

New Zealand rugby tour sparks furor

The Reuter News Service

WELLINGTON — New Zealand's Rugby Union announced Wednesday that the national team would tour white-ruled South Africa later this year and Prime Minister David Lange said the decision would be the sport's "eternal shame."

Lange arrived home from a tour of black Africa only hours after the Rugby Union's 18-man ruling council voted to defy widespread domestic and international opposition and send the All Blacks — named for their black jerseys — to play against the South African Springboks.

Church bells tolled in lament at the announcement, protesters outside Rugby Union headquarters chanted "shame," and New Zealand's biggest anti-apartheid group, Halt All Racist Tours, vowed to mobilize public opinion to stop the tour.

In South Africa, the decision was greeted with outrage by Nobel Peace Prize winner Bishop Desmond Tutu and others, while in Lusaka, Zambia, the African National Congress warned

the New Zealand players that they could get caught in the cross-fire of South Africa's civil unrest.

"It is certain that demonstrations will take place, and that the government will react with the same violence as we have seen already," an ANC spokesman said.

"The ANC can only once more appeal to them while they still have time to call off the tour."

The vote in favor of a tour had been widely expected in New Zealand, where the issue had provoked more passion than Wellington's ban on visits by nuclear ships and the resulting crisis in relations with the United States.

HART chairman John Minto said a national day of protest would be observed on May 3 to put "irresistible pressure" on the Rugby Union.

"We're going to ensure that this tour does not proceed," he said.

Police sealed off the Rugby Union's Wellington headquarters during the four-hour meeting.

Demonstrators, police and rugby fans clashed in 1981 when South Africa's Springboks toured

New Zealand in the last meeting between the two rugby-mad nations.

The decision followed Lange's statement that "the tour must not proceed," and opposition from a unanimous parliament, the churches, newspapers and the country's two biggest provincial rugby unions.

Rugby Union Chairman Ces Blazey said: "We do not believe that the majority of New Zealanders would consider that a decision should be made on the basis of intimidation, threats, or blackmail."

He said the government's view that a tour would cause international and domestic damage to New Zealand had been considered carefully, but the council's responsibility was to rugby.

Blazey said Lange's apparent success in convincing black Africa that everything possible had been done by his Labor Government to stop the tour was a factor in the vote.

The tour probably will take place from late July to early September.

The All Blacks arrive in South Africa after a

year in which more than 300 blacks have died in nationwide unrest.

Meanwhile, the tour could spell trouble for international sports gatherings, including the 1988 Olympic Games. An All Blacks' visit in 1976 prompted a walkout by African contingents from that year's Montreal games in protest of New Zealand's participation.

Yidnekaichew Tessema, president of the Union of African Sports Confederation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, said New Zealand should be barred from the 1988 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh.

Commonwealth Secretary General Sridath Ramphal said New Zealand sportsmen would pay the price for the "shameful" decision to go ahead with the tour.

"No one should believe that such acts of dishonor as an All Blacks tour of South Africa can be cost-free," he said.

A spokesman for Ramphal said he was referring to a possible black boycott of the 46-nation Commonwealth Games next July and August.

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Setting it Straight

The pitcher identified as Roger Cobb in Wednesday's Daily Nebraskan was Mike Dobbs of Lincoln.

The story also contained a factual error concerning Jeff Carter's stolen base record. Carter broke the Nebraska career stolen-base record with his 51st steal in the first game of Nebraska's double header against Minnesota. However, Nebraska assistant sports information director Chuck Pool said it is far from an NCAA record, which is well over 200.

Joel Sartore/Daily Nebraskan