

Swys looks to Schoeman to replace Marx

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JUST under a week ago in Wellington, Marnus Schoeman made his starting debut for the Lions and seven days later he's set to play the part of back-up hooker when his team take on the Highlanders in their final match of their four-stop Australasian tour.

The 29-year-old Schoeman, who has mainly played as an openside flank, is expected to be first choice hooker Robbie Coetzee's back-up following the tour-ending injury suffered by number one hooker in the Lions squad, Malcolm Marx, last weekend.

Marx returned to Johannesburg earlier this week to have scans done on his hurt groin, leaving the Lions with just the one recognised hooker on tour – Coetzee.

Coach Swys de Bruin opted to not call up a replacement for Marx, with word being that the Pumas stalwart will fill in at No 2 should anything happen to Coetzee.

Schoeman, who went to school in Pretoria and turned out for Tuks in the Varsity Cup, has represented the Bulls, Griquas and Pumas at Currie Cup level. He also played for the SA U-20 team at the 2009 Junior World Championship in Japan alongside the likes of captain Robert Ebersohn and his brother Sias, Lionel Cronje, Ross Cronje, Johan Sadie, Coenie Oosthuizen and formed part of the loose-trio with current Ireland star CJ Stander.

Schoeman is believed to have played regularly at hooker in his junior days, but it remains a major gamble on the part of the coaching team to not have a specialist No 2 in the matchday squad.

Coetzee, after his shaky performance coming on for Marx last weekend, will be under huge pressure to deliver a strong showing this weekend, as the Lions look to end their tour on a positive note. They're coming off two defeats – one of those against the lowly Reds – after starting their tour with a stunning 29-0 win against the Waratahs in Sydney.

News on the severity of Marx's injury is expected any day now, but the Lions – and Springboks – will be hoping for some good news.

The Joburg team weren't able to recruit a third hooker with experience for this season following Akker van der Merwe's departure to the Sharks last year, with former prop Corne Fourie trying to convert to the hooker position. The rest of the No 2s at the union are juniors with little experience.

And, the Boks will be holding their thumbs, too, that Marx doesn't miss next month's four Tests, against Wales and England. If he were to be ruled out then new coach Rassie Erasmus would have to fill a gaping hole and possibly convince Bulls and former Bok captain Adriaan Strauss to come out of international retirement to play Test rugby again.

Also, he might consider getting Montpellier-based Bismarck du Plessis back for the four games. The problem is last year's back-up to Marx, Bongani Mbonambi, has been sidelined for weeks. The other option for Erasmus would be to look to a rookie hooker for the June games, namely Van der Merwe, Ramone Samuels or Scarra Ntubeni.

