



SEMIFINAL FAVOURITES

Maties and Tuks set their sights on Cup showdown

Mike de Bruyn

Two former Varsity Cup champions are in line to contest the final again.

Tuks of Pretoria and Maties of Stellenbosch topped the table at the conclusion of the pool phase to book home semifinals.

Both won seven of eight games, but it was Tuks who claimed top spot on the nine-team log, thanks to a superior points differential.

Maties' sole defeat was a 13-9 loss in the first round at Tuks, while Tukkies suffered an 18-17 defeat at the hands of UJ in the fourth round.

In Monday's semifinals, Maties will play UJ at Danie Craven Stadium (4.45pm kick-off). When these two rivals met at the same venue in the final round of round-robin matches a week ago, Maties won 65-19 in front of a packed stadium.

Maties have attracted a full-house of about 16,000 at their home stadium at each match they have played there.

"That has definitely lifted the boys," said Maties coach Hawies

Fourie. "We have been able to repay the faith shown in us by delivering a brand of thrilling 15-man rugby. And for sure, we are aiming to go all the way [in 2017]. We have not lifted the trophy for six years."

As for the rematch with UJ, Fourie wants much of the same from the previous meeting.

"I'm not giving anything away to our opponents other than to say they can expect another collective effort from us," he said.

"We respect the threat they pose, but this is a big game for us and we do not want to disappoint," he said.

Fourie is not one to single out any of his players for special mention. "This is a team sport. If a player delivers a standout performance it can only be achieved with a combined effort. My players know the score in this regard and that has helped to gel the squad. [The] results speak for themselves," said Fourie, who is in his second season in charge.

Maties are the only side to have scored four hat-tricks of tries in four consecutive

matches – Edwill van der Merwe in the fifth round, Duncan Saal in the sixth, Craig Barry in the eighth and Kyle Steyn in the final round. Barry, at full-back, continues to lead the try-scoring count with eight touch-downs (15 overall in his fifth and final season), while Van der Merwe (seven) and Saal (five) have also enjoyed fine returns.

Tuks entertain Shimlas of the Free State in the second semi-final at Tuks Stadium (7pm kick-off). The home side should win at a doddle if the previous match is anything to go by.

Tukkies drilled Shimmies on their home field in the league phase winning 65-19.

"I'm hoping for a repeat," said Tuks coach Pote Human.

"We will be showing no mercy. This is our year; we want that trophy real bad. We have not tasted success since completing back-to-back wins in 2013, a wait too long.

"Shimlas come to us with nothing to lose and everything to gain, making them a threat, but we know what we need to do to end off their season."

