

RUGBY: AN ENGLISHMAN PREACHING FOR ARGENTINIAN RUGBY

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By Pirate Irwin



Argentina have been impressive in their Rugby World Cup campaign

PARIS – If Argentina ever realise their dream of being admitted to compete in either the Six Nations or Tri-Nations rugby tournaments, they will in part have an Englishman to thank.

Les Cusworth, the 52-year-old former England first five-eighth is not only lobbying for the Pumas but is their director of rugby, having been linked to them for the past five years as honorary technical advisor.

He is now charged with raising the number of players playing the game to 80,000 from the present 60,000, and he has married an Argentinian, with whom he has had a daughter.

Cusworth, who earned 12 caps over a nine-year period but was best known for his exploits with his club side Leicester, said his preference would be to be competing in the Six Nations.

Given that the Pumas have beaten two of the powerhouses in the World Cup pool stage, Six Nations titleholders France and Triple Crown winners Ireland, his choice would seem logical and add an extra bit of spice to the competition.

"Where is this game going, where do we want it to be in 30 years time?" he said this week.

"Do we just want a Six Nations or a Tri-Nations? What a stagnant game we will have if that is the case.

"It would be better for us to be in the Six Nations. We could base ourselves in Brussels, Valencia, Madrid, wherever.

"If we are included it will benefit the incumbents. Let's get into the cosy club. The International Rugby Board have been very supportive about our case but they are not the stakeholders.

"The stakeholders are the Six Nations committee."

Cusworth's sense of urgency to build on the Pumas reaching their second World Cup quarterfinal in the last three editions – and they now have a good chance of making the last four because they face Scotland on Monday (NZT) at the Stade de France – is based on a previous example of a country that seemed on the brink of a breakthrough.

"This generation of players have been knocking on the door for years. Once they're gone then what?" Cusworth told the Daily Telegraph newspaper.

"There's too much self interest in rugby. They let Romania drop off the radar; let's not see the same thing happen to Argentina."

For the moment, though, his immediate task is to analyse video footage and plot another famous scalp in the Scots, who were beaten 23–19 by the Pumas at Murrayfield in November, 2005.

"Rugby has progressed a lot in the last few years and we give the players enough information so that they can take decisions on the pitch," said Cusworth, who has worked alongside Nicolas Bastedios Molina since the 2003 World Cup, giving the players the requisite pointers on their opponents.

Cusworth, who splits his time between the leafy Buenos Aires area of Hurlingham and London, has earned high praise from his adopted compatriots.

"He is somebody who knows a lot of things," said wing Horacio Agulla, one of the few amateurs in the squad.

"He brings a lot of things to the table and always transmits a positive message.

"I have learnt a lot from him," added Agulla, who scored one of the Pumas tries in the 30-15 win over Ireland.