

Conner repays his debt in full



● Sun lotion lends a comical touch to DENNIS CONNER'S victory smile as he waves to the Fremantle crowd yesterday

FREMANTLE — Dennis Conner, the man who lost the America's Cup, won it back yesterday as his Stars and Stripes completed a 4-0 sweep against Australia's Kookaburra III.

It was sweet revenge for the 44-year-old San Diego sailor who dedicated three years of his life to getting back yachting's biggest prize, which he lost to Australia in 1983 in Newport, Rhode Island.

Conner was the first American to lose the cup which had been held by the New York Yacht Club since the Schooner America won it in 1851.

"It's a great moment for America, a great moment for the Stars and Stripes team and a great moment for Dennis Conner," the victorious skipper told the post-race news conference.

"My heart goes out to Iain Murray," he said of the skipper of Kookaburra, who was in the same position Conner was in three years ago: a loser of the cup.

Murray said he hoped the Australians could do in 1990, when cup racing resumes, what a sign proclaimed to him as he sailed off on his final race: "What goes up must come down."

Conner received a message of congratulations from President Ronald Reagan via US ambassador Laurence William Lane in a telephone hook-up.

Prime Minister Bob Hawke, the man who declared a national holiday when Australia won the cup, also phoned his congratulations to both sides. Hawke owes Reagan an Aussie bush hat for a bet he made with the president.

Kookaburra III was never really in the race in medium sea breezes known as the Fremantle Doctor yesterday. Conner led from start to finish, as he had in his three previous races with the Australians.

Recognised as a master at sailing 12-metre cup racers, Conner and tactician Tom Whidden timed their start perfectly, brushing by the starting buoy just as the cannon fired.

Stars and Stripes crossed the line five seconds ahead of Peter Gilmour, the aggressive helmsman who starts Kookaburra before turning the wheel over to skipper Iain Murray.

Gilmour had tried to trap Conner but couldn't. By breaking in front, Conner was able to call the tune for the rest of the 38.6 km race.

San Diego revels

SAN DIEGO — Pandemonium reigned at the San Diego Yacht Club as local hero Dennis Conner and his Stars and Stripes crew sailed to a smooth victory over Kookaburra III to bring the America's Cup back to the United States.

Some 1 000 people gathered to watch as Stars and Stripes, the San Diego Yacht Club entry, beat the Australians.

As the race neared the end, the crowd chanted: "Go, Go, Go!" and "USA, USA!" and waved back at Conner as he appeared on television screens 19 300 km away.

Many in the crowd wore party hats, banners hung from the walls, and a man dressed as the Statue of Liberty paraded around the room.

The party was limited to yacht club members and their invited guests and included San Diego Mayor Maureen O'Connor and singer John Denver, who hails from Colorado.