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O'Connor Back in Wallabies Mix for 2027

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Wallabies head coach Joe Schmidt has left the door open for veteran playmaker James O'Connor to feature at the 2027 Rugby World Cup, following his impressive return to Test rugby against South Africa.

O'Connor, 34, started at fly-half in Johannesburg during the opening Rugby Championship match, marking his first Wallabies appearance in four years. Originally recalled as a mentor to younger players in the No.10 role, his performance and squad injuries have placed him back in serious contention for future selection.

Schmidt praised O'Connor's influence, describing his comeback as a boost for squad depth. "It's not my decision. We've got some young guys who are coming through at 10, and part of our plan with James was for him to guide those younger players and help them through their development. But now, he's putting his hand up again in the current number 10 role," Schmidt said.

The coach also referenced Irish great Johnny Sexton, who extended his career longer than expected and played a key role at the 2023 World Cup. "I would never say never. I had Johnny Sexton with Ireland for a long time, and in 2019, I felt like that might be his last World Cup, but he was a hell of a player in 2023. So there's no definitive stopping point," Schmidt added.

O'Connor's career has been marked by highs and lows. Bursting onto the scene as a teenage sensation, he became one of the youngest players to wear the Wallabies jersey. However, injuries and off-field issues saw him drift in and out of the national setup. His latest return highlights his resilience and ability to adapt, with his playmaking skills and versatility once again valued at the highest level.

The Wallabies' recent squad changes have created opportunities for experienced players to re-emerge. Scrum-half Nick White's retirement after the British & Irish Lions series, followed by a brief comeback, underscored the need for balance between youth and experience in Schmidt's plans.

As the Rugby Championship continues with a second clash against South Africa in Cape Town, O'Connor's role offers the Wallabies flexibility in a crucial position. The fly-half role has long been an area of debate for Australia, and his steady hand could help guide emerging talents while providing reliable cover.

Looking further ahead, the 2027 Rugby World Cup in Australia looms as a major target for Schmidt's rebuild. While O'Connor will be 38 by then, his resurgence suggests he could remain in the conversation, especially as the Wallabies seek to combine veteran leadership with the energy of rising stars.

For now, his return serves as both inspiration and a reminder of the value of experience. The Wallabies will need every resource available as they aim to rebuild confidence, challenge world champions South Africa, and prepare for future tournaments.