West Indies in Australia 1984-85 Five Tests. ***West Indies Won 3 - 1.***

Balls per Over: 6 Playing Hours: 5 days x 6 hr Captains: KJ Hughes (Aus) Tests 1-2, CH Lloyd (WI)
AR Border captained Australia in Tests 3, 4 and 5.

The West Indies, having thrashed a miserable and undisciplined Australia in the Caribbean in early 1984, returned once again to Australia to repeat the dose. It was their fourth tour in six seasons, and in a summer, which saw 31 (yes, 31) One Day Internationals, the word “overkill” was coming to mind more and more often. Not that the West Indians were too bothered; they were at the peak of their powers, and they were demanding, and getting, massive guarantees for each tour.

Malcolm Marshall had now emerged as their leading bowler, and he took 28 wickets at 19.8 in this series. No weaknesses in the all-pace strategy were apparent until a spinner-friendly pitch was produced for the final Test. Almost all Australia’s batsmen were overawed, with the exception of Wessels, who overcame a poor start to top 500 runs for the series. The West Indian batsmen were nowhere near as dominant as they had been in the Caribbean, or in England a few months before, but the consistency of Gomes and Lloyd carried them through. Gomes steadied the ship in Perth in a schizoid partnership with Dujon (whose 100 took 178 minutes vs Gomes 421), and this was more than enough for the pace battery. Michael Holding led the way with 6 for 21 as Australia (76) crashed to their lowest ever score against the West Indies, and a big innings defeat.

Another bitter dose of pace was delivered by the West Indies in Brisbane, prompting Kim Hughes’ tearful resignation from the captaincy, handing it to a reluctant and almost uncomprehending Allan Border. Hughes looked a broken man: although he did not immediately lose his place, he would score only two more runs in Test cricket. There were no magic remedies for Australia's problems, as they were outgunned again in Adelaide, although this time there was resistance, notably from Wessels, until the fifth day, when Marshall applied the coup de grace. Gomes made his last Test century: six of his nine 100s came against Australia. The crowd was less than half that of the equivalent match only three years earlier: those who did go were seeing fewer than 80 balls per hour, and by now there was anminated public discussion about over rates, and talk of introducing daily minima.

In Melbourne, Viv Richards, who had been less consistent than in his prime, produced one of his finest knocks. His 208, which took 374 minutes even though he faced only 245 balls, was the highest score by a visiting batsman since 1936. (There is an interesting comparison to Victor Trumper's 214* in 1911, off almost exactly the same number of balls faced, but taking only four hours.) Australia were on the chopping block again, but Lloyd, whose team had now won eleven Tests in a row, left his declaration too late, and Hilditch was able to stonewall his team to a draw. Even so, Australia’s win in the final Test was an astonishing turnaround. Wessels, enjoying the slower pitch, blunted the attack with an eight-hour 173. By then the pitch was taking turn, and the West Indians betrayed their discomfort in such conditions by falling to the greying 38-year-old leg spinner, Bob Holland (10 for 144).

It ended a 27-match unbeaten streak for the champions, but Lloyd at least scored a fighting 72, and earned a standing ovation, to complete his 19-year, 110-Test career. A six by Lloyd had been the 18th of the series for the West Indians; the Australians had hit none at all.

Charles Davis 2001