



THE BALL

WHEN boot and shoemaker, William Gilbert started making balls for the rugby school over 150 years ago, little did he realise that his name would become synonymous with Rugby Union. Gilbert is one of the most popular makers of rugby balls and has been used by almost every rugby nation at all levels of the game. At this year's Rugby World Cup the match, training and replica balls will be supplied by Gilbert. The official ball has the distinctive Rugby World Cup brand, with colours of blue and green and a distinctive New Zealand design. Its superior shape retention and spin rate should help deliver some top class rugby throughout the tournament.

The first Gilbert rugby balls were hand stitched, four-panel leather casings with pig's bladders inside that had to be inflated by mouth. In fact, it is the shape of the pig's bladder that is reputed to have given the rugby ball its distinctive oval shape. In those days balls varied in size and shape depending on how large the pig's bladder was. In contrast, with the advent of new synthetic materials, the balls today are fairly standard and for official matches must meet IRB's regulations. For matches involving young players like in youth rugby, the use of smaller balls is allowed. The IRB's laws of the game also state that during a rugby match spare balls can be used if needed, but a team cannot try to gain an unfair advantage by using or changing the spares.

THE TROPHY

A NAME firmly established in the history of rugby union is William Webb Ellis – the man credited with creating the game. On the face of the trophy, presented to the winners of the Rugby World Cup competition, is his name, written on the glimmering gold exterior of the 38cm gilt silver cup. The words The Webb Ellis Cup are engraved along with The International Rugby Football Board on the trophy, that bears two scroll handles with the head of a satyr on one and a nymph on the other. There are two official Webb Ellis Cups, which are used interchangeably. Australia has won the Cup twice (1991 and 1999) as have South Africa (1995 and 2007). New Zealand (1987) and England (2003) have won once.

THE OPENING CEREMONY

BEFORE kick off in tonight's opening match of the 2011 Rugby World Cup between New Zealand and Tonga, rugby audiences worldwide will be treated to a showcase of entertainment. The opening ceremony of the IRB's Rugby World Cup will represent Maori and Pacific Island culture along with the best of what New Zealand has to offer. It will include aspects of all 20 nations taking part in the competition,

and reflect the sport of Rugby and the Rugby World Cup brand. A large and elaborate 12-minute spectacular firework display will take place on the Auckland water front, off barges in the harbour as well as the Sky Tower and other Auckland skyscrapers, starting the six-week competition off with a bang.

WORLD IN UNION

AT THIS year's Rugby World Cup – the third largest sporting event in the world and the biggest held in New Zealand – the rugby anthem World in Union will again ring out. The song, first used in England in 1991, has been sung at the opening ceremony of every tournament since. The theme reflects the rugby union culture. Hayley Westenra, a New Zealand soprano, will perform the song this year.

LYRICS FOR WORLD IN UNION

There's a dream, I feel
So rare, so real
All the world in union
The world as one

Gathering together
One mind, one heart
Every creed, every colour
Once joined, never apart

Searching for the best in me
I will find what I can be
If I win, lose or draw
It's a victory for all

It's the world in union
The world as one
As we climb to reach our destiny
A new age has begun

We may face high mountains
Must cross rough seas
We must take our place in history
And live with dignity

Just to be the best I can
That's the goal for every man
If I win, lose or draw
It's a victory for all

It's the world in union
The world as one
As we climb to reach our destiny
A new age has begun

RULE OF THE DAY

TACKLING

A TACKLE consists of grabbing an opposing player and bringing them to ground. A tackled player must release the ball making the ball available so play can continue. When a player tackles an opponent and they both go to ground, the tackler must release the tackled player and get up or move away.

WINNERS: South Africa's captain John Smit holds the winner's trophy after the Rugby World Cup final between England and South Africa in 2007 at the Stade de France north of Paris.

PHOTO: AAP

NEXT WEEK: ROLLIN' RUGBY Part 6