England in Australia 1978-79 Six Tests. *England Won 5 - 1.*

Balls per Over: 6 Playing Hours: 5 days x 6 hr Captains: GN Yallop (Aus), JM Brearley (Eng)

What should have been a banner year for Australian cricket, with eight Tests, was instead a disaster, on and off the field. The battlegrounds for the bitter fight with WSC had extended as far as the High Court in London, with no end in sight. The Australian team, after a controversial and unsuccessful tour of the West Indies, had lost its prized loyalists Thomson and Simpson, Thomson to WSC, Simpson to a disagreement over selection. Fortunately, an effective replacement for Thomson was found in Rodney Hogg, but Australia was otherwise bereft, and was crushed by a well-drilled England outfit. Australia's batsmen were hopelessly out of their depth, even Allan Border, making a tentative start to his career; in terms of both runs per wicket and scoring speed, it was Australia's worst performance of the 20th century. Is there any parallel to Hogg's 41 wickets in a series for a team that was comprehensively thrashed? And this was against a team without anyone who could take 25 wickets or score 500 runs in six Tests against weak opposition.

England for their part, with the exception of Gower and occasionally Botham, made no concessions to entertainment in their determination to dominate. The antics of their "court jester" Randall disguised the fact that his scoring was dead slow, although even that came as comic relief from the efforts of Boycott (23 runs/100 balls) and Brearley (25) at the top of the order. Boycott set a tragic record in Perth by batting for nine and one-half hours without hitting a single ball to the boundary (his one four required overthrows).

Not all was gloom in Brisbane, but Australia never recovered from losing six wickets in the first session. Even a hard-yakka partnership of 170 from Hughes and Yallop did not give Hogg enough room to manoeuvre. An England opening gambit of 309 in 612 minutes in Perth was enough to sink the Australians, even though Hogg took 10 wickets; when he repeated the dose in Melbourne he at last got enough support to earn a win. But the fact that Graham Wood, under no particular pressure, could take 389 minutes to score 100, and still win Man of the Match, was a sign of Australia's dire straits. Randall taking 589 minutes over 150 in the next Test (his 100 in 353 balls is one of the slowest known against Australia) and winning a similar award was even worse; at least in this case it could be described as a fight back, although rigor mortis seemed to be setting in even before the Ashes were won.

England ground their way out of trouble again in Adelaide after Botham's 74 in 97 balls brightened an awful start. Darling suffered a life-threatening blow on the first afternoon; revived by quick action from Emburey, he fortunately recovered quickly. Both here and in the final Sydney Test, Brearley's expert marshalling of resources was too much for Australia, even though Hurst was by now providing excellent support for Hogg. Yallop produced the only remarkable Australian innings of the summer, 121 out of 198 all out, but it wasn't enough, either to threaten England or to retain even a vestige of public interest. The attendance of 22,617 in this match remains Sydney's worst since 1888 (apart from one rain-ruined match in 1989), and it put paid to the idea of six-Test series in Australia.

Charles Davis 2001