

Australia IV in a big hurry

FREMANTLE — Showing tremendous off-wind speed, Australia IV came from behind twice yesterday to defeat Kookaburra II in the third round of the America's Cup defenders' trials.

Colin Beashel steered the Bond syndicate to a 20-second victory on the gusty course off this Indian Ocean port city.

There was only one race held in the 23- to 25-knot breezes as the 12 challengers had a lay day. South Australia was scheduled to face Kookaburra III, but reported mast troubles and withdrew from the race. Kookaburra III was required to complete the course to win the three points awarded to third round victors.

A decision is expected today on whether South Australia will withdraw from the series. The South Australia boat has been purchased by a Swedish syndicate. A syndicate spokesman earlier called the withdrawal rumours premature.

Yesterday's victory was Beashel's second of the week over arch-rival Iain Murray. Australia IV defeated Murray aboard Kookaburra III on Thursday.

The race showed that Australia IV was far superior off the wind, while Kookaburra II had the edge upwind.

Murray helmed Kookaburra II to a slight lead of two seconds at the start and then quickly moved out front by 26 seconds at the first mark.

Once the chutes were raised, Beashel took off and by the time the two boats rounded the leeward mark, Australia IV held an eight-second lead.

Kookaburra II picked up 33 seconds on the reaching leg, and managed to cut it to 25 seconds on the next two legs.

Murray gained another 11 seconds on the windward leg only to see it disappear on the final run. Australia went into the final beat to the finish sporting a 12-second lead.

A furious tacking duel allowed him to add eight seconds on the final 3.25-mile leg. Kookaburra III still holds a six-point margin over Australia IV.

Kookaburra II is third with 28 points. South Australia has 11 points and Steak'n Kidney, which had a lay day, has six. — Sapa-AP.