Jonathan Kaplan became the first referee to register 50 Test caps. He celebrated his half century when he took charge of the Six Nations clash between Scotland and Ireland at Murrayfield in Edinburgh. In-touch found out what notable figures in SA and international rugby circles had to say about Jonathan’s superb achievement:

Peter de Villiers (Springbok coach)
‘Congratulations to Jonathan on achieving this remarkable milestone. Jonathan is an excellent match official who is held in high regard by the local and international rugby communities. This achievement is the result of many years of hard work, dedication and sacrifice. This achievement also reinforces the fact that South Africa’s top refs are among the best in the world and that the hard work that has gone into training and developing our referees is being rewarded’.

Oregan Hoskins (SA Rugby President)
‘This is a fabulous achievement and reflects incredible credit not just on Jonathan but on the programmes that have been put in place over the years to develop South Africa’s elite referees. From his very earliest years in the game it was obvious that Jonathan was a special refereeing talent and his calm authority and deliberately low-key style endeared him to players and supporters alike. For Jonathan to have become the first referee to take charge of 50 Tests marks him as one of the best there has ever been.’

Paddy O’ Brien (IRB Referee Manager)
‘Jonathan Kaplan deserves all the accolades he is given in reaching his 50th test milestone and therefore being the world’s most capped referee. To stay in the top echelon of refereeing for such a long time says much about Jonathan’s passion and understanding of the game and also his dedication in ensuring he keeps in the right shape to referee at the highest level. In an environment where refereeing is coming more and more under the spotlight, Jonathan is an outstanding role model for up and coming refs. From an IRB point of view it is hoped that Jonathan continues to referee in the form he is in for some time to come. I know he enjoyed the moment of his 50th but Jonathan’s biggest strength is that the attention drawn to his achievement will not impact on his performance in the future.’

André Watson
‘Jonathan’s 50th is a milestone in refereeing that will probably be surpassed one day, but not soon. To me, a referee’s 50th is even more of an achievement than a player getting his 100th cap. Reason is simply that referees do not do nearly as many Tests in a year as players. Secondly, being in the spotlight all the time, referees tend to fade or are removed. Jonathan is a stayer. But more importantly, he is a great referee that has served the game well and provided joy to many all over the world. I cannot think of a guy more deserving of this record-breaking achievement than Jonny! The rugby world is blessed to have such a class referee and fortunate that he could have done his thing on 50 occasions. I hope there are many more!’

Jonathan has said that his funniest moments on the field are when he is in the wrong place at the wrong time. It happened again in his 50th Test.
What’s on my mind...

by André Watson

within a few years. So it is with this in mind that the 18 Candidates, 15 Academy and 15 Contender referees will assemble at the same venue used by the National Panel guys for a chance to brush up on their skills. They will experience the work ethic that is required to be successful at the highest level. They will receive intensive, in-depth and specialised coaching at a level and quality they have not experienced before.

In addition to the technical knowledge they will gain, the group will also be exposed to the soft skills we expect from a world-class referee. We expect the candidates to develop a team spirit, an ethos of what refereeing is all about in a country like ours. A country where we have among us some of the world’s best referees – including the very first person to blow in 50 tests.

In short they will receive all the tools to be the best they can. The rest is up to each of them. What is it that separates people once they’ve had similar training? Is it knowing how to work the system, being crafty or is it talent or is it hunger?

It is going to be interesting to see those who step up to the plate and use this opportunity to start making a name for themselves. I wonder who the big names in refereeing will be in a few years’ time, when we look back on their career and find out where they first hit the national stage. I wonder which referees are going to jump up and be noticed this Easter...

I wonder what rabbits are going to jump out of the hat this Easter...

In a first for South African rugby, the 48 match officials participating in this year’s Easter tournaments will be assembling beforehand to receive some specialised coaching so as to ensure consistency and raise the level of their own game.

The Easter tournaments have entrenched themselves as must-attend events across the country for fans wanting to experience festival rugby at its best. And this year it should be no different, with venues stretching from Naboomspruit to Johannesburg, Pretoria to Port Elizabeth and Durban to Paarl – and there’s likely others not on SA Rugby’s radar.

These tournaments are now established as the proving grounds for emerging referees, the aspiring youngsters who would like to see themselves on the national stage...
ELVs finally taking shape?

The benefits of having greater knowledge in applying the ELV’s were clearly evident during the opening round of the 2009 Vodacom Super 14. André Watson believes that through better interpretation, a more even contest has been created, creating space for players and more try scoring opportunities.

This can be seen with the try count in the early rounds of this year’s competition being significantly higher than in the previous two seasons. In the first seven matches of 2009, 45 tries were scored, at an average of 6.4 per game. This number is nearly twice as high as in previous seasons with the 2008 opening round producing 26 tries at a worse average of 3.7 per game and the 2007 opening round producing 24 tries at an even worse average of 3.4 per game.

‘On the evidence of the first round matches it is very clear that the referees are more accurate in the application of the ELV’s,’ said André. ‘This is having a positive spin-off for the game, with lots of tries, but also closer contests.

‘Referees are allowing a contest at the breakdown which either results in a team getting quick ball or there being a turn over. Refs are not calling the rucks too quickly and only when they are formed as per law, which is speeding up play and creating space for teams to play with’.

André added that the SANZAR discussions around the free-kick, which encourage referees to favour the short-arm option instead of a full penalty were proving to benefit Super 14 teams.

‘However, unlike last year, refs were not reluctant to award a full penalty, or use the sin-bin, if there were repeat infringements and we saw several examples of this. This was also a key part of the debate over the free kick and penalty,’ said André.

The ELVs have been criticised from many quarters within the game since they were first trialled three years ago. The relative success that the Super 14 is experiencing now under the ELVs is the result of many months of hard work by referees and law-makers. It is because of this hard work that results are beginning to be seen by both players and spectators.

The wheel of life

While it still feels as if we have been talking and debating rugby for months, clearly the 2009 season is well underway!

This edition of In-touch is full of interesting news and I found it quite interesting how it mirrors the cycle of life. We start out talking about recruitment and the development of players. This is the foundation of what we’re about. If we don’t recruit and groom young referees, we are going to be in serious trouble in the years ahead. André Watson highlighted a staggering statistic that we are 6,000 referees short of our needs. Recruitment and development is front and centre in our scope of activities this year and you will see more action on this in the near future.

Once we’ve identified new talent, there are opportunities for up-and-coming referees to gain exposure and experience, such as the Easter festivals held country-wide. In this edition we feature the top 12 referees – those making up the National Panel. This is an extremely prestigious place to land because once you’re there; the world really is your oyster.

Those on the National Panel become exposed to international travel through the Super 14 and IRB events. From this point, there is the opportunity to earn international honours and become a Test referee. Not only does South Africa have four Test whistlemen on the IRB panel but we were the first country to provide the same referee to two World Cup finals. André Watson, who blew those two finals, was recently the recipient of a special award from the IRB for his services to refereeing, and being the first referee inducted into the SA Sports Hall of Fame. We also provided the first referee, Jonathan Kaplan, to reach the milestone of 50 Tests.

On a sad note we mark the completion of the life cycle by mourning the passing of one of the stalwarts of SA rugby, Prof Tinkie Heyns. He was not only one of the gentlemen of the game but he served the sport with distinction, dedication and with never seeking out self-reward. May the spirit that Tinkie showed live a little in each of us. And so we come back to the beginning.

A new feature is the introduction of news from the IRB. We hope that Paddy’s Patch will become a regular column and thank Paddy for his contribution.

A new season brings new excitement and challenges and I hope this edition of In-touch encapsulates those feelings. I am positive that we are going to have a great season and I wish each and every referee – beginner and Panel ref alike – the very best for the season ahead.

Regards
After a relaxing and rejuvenating festive season, referees around the country started preparations for the coming season. SA Rugby, in cooperation with regional refereeing societies, hosted a series of training courses to ensure that match officials were adequately prepared for the start of the 2009 season. Regional courses were held between the 23rd and 31st of January around the country. The National course was held between the 20th and 22nd of January in Cape Town, while the Provincial Panel and Womens Panel spent the 15th to the 18th of January at a camp in Hartbeeshoek. Compliments to the South African Referees’ Management Committee for all the work they put in to make sure these sessions took place on time and with such commitment.
Q&A with Kim Smit

How did you become a rugby referee?
I was watching a rugby match with some friends – one of which is an active referee – and chirping the ref when he suggested that I take up the whistle myself...and like they say the rest is history.

What attracted you to refereeing?
I have two sons who play rugby, so in someway I have always been involved in the game. When the challenge came along I could not resist.

How helpful were the Golden Lions Referee Society?
Joining the GLRS was definitely the best career choice I could make. They’ve got great infrastructure and support systems in place. Having nearly a full rugby team of test referees speaks for itself.

How do you feel being the No.1 ranked ladies referee in South Africa?
Very honoured, proud and so blessed but I know that it’s only a number. Being no. 1 brings its own challenges and I know I have to keep on working hard. People expect more of me now and there’s always someone looking to take your spot.

Do you think a woman will be able to referee Super 14 games or Test matches in the future?
I can not see that happening in the near future, but it’s not impossible.

What do you think of the ELVs?
Personally, I liked refereeing the ELVs currently played in the S14. It was interesting to see the players and referees adapting to change.

Which referee do you believe sets a good example to others?
Mark Lawrence is an inspiration to me. He showed great character and determination in re-entering the IRB panel after a short absence. He is a great person who happens to be a referee and not a referee who happens to be a great person.

What are some of the challenges facing women referees in South Africa?
The biggest challenge facing women referees - not only in SA but in the world - I think is to become a professional referee, as it is not an option at the moment. But SA has without a doubt the knowledge in Oom Freek, André, Tappe and Neville to make that happen.

You refereed quite extensively before becoming a TMO. Do you miss refereeing on the pitch?
I miss the interaction with the players. As a referee I had a set routine in the build-up to a game. That has changed now, although there is still a lot of preparation to be done before a game.

The TMO is becoming increasingly important in rugby. Do you think the responsibilities of the TMO can be expanded further beyond what they currently are?
It’s not only the TMO who became that important, the whole team of officials play a vital part in the outcome of a game. Especially with everyone getting added responsibilities. In a dynamic game such as rugby, you’ve got to rely on the technology available, I still believe that there will always be experiments and trials in striving for the best product.

What is your routine on a match day?
The important thing is to communicate with everyone involved before hand. This will include the broadcasting director and most importantly, the referee of the day. You always check the sound and test equipment before kick off.

Have you ever lost sleep over a decision you made as a TMO?
I will look at every decision and evaluate if it was correct or not. Whenever there was doubt or an incorrect decision, you’ve got to look for the reason why a mistake was made. You’ve got to equip yourself so that any mistakes will not re-occur.

How would you compare the pressure a TMO is under versus the pressure referees on the field are faced with.
The TMO is only really under pressure when called upon to make a decision. As for the referee, he has to make decisions all the time. The way the officials handle the pressure determines the quality of performance you get on the field.

What is the most enjoyable aspect about being a TMO?
The training part of it. I now have time to do some road running which I enjoy very much. At half time you can have a couple of really nice snacks with coffee.

How do you think South African TMOs compare to their international counterparts?
Currently we’ve got two TMOs on the IRB panel. SA was the first to start with specialized TMOs. SA referees have always been among the top in their field in the world.

When officiating a match, what snacks might you have near by to help you get through the game?
During the game there will always be water or cold drink available. When in Pretoria I will always go for the biltong!
Leaders of the pack

National Panel for 2009

Marius Jonker
Province: SARU (KZN)
Refereeing since: 2000

Phillip Bosch
Province: EP
Refereeing since: 1999

Stuart Berry
Province: KZN
Refereeing since: 1999

Jason Jaftha
Province: SWD
Refereeing since: 2000

Lesego ‘Pro’ Legoete
Province: Gauteng
Refereeing since: 2001

Sindile Mayende
Province: KZN
Refereeing since: 2003

Joey Salmans
Province: WP
Refereeing since: 1999

Jaco Peyper
Province: FS
Refereeing since: 2000

Willie Roos
Province: Gauteng
Refereeing since: 1994

Jonathan Kaplan
Province: SARU (WP)
Refereeing since: 1984

Craig Joubert
Province: SARU (KZN)
Refereeing since: 1992

Mark Lawrence
Province: SARU (Pumas)
Refereeing since: 1990
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Law No</th>
<th>SHORT DESCRIPTION of ELV</th>
<th>LAW DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>SA Support</th>
<th>Decision at Lensbury</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Assistant referees</td>
<td>Assistant Referees able to assist Referees in any way which the Referee requires.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Corner posts</td>
<td>The corner posts are no longer considered to be in touch in-goal except when the ball is grounded against the post.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Line out &amp; throw</td>
<td><strong>Tackle/Ruck/Maul</strong>&lt;br&gt;15/16&lt;br&gt;17&lt;br&gt;Unplayable&lt;br&gt;turnover&lt;br&gt;There is no restriction on the number of players who can participate in the Lineout from either side.</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Carry over 22m line</td>
<td>If a team puts the ball back into their own 22 and the ball is subsequently kicked directly into touch there is no gain in ground.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Quick throw in</td>
<td>A quick throw may be thrown in straight or to the throwing teams own goal line.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Line out numbers</td>
<td>There is no restriction on the number of players who can participate in the Lineout from either side.</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Receiver at line out</td>
<td>The receiver at the Lineout must be 2 metres back away from the Lineout.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Opposition thrower</td>
<td>The player who is in opposition to the player throwing in the ball may stand in the 5 m area but must be 2 m’s away from the Lineout.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Pre-gripping</td>
<td>Lineout players may pre-grip a jumper before the ball is thrown in.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Lifting in line out</td>
<td>The lifting of Lineout jumpers is permitted.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SCRUM</td>
<td><strong>5m offside line</strong>&lt;br&gt;Introduction of an offside line 5 m’s behind the hindmost feet of the Scrum.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>5m offside line</td>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Half time</td>
<td>Up to maximum 15 minutes half time</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Scrum variations</td>
<td>Use of u/19 variations at the scrum for community Adult game where agreed by the National union.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>TMO protocol</td>
<td>Extending the TMO protocol to the phase before the try/no try.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OTHER UNION SPECIFIC ELV's</td>
<td><strong>Rolling substitutions</strong> for the community game where agreed by the National union.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coastal Development Kicks Off For 2009

The search has begun for potential referees in the Coastal Region. Louis Mzomba, SA Rugby Academy & Development Coach for the Coastal Regions (WP, SWD, EP, Border and Sharks), has criss-crossed the seaside provinces in search of referees who will form part of the Development Squad. Louis says 10 referees have been identified and placed in the Academy squad, which will be officiating over the Easter weekend at a tournament to be held in Port Elizabeth. The Development squad, once selected, will be blowing games at festivals in Cape Town and East London come the end of April. The purpose of the Development squad is to identify and fast track talented officials onto SA Rugby panels.

Louis says that he and his in-land colleague Eugene Daniels also assist referee development officers with talent identification and coaching. Through the Academy and Development squads, referees are exposed to travelling, crowd pressure and team-building exercises. They form an important platform for referees aspiring to be selected for the Provincial and National Panels.
In the first of what we hope will become a regular contribution, we ask IRB referee supremo Paddy O’Brien his thoughts on some of the issues facing the game.

**Merit versus neutral-based appointments**

While I applaud the SANZAR unions for their bold experimental step in introducing merit-based, non-neutral appointments for the Super 14 competition it is not something that we, at the IRB, are likely to do in the near future.

Unlike SANZAR, who choose their referees from three countries, the IRB has the option to select from around the world so neutrality only becomes an issue once every four years when the British and Irish Lions tour. A good example of this dilemma is this year when 11 of the IRB Test panel referees come from either the Lions or South Africa.

The appointments for the Lions tour will be made at the end of April and the Test match referees will definitely be drawn from neutral countries. The remaining tour matches will be allocated on a merit base, in this case there may be occasions where referees from either the Lions or SA home unions are involved.

It is going to be interesting to see the feedback on this subject at the conclusion of the Super 14. SANZAR will have to evaluate the season and decide whether they stay with the system for 2010. Let’s wait and see what they have to say.

**The ELVs**

The almost two-year programme which has seen various versions of the laws trialled in different regions is coming to an end. A seminar scheduled for the end of March – about when you will be reading this newsletter – will give participants from around the world the opportunity to make quantitative and qualitative analysis of their impact. Unions will then have a chance to review this information before final decisions will be made on law changes at the IRB’s Council meeting in May. Once finalised, an implementation date will be set for a uniform set of laws across the world and it is the intention that these will be in place until at least the 2011 Rugby World Cup.

**Recruitment**

The recruitment and retention of referees is a matter of concern in all rugby-playing countries and a shortage of properly-trained whistlers is not a phenomenon confined to South Africa alone. No-one wants to sacrifice their personal time by putting something back into the sport only to be physically or verbally abused by spectators or players. One understands that rugby is a physical game, tempers can flare and spectators become over emotional – particularly if little Johnny is at the receiving end of a crunching tackle – but we need to encourage tolerance and fair play.

If only those screaming the loudest on the side of the field would take up the whistle themselves…. Paddy O’Brien was born in Southland New Zealand in July 1959 and is manager of referees at the International Rugby Board based in Dublin. He played his rugby at full back and wing and began refereeing in 1984. Prior to turning professional in 1996 he spent 17 years with the New Zealand Police. He refereed his first Test match in 1994 and went on to become New Zealand’s most capped Test official.

Other notable achievements include his appointment as an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in recognition of his services to rugby. Clearly Paddy is a person well qualified to lead referees worldwide.

**The future**

Attending the RWC Sevens in Dubai earlier this year it became increasingly apparent that the world is really becoming a referee’s oyster. Not only were male and female versions of the game being played at a single venue but referees of both genders were also involved.

So it’s not only male referees that should be encouraged to join. The recent appointment of Susan Carty as full-time Women’s Development Officer is a clear signal that the IRB is serious about including everyone among the referees ranks.
In the last edition of In-touch, we had a look at who comprised the SA Management Committee. In this edition, we take a closer look at operational and referee administrative matters, which fall under the portfolios managed by Theuns Naude and Dana Eitzen separately.

Theuns and Dana work together when it comes to courses and national weeks. Theuns makes sure that referees at courses receive adequate coaching, that the right people are in the right place, and choosing referees - with the Appointments Committee - which Dana also serves on. Theuns is also responsible for the Contenders and Academy squads, where he appoints the Academy squad to school tournaments and the Contenders to appropriate National weeks. Dana assists Theuns administratively when venues are selected; travel arrangements are arranged for those who are involved with specific courses and drawing up a functioning schedule to keep everything on track. When it comes to recruitment and awareness, Theuns’ finger-prints can be found on the application forms that each referee society around the country receives. If a society spots someone who they think has ‘the stuff’ to whistle at higher levels, Theuns will make sure that potential whistlemen don’t slip through the cracks.

Dana is the administrative shadow behind several portfolios on the Management Committee. If money is involved, Dana will be the person processing, recording and making sure that everyone gets paid at the right time. She is also hard at work when dealing with the IRB and visiting referees. If a visiting referee needs accommodation, Dana will make sure the hotel know they are coming. When a South African referee goes overseas, Dana will be the person sending information so that search parties aren’t dispatched to find a missing referee.

Have you ever wondered how referees get their kit for games? The answer is: Dana. She is in charge of making sure that referees receive their kit at the right place, at the right time and making sure a referee isn’t forced to don an extra-large when they are a medium. Kit appearance is another area Dana works in, coordinating with the sponsor for the desired look. Dana is also the closest thing to a travel agent, ensuring that when a meeting needs to be attended, the relevant person doesn’t end up in Paarl when they are meant to be in Pretoria. It’s the behind the scenes contributions from people like Theuns and Dana that keep the referee show on the road.
The Border Referee Association began the 2009 season long before the first whistle was blown. The society held a training camp in December in preparation for the Regional referee courses that took place in January.

Eugene De Villiers, the Association secretary, was asked whether he felt the training camp Border held at the end of November was ideal preparation for the January courses. He said “Definitely! It was apparent how fit and disciplined our referees were at the camp. We had a 100% pass rate of all who participated... The guys and ladies where quick to grasp the new law applications presented by André and Theuns.’

De Villiers went further in saying that Border’s training and law programme strategy is beginning to bear fruit. Border is not taking this success for granted, with De Villiers adding ‘We need to step it up a notch to get them on the “A” panel.’ De Villiers says that Border is proud of their achievements thus far, considering that the province do not possess the same facilities compared to other societies. Assistant referees are an on-going concern, but Border is taking steps to ensure the standard of assistant refereeing is lifted throughout the region.

Regional courses are only held once a year, which De Villiers says is a pity because they are so informative. Border will be holding two more seminars this season. He said that while referees knew what was expected of them, the seminars ensure that refs are up to date on the latest terminology and interpretation of the laws.

The Border executive has prioritised six strategic imperatives for the 2009 season, they are:
• Financial stability
• Establishing a functioning relationship with clubs and schools
• Greater representation on the National Panel
• Recruitment, fast-tracking and performance measurement
• Grading, coaching and selection
• Adequate transport and kit.

With funding being a vital concern, the Association is intent on showing potential sponsors that, administratively, they have their house in order.

Recruitment has continued to be a challenge. The majority of their younger candidates attend universities which are over 130kms away from East London, which is the nerve-centre of Border rugby. Financially, through the assistance of partners such as Midway Two Holdings, the Association seeks to find employment for referees who rely solely on the officiating for income.

Even with these challenges, the Association has proven through their results that Border refereeing is on the up. The pass-rate at the national exams was 90%, a 30% improvement on the previous season. De Villiers cites the Law Education programme run by the Association’s refereeing coaches which lead to this improvement.

Six of the Association’s referees were also involved in an exchange programme between South Western Districts, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Province. The Association currently has Bongani Maloni on the Provincial Panel, Lusanda Jam and Gladile Mveliso on the Contenders Panel, with Tony Duminy and Amos Swartz sitting on the Candidates Panel. Sipokazi Njani sits at number five on the Women’s Panel while Mandla Dakuse sits on the Specialised Assistant Referees’ Panel.
The Valke Referee Society has been busy at work promoting referee development within the region. The Society recently hosted a development clinic at Tlakula High School in the Kwa-Thema district near Springs. Mlungiseleli Mdashe, Valke Referees’ Manager, took the clinic with other members of the Society.

The goal of the clinic was to encourage younger players to become Assistant Referees (AR) in school games during the rugby season. Mlungiseleli hopes that by the end of the year the experience of being ARs will assist participants to have a better understanding of the game and refereeing. With several schools in the region adopting rugby as a winter sport, students will have the opportunity to practise and hone their officiating skills over the course of the season.

This project is not exclusively for developing rugby schools, with Mlungiseleli believing that development is for everyone.

Neutral Referees for British & Irish Lions Tests

The International Rugby Board has announced that the referee appointments for the three British & Irish Lions Tests in South Africa will come from neutral countries. The decision comes after IRB Match Official Selection Committee Chairman David Pickering and IRB Referee Manager Paddy O’Brien met with management from the British & Irish Lions and South Africa teams in Dubai to discuss the selection criteria for the 2009 tour.

'We shared a very positive meeting with management from both teams and discussed the selection criteria for the three Test matches. All agreed that the most appropriate policy is the appointment of neutral referees from within the IRB High Performance Referee Panel,’ said O’Brien.

'It was also agreed that the referee appointments for the seven additional provincial tour matches will be made by the IRB from the Panel regardless of nationality and will be merit-based,’ added O’Brien. The IRB Match Official Selection Committee will meet in Dublin on April 25-26 to consider the appointments for the tour as well as the June-September Test matches, including Tri Nations, Pacific Nations Cup and scheduled tours.

André honoured

André Watson, SA Rugby referees manager, has again been honoured with his induction into South Africa’s Sport Hall of Fame.

André has also received a Silver Presidential Sports Award from former President Thabo Mbeki in 2001. He also received in 2008 a special award from the IRB for services to refereeing. André is the only referee to have been inducted into the South African Sport Hall of Fame.

He is also the only person to have refereed two World Cup finals, along with the most Currie Cup Finals (seven) and most Super rugby finals (five). Steve Meintjes, the chairman of SARRA, said ‘I am sure you will all join me in congratulating André for the meritorious service he has given to SA Rugby and obviously to rugby refereeing. Over the years André has been a true ambassador for the sport and for SA Rugby.’
Craig’s view from the field

As the Super 14 season continues to rage on, the northern hemisphere has indulged in its own rugby glut through the Six Nations. Many comparisons have been made between northern and hemisphere rugby, so In-touch decided to find a point of view that has tasted both of these tournaments from the best spot in the house: the field.

Craig Joubert recently refereed the titanic Ireland England clash at Croke Park with the Irish emerging as 14-13 winners. A week later, Craig found himself in Pretoria as the Bulls faced the Stormers in a highly charged Super 14 clash in front of a packed Loftus Versveld.

Having had a taste of life both sides of the rugby Equator, what are Craig’s impressions of the game up north? ‘The atmosphere at Croke Park was electric. There is a tremendous amount of history surrounding the English and Irish at Croke Park dating back to the Irish War of Independence, which inspired U2’s Sunday Bloody Sunday. The anthems were sung with great emotion and the capacity crowd of 82,000 sang “The Fields of Athenry” for most of the game. It was a special experience.’

Craig suggests that the ‘North vs South’ referee conspiracy is media driven and inaccurate. Craig has worked with many officials from Europe, saying ‘I have come to know my Northern Hemisphere colleagues relatively well as we work with them on a regular basis. One of my AR’s, Christophe Berdos from France, and I spent five weeks travelling together during the RWC 2007 in France. We have adopted the same principles of refereeing and assistant refereeing in the Super 14 as we have in Test matches so there is consistency in application regardless of which hemisphere you happen to be in.’

What differences did Craig spot on the field between the Super 14 and the Six Nations? ‘A Six Nations game is a Test match and as such the emotion of the occasion is at the highest level. On any given Super 14 weekend there are six or seven games and each country has four or five teams that they support. The build up to a Test match has an entire country focussing on one match, which raises the intensity and emotion of the occasion.’

Favourite aspect of a Six Nations match? ‘The history surrounding the Six Nations and the way the tournament has held onto traditions make it a very special tournament. After every Six Nations Test match there is still a black-tie dinner where toasts are made to each country. Everyone has a chance to catch up over a beer and the players from both teams share tables. It is sad that this doesn’t happen after every Test match but it is special to be involved in such tradition.’