

PUISANO SPORTS



Youth and experience in exciting RWC squad

Nienaber's squad featured a strong mix of experience and some of the best up-and-coming young players in the country, while there was disappointment for three of the starting XV from the 32-12 victory over England in Yokohama four years ago who were ruled out by injury and illness.

Flyhalf Handre Pollard (calf), Lukhanyo Am (knee) and Lood de Jager (chest problem) have been placed on standby with six other players. The Springbok coaches were hopeful that they may return to full training before the start of the tournament and be available for call-up in the event of injury.

Meanwhile props Frans Malherbe and Trevor Nyakane, lock Eben Etzebeth, loose forwards Pieter-Steph du Toit, Siya Kolisi, Duane Vermeulen, centres Damian de Allende and Jesse Kriel and fullback Willie le Roux will feature in their

third World Cup tournaments and are among a large group of players who were members of the 2019 Rugby World Cup-winning squad.

Also returning from 2019 are Steven Kitshoff and Vincent Koch (props), Bongi Mbonambi and Malcolm Marx (hookers), RG Snyman (lock), Kwagga Smith, (loose forward), Franco Mostert (utility forward), Faf de Klerk and Cobus Reinach (scrumhalves), Damian Willemse (utility back), Cheslin Kolbe and Makazole Mapimpi (wings).

Making their first appearance at a Rugby World Cup are Ox Nche (prop), Jean Kleyn and Marvin Orie (locks), Marco van Staden and Jasper Wiese (loose forwards), Deon Fourie (utility forward), Jaden Hendrikse and Grant Williams (scrumhalves), Manie Libbok (flyhalf), Andre Esterhuizen (centre), Kurt-Lee Arendse and Canan Moodie (outside backs).

The squad comprises 19 forwards and 14 backline players. "This was one of the hardest selections we have ever had to make," said Nienaber.

"Any of the 42-man training squad would do a great job but injuries have played a part in the final selection and time unfortunately ran out for some real champions.

"However, we said from the outset that we wanted to name the best 33 players for the World Cup, and after giving 38 players a run in the last four Tests we are pleased with the make-up of the group and we know we have proper depth in each position. "We've picked a squad with a bunch of the players who can also cover alternative positions, which we'll need in a very tough World Cup.

"We were in a great position this year to have so many players knocking on the door for selection but unfortunately, we could only select 33. Injuries have had a hand in the final selection, but they are part of the game, and we are excited about the quality of the players who can step in and perform at World Cup level – as many of the players who featured against Argentina

showed last weekend." Nienaber also announced that nine players would be placed on standby – five of whom will travel with the team to Cardiff and London for their last two World Cup warm-up matches against Wales (19 August) and New Zealand (25 August).

The nine players are Am (centre), Joseph Dweba (hooker), De Jager (lock), Jean-Luc du Preez (utility forward), Thomas du Toit (prop), Herschel Jantjies (scrumhalf), Pollard (flyhalf), Evan Roos (No 8) and Gerhard Steenekamp (prop). The five travelling to the UK on Saturday are Dweba, Du Toit, Du Preez, Pollard and Am.

South Africa will launch their Rugby World Cup title defence on Sunday, 10 September, against Scotland in Marseille, which will be followed by pool matches against Romania in Bordeaux (17 September), Ireland in Paris (23 September) and Tonga in Marseille (1 October). The Rugby World Cup quarter-finals will be played on the weekend of 14/15 October, with the semi-finals on 20/21 October and the final on Saturday, 28 October.

SAFA CEO announces Bafana's opponents for September and October

Bafana Bafana will play three international friendly matches at home and one away in the coming weeks as coach Hugo Broos prepares for the Africa Cup of Nations in Côte d'Ivoire in January next year, and for the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers. SAFA CEO Lydia Monyepao confirmed that the South African senior men's national team will host Namibia on 9 September 2023 (kick off is at 15h00), DR Congo on 12 September (18h00) and Eswatini on 13 October.

Coach Broos' charges will then travel to the west of the continent

to face Africa Cup of Nations hosts Côte d'Ivoire on 17 October, five days after the AFCON draw. "These matches are in support of Bafana Bafana coach Hugo Broos as he continues with his preparation for the Africa Cup of Nations in the beginning of next year, and the start of the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers in November this year," the SAFA CEO said.

The venues of the matches in South Africa will be confirmed in the coming weeks. "The national team has been going from strength to strength, and we at 10bet can't



wait for the upcoming international friendlies to kick off. Millions of football enthusiasts and the nation at large have your back, and this is an opportunity to continue rallying behind the team along their exciting journey ahead.

Good Luck Bafana Bafana, you have our support", said Nick Moyo, Sponsorship Manager at 10bet South Africa. The South African senior national team was placed in Group C at the draw for the 2026 FIFA

World Cup qualifiers conducted in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, in July 2023, and they were pitted against Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Benin, Rwanda and Lesotho.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup will be jointly hosted by Canada, Mexico and the United States of America. The World Cup qualifiers will start in November this year and wrap up in 2025. The Africa Cup of Nations will be held from 13 January to 11 February 2024.