



Mitchell pleased with Bulls' effort

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Loftus Versfeld

IT WAS far from the perfect performance Bulls coach John Mitchell would have been looking for but it would have been enough to get his charges ready for their Super Rugby opener against the Hurricanes in two weeks' time.

The Bulls showed they are more than ready to take on the big guns with a show of force against a full strength Jaguares side on a wet, slippery surface at Loftus Versfeld last night.

What would have been most encouraging for Mitchell was how his Springboks performed in their first hit-out of the pre-season, the likes of Trevor Nyakane, Handre Pollard, Jesse Kriel and Warrick Gelant proving how valuable they will be for the Bulls this season.

Having been rested throughout the pre-season and in their friendlies against the Sharks and Stormers, the valuable time spent on conditioning and skills paid dividends.

Even though it was a far cry from the

running, flowing rugby expected from any team coached by Mitchell, there were enough glimpses of what the Bulls can do to send out a message to every other team that rumbled over them last season in this hard fought 21-12 win.

Over and above the Bulls' thirst for running rugby, it was their defence that again stood out and regardless of the Jaguares' spirited second-half performance, they only managed to score two tries through replacement hooker Julian Montoya and wing Javier Ortega Desio.

"It was a tough match and it was our first outing for the year and we got tired towards the end," said Argentinian international Martin Landajo afterwards.

As much as it was a collective effort in stopping the Jaguares from making any headway, Mitchell must have found great comfort in the standout displays by fringe players Thembelani Bholi, Marco van Staden, lock Ruben van Heerden, and halfbacks Enbrose Papier and Manie Libbok, as well as Bok lock Lood de Jager.

De Jager led with admiration and rolled back

the years to the time he was the best player in the land three years ago and it was a pleasing sight for the thousand or so spectators to see especially Gelant and Pollard show touches of why they are above the rest.

A satisfied Mitchell thought his team had done well against a side full of Argentine internationals but believes there is still a lot of room for improvement.

"You've heard me say before that we are building a squad of 38 and depth is critical. Whether selected or not, everyone has to be ready," he said.

"I thought the first half went very well against a Test side, so it brings closure into their minds on the international sides of the competition.

"Everyone is now on the same timeline so all the returnees are now back again and I always knew that it would be a bit untidy. We had to adapt to conditions as well so the defence was suffocating on the opposition.

"There is still plenty to do but a lot of really good stuff done."

