



By: Javid Lateef

The third test against India has just concluded and India has emerged victorious. Considering the lead-up to this game, Hollywood could not have written a better script.

The second Test at Sydney was a nail biter. The game was won by the Aussies in the last ten minutes of the fifth day. While the game was entertaining and captivating, cricket was overshadowed by a series of controversies. The umpiring of *Steve Bucknor* and *Mark Benson* was incompetent. They combined to make such poor decisions, most of which went

against the touring side, that the Indian management formally complained to the ICC (International Cricket Council) to have *Bucknor* removed from any more officiating duties in games the Indians were involved in.

Not to sound like a sore loser, but he lost India that Sydney game, as *Dravid* who was holding up one end whilst the team was trying to save the game, was given out to a shocker of a decision, the tail folded and India lost.

That was not all. Things between the Aussies and Indians got a little heated up on the field.

Harbhajan Singh and *Sachin Tendulkar* strung together a great partnership in the first innings of the Sydney test, wresting control away from Australia as they tried to tighten the noose. After one particularly savage pull shot that rocketed to the fence, *Harbhajan* was on the receiving end of some unflattering comments from *Andrew Symonds*. He in turn responded, and *Sachin* and *Ricky Ponting*, the Aussie skipper, had to intervene to break it up.

After the day's play was over we found out that a formal complaint had been issued to the match referee, stating that *Harbhajan* had called *Symonds* a "monkey"! The allegation by *Ponting* was that this was a racist comment as *Symonds* is of multi-racial descent. The Indian team retaliated by issuing a statement from *Tendulkar* stating that the word, "monkey" was never used on the field. A subsequent hearing after the test match would impose a three match ban on *Singh*, but politics got involved and it has been postponed....and that is another story....!!!

I was in India as this unfolded, and like we all do at the end of a day's play, there is the post-mortem. We are all sitting around at a local country club, when we got a call from a former BCCI representative, and here is the humorous twist to this tale - *Symonds* had said something to *Harbhajan* to which he took offense. In his inimitable Punjabi style, *Harbhajan* replied, "*Teri Ma k%*".



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This was interpreted by all that heard it, as "monkey".....!!!!!! The Aussies, who pride themselves on fair but hard play, were the subject of much recrimination by both the Aussie and Indian



Andrew Symonds

media, and it is under these circumstances that the teams made their way to Perth to play the third test.

The WACA or Perth wicket has a history of being the fastest and bounciest track in the world, and the Indian team has had a losing record here. The toss was won by the Indian captain, *Anil Kumble* and India elected to bat first. *Virender Sehwag*, who was back in the squad after a long layoff, and *Jaffer*, got India off to a decent start. *Dravid* and *Sachin* combined well for a good partnership, the former falling seven runs short of his century. The

Aussies bowled well, restricting India to 330 and it was their turn to bat now.

The Indian seam attack, depleted by the absence of *Zaheer Khan* and *Sreesanth* was going to be *RP Singh*, *Ishant Sharma* and *Irfan Pathan*, who was making a return to test cricket after more than a year. The media had written off the Indian seam attack as they were not seasoned enough. They must have taken this to heart, as all three of them combined to

bowl quite magnificently and the great Aussie batting lineup was dismissed for 212, *RP Singh* getting four wickets and handing India the first innings lead of 118 runs.

The wicket started to act a little funny after the second day and while it looked hard and bouncy it had a springy kind of bounce and the Indian second innings was in tatters till a workmanlike 79 from *Laxman* and a stodgy 38 by *Dhoni* enabled India to set a total of 400 odd for the Aussies to win the test. *Irfan Pathan* was at his best and in the waning hours of the third day's play, he removed both the openers (as he had done in the first innings) and the Aussies went into the dressing room two wickets down and two days to go to save/win the game. The Indian seamers bowled to a set line and length, and that combined with seam and swing movement, did the Aussies in. *Ponting* and *Mike Hussey* had a great partnership and *Michael Clarke* threatened for a while with a well compiled 81, but the Indian bowling and fielding proved too good for the Australians and when the last wicket of *Shaun Tait* fell, bowled by *RP Singh*, the Aussies were 72 runs short.

It was a historic win and considering the events that led into this game, it was an inspired performance by the Indian squad. The Australians are known for their hard nosed approach to the game and are not hesitant to let the opposing batsmen know how they feel.

My whole take on this is, if you can dish it out, you had better be able to take it too. Running home to Mommy when you get your nose bloodied, is not what I expect from a squad like the Australians.

We move on to Adelaide now and the 4th and last game of the series. The Indians have the momentum right now and it will be an interesting encounter, to say the least. On that note, signing off for now. Happy watching and *Chak De, India!*