

## AMERICA'S CUP SETS SAIL FOR HOME AS AUSSIES STRUGGLE

# Kookaburra trounced and Conner goes two up

FREMANTLE — Stars and Stripes skipper Dennis Conner, in total harmony with the heavy seas, handed Kookaburra III another thrashing yesterday and is now within two races of recapturing the America's Cup.

In the second race of the best-of-seven Cup final, the American challenger swept home a mighty one minute 10 seconds ahead of the Australian boat.

Kookaburra III raised a protest flag shortly before the start, but after studying video tapes the Australian syndicate decided not to lodge an official protest with the international Cup jury.

Australia captured the America's Cup from Conner's boat Liberty at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1983 and this is their first defence of the coveted 135-year-old trophy.

The impact of yesterday's American performance, coming on top of Saturday's emphatic victory by Stars and Stripes, could have a shattering effect on Australian morale.

Things could have been a lot different for the Australians if they had capitalised on a brilliant start which had them three seconds ahead of Stars and Stripes at the gun.

But Conner, relying on his favourite race tactic of "out-dragging" the opposition in choppy seas, slowly inched ahead in 25-knot winds down the first windward leg and by the first



● The glee of DENNIS CONNER, who is beginning to look invincible in the America's Cup final

mark had eased his boat into a 12-second lead.

On the second, leeward, leg Conner continued to prove his mastery of white waves, standing nonchalantly at the wheel and letting his fingertips tell him the right course through the swell.

The American challenger increased its lead to 29 seconds at the second mark as Kookaburra failed to find an answer to Conner's awesome control in the rolling waves.

By the third mark Stars and Stripes

was a massive one minute 14 seconds in front and the outcome was a foregone conclusion.

The wind kept blowing consistently from south-south-west, favouring the yacht in front.

Shifting winds, like those that prevailed on Saturday, give the trailing boat a chance to find a shift and overtake the leader.

Stars and Stripes lost five seconds off its lead, falling to 1:17 after the fifth leg as Kookaburra III tried to catch up.

But on the sixth leg the Aussies lost time and trailed by 1:23. The wind picked up to 26 knots, packing a punch that could have caused gear problems.

It didn't happen on the seventh leg as Conner was far enough in front to play it safe.

Stars and Stripes took its spinnaker down about 20 seconds before the end of the downwind run rather than keep it up until the boat reached the buoy. That avoided potential equipment problems and cost the boat some time it could afford to lose.

Still, the Americans were ahead by 1:08, a loss of 15 seconds, heading toward the finish and victory.

Kookaburra's starting helmsman Peter Gilmour said later the Australian crew were "discouraged but not shattered" by yesterday's result.

"They are doing better and we need to get our act together," he said. — Sapa-Reuter-AP.