

How the Aussies cooked our kiwi

There can't be many Kiwis who now believe our cricket team should have been able to hop the Tasman and without proper preparation knock off the full-strength Aussies in their own parched land.

There's several reasons. The obvious one was we didn't take a proffered chance to train for the savage weather and pitch conditions. As one of the commentators said, the Black Caps looked under-done in experience on the Aussie wickets and playing in much higher temperatures than at home.

Acclimatising has always been a problem for cricket teams when they travel, but some small consolation is usually provided by a warm-up match before getting down to business.

Not in this case. The Kiwis opted to throw themselves straight into the furnace of Perth and were duly cooked. Only bowler (and second-best Kiwi batsmen in the woeful first innings at Melbourne) Neil Wagner seemed unaffected.

By the time they long-hauled back from Perth to the MCG for the much-touted Boxing Day test, the Black Caps were mentally exhausted...apart from Wagner, and Tom Blundell, who didn't play in Perth.

An underlying problem, though, is the world cricket rankings, which had New Zealand at number two and Aussie at five. It's obvious from its TV commentators what Australia thought of that, although while Ian Smith was in the commentary box they were polite.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan said it for them, calling the rankings rubbish, with Australia too low and New Zealand and England too high for credibility. Whatever, the Australian cricket behemoth saw this as a chance to right such an outrageous state of affairs.

Were New Zealand cricket managers so desperate to play in the Boxing Day test (after a three-decade snub) they readily accepted a roasting at Perth for the first match, and then a mere three-day gap between Melbourne and the third test in Sydney?

Cricket calendars are presumably organised well in advance, but you can't help feeling the Australians figured five days would be superfluous in Perth and Melbourne (both matches ended in four) and offered the tight Melbourne/Sydney schedule accordingly.

Other reasons for our failure include the return from disgrace after the sandpaper scandal of the best two Aussie batsmen, Warner and Smith (although most of their scores were average, thanks to Wagner's heroics).

There was also the early loss of Lockie Ferguson, meaning we had no fast bowler capable of slinging the ball down within 15 kilometres per hour of the Aussie quicks. Doesn't sound much, but that speed difference is massive in terms of batsmen having time to decide what do.

Wagner's body-line bouncers coming at you at 130kmh are effective (he got most wickets) but less physically damaging than something doing nearly 150. Ask Trent Boult, whose hand was broken by one (what is it with bowlers attacking each other?).

The Australian cricketing public know what's going on. They turned up for the first day at the MCG, which had a crowd of 80,000, including 16,000 to 20,000 Kiwis who bought into the hype. But after that, the stadium was less than a third full and was only able to project crowd ambience through Kiwi chanting.

You would have sworn it was the Barmy Army in drag, only ours was better than the big-bellied English version, especially with their haka at the end. Without them, things would have been even more depressing.

I'm feeling for Jordie Barrett. What the hell has happened to Australia? I recall sitting in a jammed Sydney Cricket Ground and marvelling at the speed with which the unruly crowd sculled beer and the scant attention they paid to the cricket.

Maybe it's just a case of brash Sydney versus cultured Melbourne. You'll be fine for the third test, Jordie. Or maybe not, given it's unlikely the SCG will be packed, which will make it easier for security to spot wayward spectating. Take the field – you'd be an asset.

Many New Zealand fans were drawn to the Boxing Day match, but most of them will be home now in front of TV, squirming at the possibility of another beating as the third test unfolds.

The experts are saying Australia won't be taking its foot off our throats, because of the new-fangled world test match championship. Every game, dead rubber or not, counts towards your points total.

Pardon me if NZ wins. Cricket can be like that. Here's hoping this whole sorry episode ends with something positive, especially for over-worked skipper Kane Williamson.