Originally run on www.irishtimes.com , this article hits a few different international topics quickly, including RWC ticket sales, one of the Eagles key opponents in Russia's Vasily Artemiev, a twitter boycott and this weekend's Super 14 final.

RUGBY World cup countdown

"BEST seats left empty as fans go for cheap," was the New Zealand Herald headline yesterday. By June 2007 the French World Cup organisers announced that two million of their 2.4 million tickets had been sold. So, how does New Zealand 2011 measure up?

"Tournament organisers announced last week they had sold 900,000 of 1.6 million tickets – or 56 per cent – to reach three-quarters of their sales target of $268 million," reported the New Zealand Herald.

No match is a sell-out yet (although the All Blacks versus France will be soon), while the knockout round tickets went on public sale yesterday.

Taranaki's Yarrow Stadium, which hosts Ireland's opening pool match against the US Eagles on September 11th, is beginning to shift tickets to the locals.

It's just that Kiwis are not overly enamoured about shelling out up to €260 when they can pay €24.

Pool C player focus

Vasily Artemiev (Russia)

VASILY Artemiev (Russia, above) is a product of the Leinster schools system.

His time at Blackrock College is memorable for his prolific try-scoring return, especially the hat-trick in the 2003 Junior final and crucial touch down in the 2006 senior final. Blessed with electric attacking skills, he was inevitably nicknamed the "Moscow Flyer".

Playing in a back three with his good friend Luke Fitzgerald and the Leicester Tigers new recruit Niall Morris, age-grade honours followed for Leinster and Ireland.

However, he was denied a place on the Irish Under-19 World Cup squad in 2006 as boarding school in Blackrock was not considered sufficient residency grounds by the IRB.

An extremely bright student, who developed a distinctive south Dublin accent, he went on to UCD, winning his Colours, while also being recruited by the Leinster Academy.

Despite becoming a regular try scorer in the All-Ireland League, Artemiev did not get a full contract from the province so he returned to Moscow, making significant strides on the IRB Sevens circuit and eventually becoming a valued member of the Russia 15-man team.

His try-scoring knack has continued onto the international stage with nine in 25 Tests and he impressed again during this summer's Churchill Cup.

He will join the Northampton Saints after the World Cup in New Zealand.

Happy Henry: Coach welcomes players' decision

ALL Black coach Graham Henry (right) has welcomed his players' decision to abstain from Tweeting during the World Cup.

The host squad have also rejected all monetary offers to write newspaper columns.

"Many of the current players have been approached by newspapers, from all over the world, requesting them to write columns whilst the tournament is going on," said Henry in the Daily Telegraph.

"The players got together and decided to make an immediate stance. They thought it was best to concentrate solely on the footie and to leave everything else alone.

"I agree with the move they have made and am happy they have done it. Such matters can only be a distraction."

Former England captain Will Carling wasn't long seeing this move as a weakness. Tweeting, of course, Carling said: "think Twitter ban a bad call – gives fans an insight – great marketing. signs that pressure is already high #rugby ".

The Irish squad are expected to stick with the stance adopted mid-way through the Six Nations after some awkward interaction between players and the public prompted adherence to IRFU guidelines.

That means no tweeting 24 hours before and after games.

Reds v Crusaders: Cooper v Carter in Super 15 final

SATURDAY'S Super 15 Grand Final is being billed as the clash of the game's two greatest outhalves.

Quade Cooper's unpredictable brilliance will be measured against the long established excellence of Dan Carter as the Queensland Reds host the Canterbury Crusaders in Brisbane (10.40am – live Sky Sports 2).

Cooper's kicking return of three from seven in the Reds' semi-final victory over the Auckland

Blues proves he has some way to go. Carter's near flawless left boot, aided by Sonny Bill Williams' defence unlocking skills, saw off the Stormers in Cape Town last weekend.

Cooper is actually a Kiwi but his family moved to Australia when he was 12.

(For a glimpse at his famed side step see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROhPvSE3Tkc)

The meeting also pits several young Wallaby hopefuls against an All Black laden side captained by a fit-again Richie McCaw.