

Aussies still harping over loss to WI

IN ONE of his typically forthright yet, in this case, most perceptive comments, Viv Richards described Bob Simpson as "a moaner, a bad loser and a sour sort of guy."

Perhaps we need to keep that characterisation in mind in considering Simpson's recent comment, contained in an interview in the Daily Telegraph of London, on Australia's recent home series against the West Indies - except that he is, still, Australia's cricket manager.

Admitting to feeling "pretty low" after the West Indies 2-1 triumph in the Test series, Simpson added: "We controlled so much of that series but people have forgotten we lost by one run and a decision that wasn't out in

the end. The other side got away with murder in Brisbane."

It is only human nature, particularly for moaners, bad losers and sour sorts of guy, to seek excuses for failure and to try to hoodwink those who were not there to witness it for themselves that humiliating defeat was actually heroic triumph.

In Simpson's case, it is a condition developed through a lengthy, depressing sequence against the West Indies - as losing captain in 1965 and 1979, losing manager in 1988-89, 1991 and again a few months ago.

Yet he not only degrades his eminent position but also deludes himself, if no one else, in suggesting that Australia were hard done by in the most recent series.

Immediately after the West Indies had secured the narrowest of all victories in the fourth Test at Adelaide to level at 1-1, Australian captain Allan Border said of the decisive caught behind decision against Craig McDermott: "The ball brushed right on the edge of the glove. Technically it was out but it was a very brave decision."

Even that was somewhat evasive and, since then, McDermott himself and now, five months later, Simpson have proclaimed it was not out.

Simpson has a powerful army of critics in Australia, of whom Ian Chappell is commander-



From **TONY COZIER** in Bridgetown.

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in-chief. It is obviously in his interest to make light of the setback against the West Indies, especially now as he is again poised for another Ashes victory over traditional opponents who would now be hard-pressed to give Fiji or Bermuda a serious challenge.

It would be more to the benefit of his team if he examines the facts and the reasons for their capitulation to the West Indies.

They show that they were beaten by a developing team, suddenly minus four great players and with half its compliment with less experience than 10 Tests a man.

Contradicting Simpson's assertion that Australia "controlled so much of the series", the statistics reveal that the West Indies scored faster overall (3.12 runs an over against 2.62) and got their wickets cheaper (at 27.84 apiece against 29.25) and that four West Indian batsmen averaged better than 40 an innings, while only one Australian, David Boon, did.

Australia not only had the advantage of playing at home, where they had last been beaten in a Test series by anyone except the West Indies in 1985/86 (by New Zealand), but also of winning four of the five tosses.

But what separated the teams more than anything else was their attitudes. While the West Indies, following the clarion call of captain Richie Richardson, were always positive and keen to attack, Australia, under the negative influence of captain Allan Border and Simpson, were consistently cautious and unadventurous.

A few illustrations will suffice. Ahead by 162 in the second Test, Australia seemed to freeze and took 91.4 overs to make 196 in their second innings. Next day, Shane Warne spun them to victory but it was not one they had pressed hard for.

A few days later, at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) where they had gained an undeniable psychological advantage over the West Indies, they won the toss, batted and took almost two days, at less than three runs an over, to amass 503 for nine declared. The West Indies saw that as an extraordinary lack of self-belief and Brian Lara fashioned his exceptional double-century, with support from Richardson, that effectively swung the balance.

In the next Test at Adelaide, the West Indies held sway all the way down to the last two Australian second innings wickets when the gripping finale developed. Simpson's attempt to cast doubts over the outcome was not only churlish but was at odds with his own captain's verdict.

He would have been better off examining the complete surrender of his team in the final Test which, after all, decided the series. It was his job, as cricket manager,

and Border's to revive their spirits after the disappointment of Adelaide. Instead, Australia capitulated to the quickest Test defeat since 1945, by lunch on the third day.

To hear Bobby Simpson tell it, Australia should really have been three up by the time Perth came around. Apart from McDermott's "not out" the West Indies "got away with murder" in the first Test in Brisbane, an obvious reference to the several lbw decisions refused during their second innings.

But he conveniently ignored the fact that lbws were in such short supply that only six were given all told in the five Tests and Australia, too, "got away with murder," not least in the final heart-stopping stages in Adelaide.

Such honesty, however, does not serve Simpson's self-interest nor correspond with Viv Richards' character summation.