

No pressure for China Lions' hooker

China Lions hooker Greg Pleasants-Tate knows about performing under pressure, in fact he revels in it.

To the inexperienced eye, a scrum looks like a mass of bodies pushing and grunting and heaving, all to get an oval ball pushed out the back like a chicken laying an egg. But to the trained eye it's poetry in motion, a mixture of strength, technique and pressure.

Pleasants-Tate says it's hard to describe how that pressure feels on his body, but often after he gets up from a scrum, he sees black little spots floating around in his eyes for a few seconds, as well as a little bit of light headedness.

"But you've got to push that aside and start running to the next set piece or into a defensive position."

The 28-year-old has an interesting analogy to describe the pressure a front rower is put under at scrum time.

"As a front rower, you have eight guys pushing against your shoulders and neck, then you have five guys behind you trying to push back and they all weigh more than 100kg. That's more than 1.3 tonne pushing on your neck. If you don't stay strong and technically correct, you will end up folding like a staple."

Pleasants-Tate says there is a public misconception about the scrum.

"It's a tough position, people take it for granted that you just bend over and push. Technique is going to beat power and strength every time. You can be the smaller prop or hooker, but if your technique is better than your opponent, you are always going to dominate him."

At 1.85cm tall and weighing 112kg, Pleasants-Tait should know. He has been plying his trade as a professional rugby player for almost 10 years.

Pleasants-Tate has been named in the starting line-up in the Lions historic season opener against Fijian Latui at ANZ Stadium, Fiji at 6.15pm (local time).

"The feeling within the squad has been positive and the team is really looking to show what Lions rugby is all about.

"Global Rapid Rugby is here and the boys are really pumped for this game. We are expecting Fiji to really show their flair, and they will have a vocal and excited fan base. So, it's going to be a real tough encounter."

Pleasants-Tate has a leadership role within the team and he says it's been good to help develop the younger members in the squad.

"I'm loving the environment here. We've got a good group of young lads, which is pretty wicked. They bring a lot of energy to the environment."

He says the team is looking forward to the Chinese players joining the squad, once the travel restrictions have ended, and with China having a population of 1.4 billion he can't wait to play a home game there.

"My partner and I, love the Asian culture. I understand that the Chinese love their sport. So, I can't wait to play there and to have our supporters get in behind the team. I think it will be something pretty spectacular to see."

Pleasants-Tate says with the exciting new rules in Rapid Rugby it has meant some adjustments in his training regime.

"For a forward, we have had to work really hard on getting connected to the ball. Most teams will either run the ball or kick it long. So, being mobile is important."

After suffering a serious neck injury two years ago, Pleasants-Tate says, weight training has played an important part in his fitness.

"I focus quite a lot on neck strength because there is a lot of weight going through your neck. Another big one for me is flexibility, especially in my hips."

Rapid Rugby is the new game in town and there will be a lot of pressure on the Lions to perform. But being under pressure is nothing new for Pleasants-Tate and his team mates.

China Lions

1. Solomona Sakalia
2. Greg Pleasants-Tate
3. Nico Aanderwiel
4. Hoani Matenga
5. Stan van den Hoven
6. Ray Tatafu
7. Joe Johnston
8. Hugh Blake (C)
9. Te Aihe Toma
10. Dwayne Sweeney
11. Fa'asiu Fuatai
12. James Little
13. Mathew Skipwith-Garland
14. Tyler Campbell
15. Pryor Collier

Reserves

16. Nic Souchon
17. Haereiti Hetet
18. Tevita Sole
19. Iosefa Maloney
20. Kohan Herbert

21. Luke Campbell
22. Dan Hollinshead
23. Liam Coombes-Fabling

Game:

Fijian Latui v China Lions
ANZ Stadium, Fiji
Kick-off 6.15pm (local time)