

Barrackers Corner

Cricket the Fraud

Australia Day holiday, third day, Fourth Test, Adelaide Oval. The seagulls are in their place on a splendid, cloudless, twenty-five degree day except it will turn the skin nasty in twenty minutes so we are told to load up with merchandise: sunhats, suncreams and logoed T-shirts although I don't know what protection the logo affords against carcinoma.

The Moreton Bay figs are still there but David Hookes wants to spoil the scape by plunking a giant video screen next to the National Trust scoreboard. Behind the board the Cathedral looms but curious bits of wire seem to be poking out, one hopes not awaiting TV antennas to be affixed.

At the start of the day's play Australia was 1/37, at the end 2/245. Not much action and what if David Boon had been given out twice the night before to leg before wicket appeals which were euphemistically 'close'. As it turns out the Australians pat away all day in a one pace dreary display against an attack of Kapil Dev, Prabhaker, Srinath and Raju on an easy paced pitch. Of course one knows what the excuses will be. The ball wasn't coming onto the bat is an old furphy although it is funny how the bats of a Botham or Dev come onto the ball on any wicket and the exquisite touch of a David Gower or Mark Waugh seem to create delight wherever they go.

The trouble with the present Australian batting order is that the first four: Marsh, Taylor, Boon and Border are all plods who operate in the Bill Lawry mode and the only batsmen worth watching are Jones and Waugh at five and six. Thank heavens for the memory of Harvey and O'Neill of my boyhood and the Chappells and Walters in the not too distant past.

The difference of course between then and now is that cricket spectators then seemed to know the game and demand a better deal. In desperation I hollered at Boon from the member's enclosure at one point to 'ave a go' but most members genteelly await and politely applaud the inevitable six-and-a-half hour century. There seems to be some sort of reaction which has set in that the traditional game is somehow too holy to be touched. The one-day mob are portrayed as boorish louts but the Test mob are numbed into accepting anything and even under the scoreboard bar where the late afternoon sun and beer used to bring catcalls and slow handclaps, now only the daily parade of West End lovelies in red off-the-shoulder micro-minis which look like they've been squeezed on brings any life (and a photo-opportunity).

Perhaps this is what formula cricket as we have seen it develop over the last few years was meant to be but having just read Robert Pirsig's long awaited second book *Lila*, and listened to him expound on Quality, one could find little quality here.

At the drinks break in the afternoon sessions a welcome relief was to sip some ponies of beer (a minuscule glass) in the hospitality tent at the back of the stands and thus miss an hour of the tedium. While there I was accosted by a fellow in an Akubra who said 'Border's killing the Test and he's shit-scared of losing'. The cowboy couldn't have put it better and though I knew that the inevitable headlines of the morrows *Advertiser* would rabbit on about a heroic Boon-Taylor stand there were precious little heroics for me.

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