

# **Rugby World Cup opening matches: A statistical look**



## RUGBY WORLD CUP OPENING MATCHES

With the Rugby World Cup 2023 match schedule to be announced on Friday, 26 February, we take a statistical look at the nine previous opening matches in the tournament's history.

### FAMILIAR FACES

Twelve nations have taken part in the opening match of a men's Rugby World Cup.

In chronological order they are: New Zealand, Italy, England, South Africa, Australia, Wales, Argentina, France, Tonga, Fiji, Japan and Russia.

New Zealand and Argentina have made the most appearances in the opening match with three.

The All Blacks have not lost a tournament opener, beating Italy 70-6 at Eden Park in 1987, England 18-12 at Twickenham in 1991 and Tonga 41-10 again at Eden Park in 2011.

Argentina appeared in three successive RWC opening matches from 1999-2007, losing 23-18 to Wales in 1999 and 24-8 to Australia in 2003 before stunning hosts France 17-12 in 2007.

England (1991, 2015) and Australia (1995, 2003) are the only other teams to feature in the opening match more than once.

South Africa, Wales and Japan are the three teams to win their only appearances in the opening match, in 1995 (27-18 v Australia), 1999 (23-18 v Argentina) and 2019 (30-10 v Russia) respectively.

Eden Park (1987, 2011) and Twickenham (1991, 2015) have both hosted a Rugby World Cup opening match twice.

### HOSTS PREVAIL ... MOST OFTEN THAN NOT

Seven of the nine men's Rugby World Cups to date have seen the host nation or one of the co-hosts win the opening match in New Zealand (1987, 2011), South Africa (1995), Wales (1999), Australia (2003), England (2015) and Japan (2019).

Co-hosts England in 1991 and then France in 2007 are the two exceptions.

Only once has the winning team not scored more tries than their opponents in the opening match, South Africa and Australia both touching down twice at Newlands in 1995.

### HISTORY MAKERS

The first points scored in Rugby World Cup history were from a penalty try awarded to New Zealand by referee Bob Fordham on 22 May, 1987.

All Blacks flanker Michael Jones had the honour of being the first player to score a try, while fly-half Grant Fox kicked the first penalty and conversion and Italy centre Oscar Collodo the first drop goal.

### TRIES APLENTY

A total of 40 tries have been scored in the nine opening matches of a Rugby World Cup.

New Zealand account for 19 or 47.5 per cent of them, having scored 12 in 1987, one in 1991 and six in 2011.

Twenty-nine of the 40 tries have been converted.

Only one hat-trick has been scored in an opening match, by Japan's Kotaro Matsushima in their 30-10 defeat of Russia at Tokyo Stadium at RWC 2019

Michael Jones and Ignacio Corleto are the only players to score a try in the opening match of two tournaments, the All Black in 1987 and 1991 and the Los Pumas star in 2003 and 2007.

### **A KICKING GAME**

Forty-five penalties were kicked across the nine matches.

The most penalties kicked by a side in an opening match is six, all by Gonzalo Quesada in Argentina's loss to Wales at RWC 1999.

That match at the Millennium Stadium also saw the most penalties in total with nine kicked.

Three drop goals have been kicked in opening matches, although none since Joel Stransky's effort for South Africa in 1995.

The others were kicked by Italy's Oscar Collodo in 1987 and England's Rob Andrew in 1991.

### **POINTS**

A total of 390 points have been scored across the nine opening matches.

### **SCORING FIRST**

The first points in an opening match have been a penalty in seven of the nine matches – the exceptions being a penalty try for New Zealand in 1987 and Kiril Golosnitskiy's try for Russia in 2019.

The winning team has scored the first points on five occasions – in 1987, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015.

### **THROUGH THE TURNSTILES**

A total of 540,914 fans have been lucky enough to have attend an opening match in RWC history.

RWC 2003 had the biggest attendance with 81,350 fans packed into Telstra Stadium to see Australia beat Argentina 24-8.

The inaugural tournament got underway with 20,000 fans at Eden Park as New Zealand beat Italy 70-6.

### **A FRENCH CONNECTION**

France's captain in their RWC 2007 opening match loss to Argentina was Raphaël Ibañez. The former hooker is now Les Bleus' team manager as they count down to the opening match of RWC 2023 on home soil.