Barrett starts as All Blacks ring changes for Fiji Test in US

AFP- New Zealand on Thursday made 11 changes to the team to face Fiji in San Diego, with Beauden Barrett starting at fullback, a debut for centre Billy Proctor and five uncapped players on the bench.

Proctor, who plays for Wellington Hurricanes, lines up with the experienced Anton Lienert-Brown in midfield for the game on Friday night in California.

Playmaker Barrett is restored after hugely influential performances coming off the bench in both Test wins against England.

The two-time world player of the year sparked the All Blacks comeback in Auckland on Saturday after they had trailed 17-13 in the second half.

Coach Scott Robertson said that 125-Test Barrett's form could not be ignored, having been benched against England following a club season in Japan.

"It was a reminder for us, a player like him coming back from Japan, playing at that top level, that class is permanent," Robertson told reporters.

"It was an incredible cameo and now it's an opportunity for us to build depth in different positions."

Scrum-half Cortez Ratima gets his first start after debuting off the bench in the 24-17 win at Eden Park that gave New Zealand a 2-0 series sweep against England.

Hurricanes prop Pasilio Tosi, Auckland Blues lock Sam Darry,

Waikato Chiefs loose forward Wallace Sititi, and Canterbury Crusaders pair of scrum-half Noah Hotham and hooker George Bell could all make debuts from the bench.

Robertson said the newcomers would have no easy ride against a dangerous Fiji, who beat Australia in last year's World Cup and exited in a narrow quarter-final loss to England.

– Fiji respect –

"It's a hell of a great opportunity for the debutants to show their talent," Robertson said.

"We're really respectful of Fiji. When they get rolling, they get their arms free and they break the game up. They can beat anyone."

Captain Scott Barrett is one of only four Eden Park starting players to keep their place.

The others are No.8 Ardie Savea, wing Sevu Reece and fly-half Damian McKenzie, who will play his 50th Test.

Fiji coach Mick Byrne made three starting changes to the backline from the team who beat Georgia 21-12 in Batumi two weeks ago.

Fijian Drua fly-half Isaiah Armstrong-Ravula is promoted from the bench, pushing Castres playmaker Vilimoni Botitu to fullback in place of Ilaisa Droasese.

Lyon winger Semi Radradra replaces Peniasi Dakuwaqa, who scored twice on Test debut against Georgia.

Fiji's starting side features six players from the Drua Super Rugby team, six from French Top 14 clubs and three from the English Premiership.

New Zealand (15-1):

Beauden Barrett; Sevu Reece, Billy Proctor, Anton Lienert-

Brown, Caleb Clarke; Damian McKenzie, Cortez Ratima; Ardie Savea, Ethan Blackadder, Luke Jacobson; Tupou Vaa’i, Scott Barrett (captain); Fletcher Newell, Asafo Aumua, Tamaiti Williams.

Replacements: Emoni Narawa, Jordie Barrett, Noah Hotham, Wallace Sititi, Sam Darry, Pasilio Tosi, Ethan De Groot, George Bell.

Fiji (15-1):

Vilimoni Botitu; Jiuta Wainiqolo, Waisea Nayacalevu (captain), Inia Tabuavou, Semi Radradra; Isaiah Armstrong-Ravula, Frank Lomani; Viliame Mata, Kitione Salawa, Lekima Tagitagivalu; Temo Mayanavanua, Isoa Nasilasila; Mesake Doge, Tevita Ikanivere, Eroni Mawi.

Replacements: Sireli Maqala, Caleb Muntz, Simione Kuruvole, Elia Canakaivata, Albert Tuisue, Samu Tawake, Haereiti Hetet, Zuriel Togiatama.

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