

South Africa 26-3 Japan: Springboks through to Rugby World Cup semi-finals

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Makazole Mapimpi's early try gave South Africa control from the start

Rugby World Cup quarter-final

Japan: (3) 3

Pens: Tamura

South Africa: (5) 26

Tries: Mapimpi 2, De Klerk **Pens:** Pollard 3 **Cons:** Pollard

South Africa ended Japan's dream World Cup run to reach the semi-finals after a bruising 26-3 win against the hosts.

The Springboks led after a powerful run gave Makazole Mapimpi a try, but went a player down when Tendai Mtawarira was shown a yellow card for a tip tackle.

Japan could only take a Yu Tamura penalty from the man advantage, making the score 5-3 at half-time in Tokyo.

Second-half tries from Faf de Klerk and Mapimpi plus Handre Pollard's 11 points put the Springboks out of reach.

Watch: Wales into semi-finals & South Africa end Japan's World Cup run

The tries put paid to any hopes of a repeat of Japan's 2015 World Cup win against the same opponents and brought to an end a fairytale four weeks for the hosts.

The Springboks will now play Wales in the semi-final on Sunday, 27 October, with the winner facing England or New Zealand in the final.

History made in Tokyo

Tendai Mtawarira became the third South Africa player to be yellow carded in a World Cup knockout game after Bryan Habana in 2015 and Juan Smith in 2007

It was an historic day for Japanese rugby and the fans knew it, posing for photos with South African supporters as proof that they were there for their nations' first World Cup quarter-final.

Television audiences and media interest has gradually increased after an impressive group-stage performance which included superb wins against Ireland and Scotland.

The Brave Blossoms started as optimistically as they had played in the pool stages, with fly-half Yu Tamura kicking cross-field to wing Kotaro Matsushima, but it was two-time winners South Africa who scored first.

The Springboks overpowered Japan in a scrum and De Klerk's pass to Mapimpi found the left wing with plenty of room to run through Tamura and dive over in the corner.

It would take more than that to quieten the Japanese fans, though. Chants of "Japan" were only interrupted when captain Michael Leitch had the ball, at which point prolonged cries of "Leitch" rang out instead.

There was a yellow card for prop Mtawarira for a tip tackle on opposite number Keita Inagaki in the 11th minute.

No tries came of the numerical advantage, but Japan won a scrum penalty just to the left of the posts and the crowd exploded into cheers. Tamura duly landed the kick and cut South Africa's lead to two.

Brave Blossoms overpowered

South Africa coach Rassie Erasmus had stacked his side with strength up front, naming six forwards on the bench.

And when Japan's now trademark fast hands were met with brute force by South Africa, it left the Brave Blossoms looking far less slick in attack than they had in the group stage.

A searing run up the left wing for Kenki Fukuoka brought Japan up to the five-metre line, but the attack came to an end when the hosts conceded a penalty at the breakdown.

Indiscipline was the undoing of South Africa's attack in the first half - the Springboks conceded six penalties to Japan's two in the first 40 minutes.

A disappointing 40 minutes was capped off by a disallowed try for Damian de Allende. The centre clawed his way through four tackles to make it across the try-line but his effort did not count because of a double movement.

However, South Africa were quickly on the scoreboard in the second half thanks to Pollard's first penalty and looked to have extended their lead further when Pieter-Steph du Toit cantered across the whitewash. But that one did not count either because of a forward pass.

Pollard soon added another three points after a scrum penalty and the task facing Japan suddenly looked very daunting at 11-3.

Living up to their name, the Brave Blossoms refused to give in and continued to try and run the ball out from their own 22 at every opportunity.

But a high tackle on De Klerk resulted in a third successful Pollard penalty in front of the posts.

And it was De Klerk who dealt the killer blow. The Sale scrum-half sprung through the hole created in the Japanese defence by a Springbok maul to score and Pollard landed the conversion.

South Africa's attack was repeatedly frustrated by their own indiscipline in the first 40 minutes, but they were well and truly in their stride by the end of the match.

Mapimpi took advantage of an overlap and thundered down the left wing. Japan's Kotaro Matsushima gave chase but was too late to stop the South African scoring his second of the match.

Chants of "Japan" continued right up until the final whistle, when the players fell to their knees and the crowd got to their feet to show their appreciation for what their team had done.

The Japan players formed a circle on the field, tears running down many cheeks, as the Springboks thanked the fans. Hearts were broken in Tokyo, but Japanese fans found their voice to give their team one last roar before they left the pitch.

Man of the match - Makazole Mapimpi

Makazole Mapimpi took his tally to 13 tries in 12 games for South Africa, no player has scored more in Test rugby since Mapimpi's debut (he's level with Jonny May and Rieko Ioane).

South Africa wing Makazole Mapimpi had tough competition in opposite number Kotaro Matsushima but he more than coped with it. The 29-year-old completely overpowered Yu Tamura for his first try and outran Matsushima for his second.

'It took a lot out of us' - player reaction

South Africa captain Siya Kolisi: "It was exactly what I expected. We knew what they were going to bring today and it took a lot out of us to keep on fighting. We fought and ground it out in front of this beautiful crowd.

"We knew how fast they can play the game, they play a style that is fearless and didn't shy away from it today. We pride ourselves in hard work in defence."

Japan captain Michael Leitch: "Rugby is all about creating moments and taking opportunities. We had a few opportunities to capitalise on but unfortunately South Africa kicked us out.

"Congratulations to the South African team, they played their A game and played it very well.

"I'm extremely proud of what this team have done. To represent Asia and the two-tier countries, I'm sure they'll be proud of us as well. Japan is only going to get stronger."

'Japan have been a joy to watch' - analysis

Former England fly-half Paul Grayson on BBC Radio 5 Live: "The dream was always going to come to an end at some point. They've brought the whole country with them to the quarter-final stages.

"They've done themselves absolute credit because they play a brand of rugby which maximises every single bit of physical and mental resource they are capable of putting on the field. They've been a joy to watch.

"They've just run into a team who were too big and too strong for them."

Former Ireland international Jamie Heaslip on Radio 5 Live: "If we think back through the whole game, there have been three or four other moments where there could have been another try. Credit to South Africa, it's 26-3, but there could easily have been another 10 or 20 points on top of that."

Japan's players posed for pictures with their families after the match

Match stats

- Japan's defeat ended a run of six straight World Cup victories.
- There were just eight points scored in the first half of this match, the fewest in a game at this year's World Cup.
- Japan failed to score a try in this game - they had crossed the try-line in each of their previous 15 World Cup matches, last failing to do so in a 91-3 defeat by Australia in their opening game of the 2007 tournament.
- South Africa were the only side not to lose a line-out on their own throw in the pool stages, they won 10/10 against Japan to take their tally to 57/57 for the tournament.
- Tendai Mtawarira became just the third South Africa player to be yellow-carded in a World Cup knockout game, after Bryan Habana in 2015 (v NZ) and Juan Smith in 2007 (v Argentina).
- South Africa have now won five of their seven World Cup quarter-finals, their 71% win rate at this stage of the tournament is only bettered by New Zealand (89% from nine matches).

Teams

Japan: Yamanaka; Matsushima, Lafaele, Nakamura, Fukuoka; Tamura, Nagare; Inagaki, Horie, Koo, Thompson, Moore, Leitch (capt), Labuschagne, Himeno.

Replacements: Sakate, Nakajima, Ai Valu, Van der Walt, Lelei Mafi, Tanaka, Matsuda, Lava Lemeki.

South Africa: Le Roux: Kolbe, Am, De Allende, Mapimpi; Pollard, De Klerk, Mtawarira, Mbonambi, Malherbe, Etzebeth, De Jager, Kolisi (capt), Du Toit, Vermeulen

Replacements: Marx, Kitschoff, Koch, Snyman, Mostert, Louw, H Jantjies, Steyn