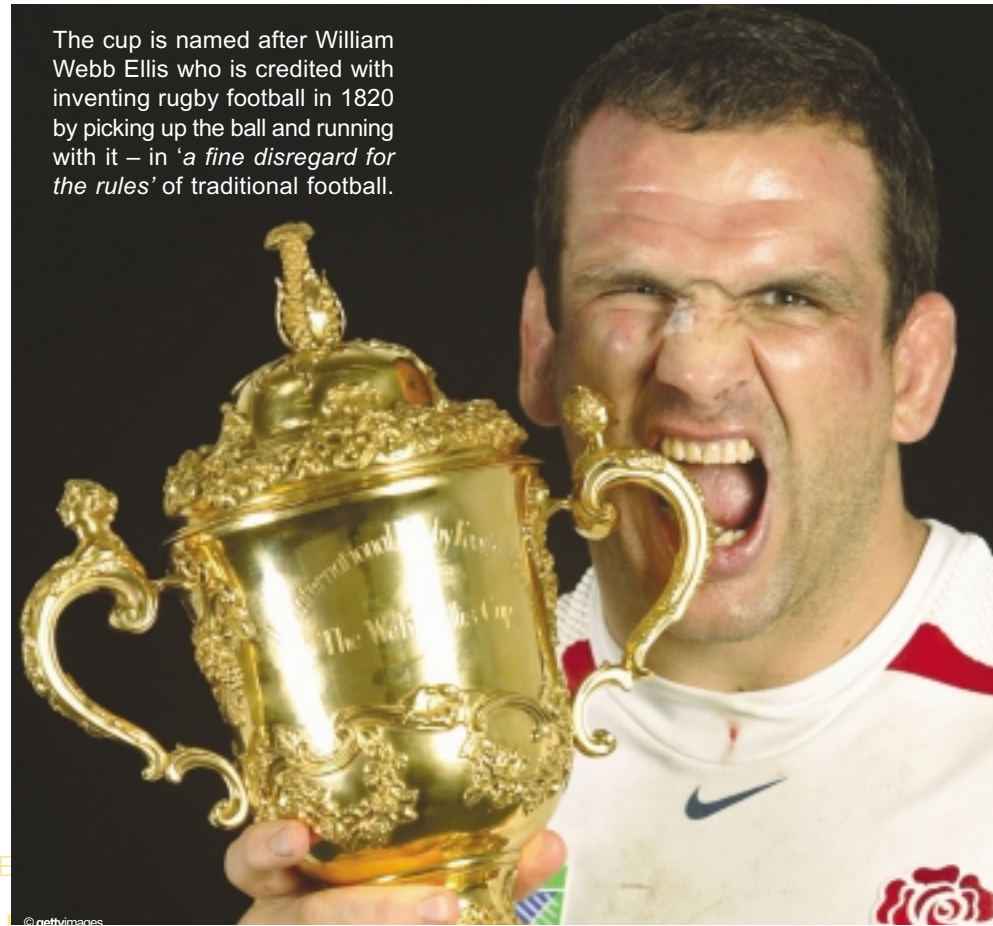
No one seriously doubted that the Australians would show their true colors and support their team in defending the Webb Ellis Cup . Sydney 2000 had already demonstrated the Australian enthusiasm for sports and an all-out effort put into being gracious

hosts to the world. The RWC 2003 was bound to rekindle some of the same Olympic spirit.

Upon the tournament's conclusion, Australian Rugby Union Chief Executive John O'Neill reserved the highest praise for the Australian public: *"It has been amazing in the stands, on the streets, in the pubs and clubs, RWC 2003 had no boundaries geographically across Australia and demographically across all ages, sexes and social groups."*

"The atmosphere was extraordinary. Being at the match venues you had to take a double take. At times you read the newspapers and wondered

The cup is named after William Webb Ellis who is credited with inventing rugby football in 1820 by picking up the ball and running with it – in 'a fine disregard for the rules' of traditional football.



if there was anything else going on in the world."

Distance and time difference between Australia and other key rugby markets made the outcome of RWC 2003's international projection less predictable. Matching the crowds and television audiences of RWC 1999 was an outright challenge from downunder. An impressive 1.7 million had attended the 48 games in Wales; a cumulative total of 3.1 billion in 140 countries had watched them on TV. But then the broadcasts were conveniently scheduled to suit the English, French and even South African taste. No mid-morning kick-offs!

In the final tally, more than 40,000 overseas visitors traveled to Australia, using up 500,000 bed nights over 44 days in the ten RWC 2003 cities. From Townsville in northern Queensland to Launceston on Tasmania, the venues filled with partisan crowds of the most varied colors.

While England had only 15 players on the pitch during its pool and knockout matches in Perth, Melbourne and Brisbane, it regularly had a few thousand also clad in the team shirt giving vocal support from the stands. When England played the final in Sydney, on November 22, the 'Barmy Army' – that's what the loyal supporters are called – had grown exponentially. The RWC press release of 22/11/03: *"The England players were not disappointed with tens of thousands of fans wearing the famous white shirt, so many it was impossible to put a figure on their contribution to the Rugby World Cup record crowd of 82,957.*

The English fans sang their hearts out, bantering with the home supporters to create an atmosphere that many who were there will never forget. Unlike the Wallabies' fans, they had to fly more than 10,000 miles to get to Sydney."

IWGA President Froehlich – one of 82,957 spectators inside Telstra Stadium – sums up the memorable final on page one of this FORUM.

Rugby emerged even stronger after the last game was played: reports on record crowds, record

television audiences and record profits started to pour in. International Rugby Board (IRB) chairman Syd Millar declared that the 2003 tournament had taken the RWC to a new level. *"The television audience, people through the turnstiles, the money raised, absolutely tremendous, for that we are grateful to the Australian Rugby Union,"* Millar said and labelled RWC 2003 the *"best ever"*. 2,000 accredited journalists from 40 different countries concurred.

1,837,547 people attended the 48 matches in Australia; an important increase over 1999 (1.7 million) – given the distance to and the spread between the ten RWC venues.

A peak audience of 4.36 million watched the final on Seven Network in Australia's mainland capitals; the audience share in Sydney was 87%. The performance made it the most watched television program of the year and the most watched game ever, way ahead of Australian Football League and FIFA World Cup finals. Overall, 31.5 million had tuned into Seven Network's comprehensive coverage of the tournament.



In Britain, the final on ITV recorded a peak of 14.5 million and a share of 80%, gathering the top sports audience of the year – despite the 9 a.m. kick-off.

9.5 million witnessed how 'Les Bleus' got defeated by England in the November 16 semi-final on France 2. That beat the 8.8 million watching France's semi-final win over New Zealand during the RWC 1999. Even a 'bleu'-less final garnered a respectable 4.63 million audience and 53.7% share in France.

The official website – with its real-time match information, historical databases and statistics – registered 495 million hits over the tournament. The record for a single day, 44.5 million hits, had come on November 22!

