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Croft in but Lions thrown into disarray



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*Flannery ruled out,
Quinlan banned and
Halfpenny in doubt*

LEICESTER'S Tom Croft was celebrating a belated call-up for the Lions last night, but three other players were facing heartbreak as the tour of South Africa was hit by yet more disruption.

Ireland hooker Jerry Flannery was ruled out by torn elbow ligaments, Wales wing Leigh Halfpenny was sent home temporarily with a thigh injury and Alan Quinlan's 12-week ban for foul play was upheld after an appeal hearing in Glasgow.

The spate of injuries and Quinlan's suspension means there will now be five of the original 37-strong party

official send-off dinner at the Natural History Museum in London last night.

At least for Croft, the Lions call-up as a replacement for Quinlan was the perfect boost ahead of Leicester's Heineken Cup final against Leinster on Saturday. Croft, 23, had been considered the unluckiest of those to miss out on selection for the original party and he will now make a swift change to his summer plans, heading for South Africa rather than to Argentina with England.

One of Croft's England colleagues, London Irish full-back Delon Armitage, might yet join him on the plane south. Armitage must be considered one of the front-runners to deputise for Halfpenny, who returns to Cardiff today for treatment which will delay his departure for the Lions for at least a fortnight. Others in the frame include England's Mark Cueto and Josh Lewsey, as well as Scotland's Thom Evans. Chris Paterson will also come into consideration, given that head coach Ian McGeechan said



INPHO/DAN SHERIDAN



High hopes:
Lions players
undergo
altitude
training,
above,
before
scrummaging
practice;
but they
will be
without
Jerry
Flannery,
right,
who is
the latest
to succumb
to injury

