

Major League System

Chapter 101 - 101: Incident (1)

The next day, Ken was on his way down to the baseball fields after class had ended. Since the conversation with his father last night it was as if a fire had been lit inside of him.

"Hey man are you okay?" Shiro asked, trailing behind him.

He had barely spoken a few words throughout the whole day, not even giving an excuse about not showing up to school yesterday.

'How can we get to nationals and win?'

In his previous life Yokohama High School had made it to the first round of nationals in his first year, however this was thanks to a relatively easy fixture during the prefectural tournament.

This immediately showed as they were the first team to be eliminated in the very first round of Koshien. Since many things had changed, he couldn't count on having an easy fixture once more.

Even if he were to become the Ace pitcher of the team once again, Ken knew that he would not be able to achieve the results he needed on his own. After all, baseball was a team sport.

Unless he had the strength to strikeout every batter in every innings, he could forget carrying the team himself.

"Ken! What's wrong with you?" Shiro finally had enough of being ignored and stepped in front of Ken.

Ken stopped in place, seeing the annoyed look on the short guys face.

"I need you to get better." He said simply, his gaze not leaving Shiro's face.

"Huh!? What the hell are you talking about?" His response was almost too polite for suddenly being criticized out of nowhere.

Ken continued his walk towards the baseball field, only stopping after a few steps.

"Nationals... We're going to win it this year, so I'll need your help." His tone was sharp, carrying the determination flowing from within.

Shiro felt a shock creep up from his toes, assaulting his whole body. What kind of crazy words was this person speaking? What right did a first year who hadn't even made it to the main squad have to make such a declaration.

However, despite knowing just how outlandish it sounded, there was a part of Shiro that was filled with excitement. It was the same feeling that he got on the field whilst playing against the very man before him.

He wanted to believe in these words, just like he did that time.

"A-Alright. Let's go win at Koshien."

A smirk teased the corner of Ken's lips before he nodded. With his knowledge of the future and the system, he would be able to identify those within the team who had the potential to get better.

Not only this, he could identify strengths and weaknesses within the squad, putting him in the best position to suggest training and make decisions.

However, even if he had the information there was no way that anyone would listen to a simple first year student like himself. Which meant he needed to work his way up the pecking order, even making use of the coach to accomplish his goals.

With the Charismatic Air skill, he believed such a thing would be possible. Yet to have the most effect, he would need to take back the Ace position.

After getting changed, Ken and Shiro met up with the other players on the field who had already begun their warm-ups. It was still only the first and second years who weren't on the main squad, however they were due to be back at practice today.

Yusuke saw Ken and nodded in his direction, acknowledging his presence. Ken nodded back, his mind calculating what to do with his fellow first year.

Since his potential was amazing, he could be a great boon in the coming years for Yokohama. However, the tumor inside of his knee was already beginning to effect his physical abilities, particularly his crazy speed and agility.

If Yusuke were to make it into the squad, he could become a liability in the middle of a match, potentially costing them runs or even a game. He could not afford to take such a risk, not when his mother and father's happiness rested on it.

Before he could continue on this line of thought, Coach Hanada made his way onto the field, followed by another 12 or so players dressed in the same baseball uniforms.

"Good, everyone is here." Coach concluded.

His eyes moved over the players on the field, brightening briefly as they passed over Ken. In truth, he was a little worried when Ken had not appeared yesterday, especially after seeing how talented the boy was.

"Today we'll be having a friendly match. First team vs Second team."

Instantly, murmurs broke out around Ken and the other first and second years. This was something that occurred every year without fail, and was the opportunity for the other players to show off what they're made of.

While it was meant to be a friendly, no one treated it as such. Since the inception of the tradition, the first team had never lost against the Second team. This was true even in his previous life.

Ken first looked at Shiro, then at Yusuke. These were his two best players that he would need to rely on in order to have a chance in the match.

"I'll be picking and coaching the Second team squad while the assistant Coach Kano will be taking over the First team." Coach Hanada stated.

Everyone except from the Second years and Ken seemed to be surprised by this fact. One would usually think that the Coach would make the assistant coach in charge of the second team, however this was not the case.

Coach Hanada liked to work first hand with the new players that had joined and get a good gauge of their capabilities. This was because players would only be able to play for high school clubs until they graduated, meaning first years were the lifeblood of a club.

This was another reason why Ken respected the man in front of him. Aside from his large baseball knowledge, he was really invested in the club and especially the players.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 102 - 102: Incident (2)

The coach walked over and began to rifle off some names, mostly first years who would be on the starting team against the seniors. Of course Ken, Shiro and Yusuke were included in this lineup.

Apart from Shiro who was jumping up and down with excitement, both Ken and Yusuke thought this was natural.

"Ken, Shiro told me yesterday that you're a pitcher so how about you start on the mound for the second team?" Coach Hanada asked, his pen and clipboard in hand.

"Yes Coach." He answered, a small smile forming on his face. He had been looking forward to getting back onto the mound, even if it was just a friendly match.

"Shiro, you can be our catcher. Yusuke... Where do you usually play."

"Second base."

Both Shiro and Coach Hanada looked at the person who said these words with confusion in their faces.

Yusuke on the other hand looked completely shocked as he stared at Ken who had correctly guessed his preferred position, even answering before himself.

Ken didn't bother explaining himself and told Shiro to follow him so he could warm up his shoulder.

"I take it by your expression he is correct?" Coach Hanada asked, looking at Yusuke expectantly.

"Y-Yes." Yusuke responded, unsure of how to react. He kept his gaze on the tall figure of Ken walking alongside Shiro to warm up.

Shiro couldn't help but feel excited. Since he was a first year, he thought it would be a long time before he could get the opportunity to show off what he could do, yet here he was about to battle the first team.

"Go and get your equipment on." Ken advised, rotating his shoulder and getting it loose.

"Yes sir!" Shiro replied with a grin.

A few moments later Shiro returned, fully kitted out in his catchers gear.

"Ready when you are Ken!" He stated before getting into a squatting position.

Ken started off slowly, warming up the muscles in his shoulder. Besides yesterday at Yokohama stadium, this was the first time he'd thrown properly with his right arm in a year.

Of course he had pitched last night in the Image Training, however that was everything but physical practice. After around 10 balls he finally felt that he had warmed up enough to throw seriously.

"Let's see if I've improved from yesterday." Ken mumbled.

Shiro felt as if the atmosphere suddenly darkened as Ken's face turned serious. He saw the long limbs of Ken retract as he pulled his hands to his chest and lifted his knee to begin his throwing action.

'Here it comes' Shiro tensed as he felt the hairs on his body begin to stand up from the pressure.

"Hup!"

Ken released his arm like a whip through the air, sending the ball out of his fingers with tremendous force. His shoulder felt fantastic, working as it should like a well-oiled machine.

"Ah"

Shiro quickly stood up and tried to jump in the air in order to catch the ball that rocketed over his head. Thanks to his quick reflexes he was able to tip the ball, however it still carried on and landed over 10 meters away.

"Hahahaha!"

Grating laughter filled both Shiro's and Ken's ears as they turned to look at the ball. A tall and skinny teen bent down and collected the ball, his face filled with amusement.

"Is this meant to be the new first years pitcher? Look's like we've got nothing to worry about fellas." He turned to the players surrounding him and chuckled once more.

'Akira... I kind of feel sorry for this guy.' Ken mused inwardly.

In his previous life, Ken had taken the spot of Ace pitcher from Akira not even a month after joining the team. Unfortunately, he planned on doing the same in this life. It seemed that this lanky guy was doomed to be a side character all along.

"Senpai, ball please."

Ken smiled warmly. There was no point in giving into the taunts of this kid who would fade into the background in a month or two.

"Heh." Akira smirked and gripped the ball in his hands, before loading up and sending it back straight towards Ken.

"AH! What are you doing!?" Shiro yelled out.

Since they were just warming up, Ken had yet to put on a glove. Seeing the ball thrown at Ken with such force caused him to cry out in worry. If he tried to catch the ball barehanded, it could easily end in an injury.

It wasn't only Shiro that was anxious right now as Coach Hanada happened to hear the commotion earlier and had been watching.

"Duck!" The coach yelled out the first thing that came to his mind as the ball came flying towards Ken at great speed.

A grin formed on his face after hearing the coaches warning. It seemed as if he didn't have to do much, Akira had already sealed his own fate.

His eyes never left the incoming ball which was coming straight for his face. Ken waited for the opportune moment and stepped to his right before placing his left hand exactly where his head had been a moment ago.

Before the ball arrived, he moved his hand backwards to reduce the impact of the baseball on his hand. With his mental capacity and keen control over his body thanks to the Fine Motor Control skill, he was able to secure the ball without bearing the brunt of the force.

To further reduce the impact, Ken twisted his body in the direction of the balls trajectory, safely bringing the ball under control.

Silence.

Shiro stared with his eyes wide open and jaw slack after witnessing the precise and almost flawless movement that took place in front of him.

Akira was also dumbfounded, however he clicked his tongue in the next moment and was about to walk away. That was until a thunderous voice halted him in his tracks.

"AKIRA!"

"Oh crap."

His expression paled when he saw the coach bounding over to him with a livid expression.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 103 - 103: Intersquad Match (1)

Ken's eyes followed Coach Hanada who had stomped his way over to Akira and the other first squad members who just so happened to distance themselves from him.

If he remembered correctly, Akira was a tyrant while he was the Ace pitcher. He took his status and lauded it over anyone who was not in the first squad, making them clean up after him or just outright bully them.

Of course this changed once Ken took over his position. All of the status he had turned to naught, and he was forced to work hard in order to stay in the team, with the hopes of one day retrieving the position.

He wasn't entirely sure who became the Ace after he injured his shoulder, not like that mattered at this point.

Ken shook his head, now was not the time to think about the past. He beckoned to Shiro who was being nosy and trying to listen in to the grilling of the unruly senpai.

"Shiro, let's continue."

"Ah y-yes." He stammered, turning his attention back.

Ken let out a long breath and breathed in through his nose. He could feel where he was lacking in his last pitch which caused it to go way off target. With a few adjustments, his muscles would be able to adapt to the mental training he had been doing last night.

As long as he continued to throw a few more pitches, everything would be as it should.

Once again Ken got into his pitching stance, each movement looking more deliberate than before. The next moment the ball came whipping out, off target once again, however this time Shiro was able to reach it in time.

"Again."

Shiro was a little perplexed at how Ken's pitching was so all over the place, yet he still did what he was told. The coach had already given them the positions, so he would need to make the most of the situation.

Of course, if the pitcher did not have great control, it made for a nightmare to lead.

He let out a small sigh after sending the ball back to Ken.

'Man, he should have stayed at first base.' He commented inwardly, losing a little motivation.

Shiro waited for the next ball, ready to spring up the moment the ball left Ken's arms. Since both of the last pitches had been high, he was expecting something similar.

WHOOSH

Without a word, he extended his legs and was debating whether to jump for the ball once again. However, as the ball came closer he suddenly realized that he had misjudged.

Not only was the ball faster than the last pitch, it was also well and truly a strike.

Since he had gotten up in anticipation of a bad pitch, the ball which was aimed for the strike zone was now inconveniently where his privates were located. A look of panic and despair assaulted his features as he tried to save his crown jewels.

Thankfully, due to his short height, the ball managed to hit the tail end of his chest protector, right beneath the naval. However, just because they missed the royal treasures, didn't mean that it didn't hurt.

"OOOOFFFF" After a loud thud, the sound of Shiro's lungs emptying of air entered everyone's ears, causing them to snap their gazes in his direction.

"Come on Shiro, it wasn't that bad." Ken said dismissively, walking up and grabbing the ball which had ricocheted in between them.

'Not that bad!?! I hardly saw the damn ball coming!' Shiro screamed internally, currently unable to form words since he was winded.

He had experience catching around 130km/h and could tell that the pitch he had just received exceeded that speed.

Shiro had no doubt in his mind that Ken had just thrown was definitely faster, maybe even close to 140km/h.

"Alright everyone, let's head onto the field. 2nd team will be batting first." Before Shiro could get himself off the ground, Coach Hanada called out to the team, signaling the beginning of the Intersquad match.

The 2nd team gathered in the dugout a few minutes later, surrounding the coach.

"Here is the batting lineup. Yusuke, you're up first followed by Shiro."

"Yes Coach!" Both Yusuke and Shiro responded with gusto. It seemed that the two were both excited.

Yusuke walked up to home plate and adjusted his helmet and elbow protector. Tapping the home plate once, twice and thrice, he looked up at the pitcher and nodded, indicating that he was ready.

Akira who had just been chewed out earlier by the coach, was feeling a bit pissy. He decided that he would take it out on his juniors during this game, ensuring that he made them look useless.

His tall frame and long limbs made him look like uncoordinated, however he was able to throw quite fast as a result from the leverage. Getting into his stance, he whipped a fastball on the outside, painting the strike zone.

PAH

"Strike one."

The umpire said plainly, forcing Yusuke to click his tongue. The ball could have been called either way, but he quickly changed gears and tried to focus on the next one.

"Hehe, I'll show these pipsqueaks they're not on our level." Akira mumbled, a smirk forming on his gaunt features.

The next ball was similar, this time on the inside. The speed was a respectable 130km/h and held a great deal of control.

DONG

Yusuke sucked in a deep breath and swung in rhythm, sending the ball over the short stops head for a base hit.

"Tch, lucky boy." Akira spat out, returning to the mound.

"Nice hit!" The players in the 2nd squad dugout called out words of encouragement, happy to get on base in the first innings.

Now it was Shiro's turn to head up to bat. Thanks to his short stature and wide shoulders, he was actually a rather good hitter, at least in middle school.

However, feeling the pressure of going against his senpai, he was currently nervous. He gulped before setting his feet and going through his batting routine.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 104 - 104: Intersquad Match (2)

"Don't be nervous Kohai, we're all on the same team." A soft yet trustworthy voice rang out from behind him, surprising Shiro quite a bit.

"A-Ah thank you Senpai." He muttered, suddenly feeling a little better.

"I'm Yuta, a third year. Nice to meet you." Yuta smiled warmly.

"I'm Shiro, nice to meet you too." He replied.

The small chat and introduction seemed to have calmed any nerves that Shiro had leftover, allowing him to concentrate. He saw the first ball coming and decided to let it through.

Unfortunately the umpire called it a strike despite being just outside of the strike zone by his calculations. Since he was a catcher, he was well aware that the way a catcher framed a pitch could have a great impact on calls.

'This Yuta must be a really good catcher.' He thought inwardly. Knowing that there was already a good catcher on the team only served to light a fire within him. Ever since leaving Fujimi, he vowed to never be oppressed again, even by his teammates.

'I'll send the next one packing.'

Akira sent another ball towards the same spot, wanting to steal another strike with the help of the catcher.

"As if I'll let you!"

Shiro loaded up and swung hard, sending the ball right in between third base and the short stop.

"Yes!" The players in the dugout cheered, seeing how the ball looked like it was about to pass by both fielders.

"ORAAAAHHH!"

The third baseman let out a shout as his muscles seemed to almost rip through his tight uniform. He leapt into the air, scooping the ball up with his glove before flinging it to the short stop in front of him in one smooth motion.

The short stop swung his head and was about to throw to second base, however he was surprised to see that Yusuke was already sliding towards the bag. In a fraction of a second he made the decision to send the ball to first base.

"Out."

Shiro stood on the base a few moments later with a disappointed look on his face.

"Ah damn it, I almost had it." He cursed.

Ken couldn't help but smile after seeing the display. The muscular student on third base was the captain Makoto Watanabe, known for his flashy athletic plays.

The short stop with the fringe was the silent assassin Naoki Ito. Despite the fringe covering his eyes at all times, he was able to quickly and accurately throw to anywhere in the infield lightning fast.

"Very good." Coach Hanada mumbled and began to write down some comments on his clipboard.

Ken didn't need to peek over his shoulder to know what he was writing. Just the fact that Yusuke had arrived onto second base in time and prevented the double play was enough to know that he had speed and skills.

"Ken, you're up after Ida" Coach Hanada said, pointing to the player who was walking to the plate now.

A grin formed on his face. There was a certain pride with being named the 4th batter on the team, better known as the clean-up hitter. It seemed that he had made enough of an impression to receive this position.

However, in the next moment he shook his head. He shouldn't let something like this stroke his ego, not until he made the first team. What was the point in being the best on the second team? Absolutely nothing.

Ida was someone that Ken did not remember or even recognize, therefore it was no surprise that he was struck out in 3 consecutive pitches.

Ken picked up a bat and made his way to the batters box. It was currently 2 outs and Yusuke was on second base, meaning he had to either hit a double or go straight for a home run.

Since he didn't trust any of the other second team players to score in this 3 inning Intersquad match, this would likely be the only time he would have the chance to get runs on the board.

His eyes shifted to the outfield to where two players who looked eerily similar were standing. These were the Aoyama twins, supreme speedsters who could get to any ball as long as it entered their territory.

Ken knew that he couldn't hit it into the left or center outfield, just in case he didn't get a full piece of the ball. Which only left the right outfield.

"You sure like to observe." Yuta said from behind Ken, a hint of amusement in his tone.

"I like to do my research Yuta Senpai." Ken replied, a grin forming on his face.

Yuta's face flashed with surprise, yet a smile crept onto his lips a moment later.

'Looks like we need to be wary of this guy.'

After saying so, he didn't wait for a reply and squared up his shoulders, finally focusing on the mound.

Akira who had been staring daggers at Ken was starting to feel stifled after being ignored for so long. It was almost as if he was being completely disregarded.

This on top of being chewed out by the coach earlier, only served to fuel his rage.

'I'm gonna wreck you boy.' Akira ground his teeth, gripping the ball in his hand tightly.

Finally, the object of his hate turned and faced him after ignoring him for so long. Akira let out a deep breath, managing to calm his state of mind a little. It would do no good if he were to make a fool of himself here.

He nodded at Yuta, happy with the lead. In the next moment he performed his wind up and sent the ball rocketing towards the strike zone at a cool 130km/h, one of his fastest pitches.

Ken's eyes narrowed as he followed the ball, judging the rotational speed and anticipating where it would land within the strike zone.

He waited a fraction of a second longer than he usually would before throwing all of his weight onto his front foot and swinging through with power.

DONG!

The very first ball he faced was sent flying into the right outfield, seeming as if it would never come down. The second year Yuki in the outfield followed the ball for a few seconds before giving up, deciding to watch it fly over the gate.

"Huh?" Akira couldn't help but stare at the first year who leisurely made his way around the bases, not even celebrating his hit.

'Isn't he meant to be a pitcher?'

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 105 - 105: Back on the Mound (1)

Yuta let out a whistle of appreciation as he saw the ball sail into the right outfield and out of the grounds for a home run. His amicable face was now turned up in a smile, feeling a touch of excitement.

"Looks like we got a monster first year." He murmured, turning his gaze to the person in question leisurely making his way around the bases.

"Nice hit Kouhai." Makoto on third base commented, holding out his hand for a hi-5 as Ken went past.

"Thanks Captain."

Ken slapped his hand on the way past and headed towards home plate with a grin. He could tell that with one swing of his bat that he had gained the attention of the first team players.

He didn't bother looking at Akira who was probably seething on the mound right now. As long as he did well enough pitching, he should be able to secure the Ace pitching position right away since Akira was a terrible hitter and sat at 9th in the batting order.

The most excited out of the bunch was Coach Hanada, who suddenly saw his chances of reaching nationals skyrocket.

'Thank you Senpai for sending a monstrous batter to me.'

The coach praised Ken's father inwardly, counting his lucky stars that a player like Ken would decide to come to a public school instead of one of the prestigious baseball schools.

Ken made his way back to the dug out, only to be met with the sparkling smiles and looks of admiration from his teammates. Coach Hanada had managed to wear his poker face once again, giving nothing away.

Of course that would only be true for those who did not know him well. Ken's eyes were drawn to his right hand which held the clipboard shakily.

Whenever the Coach was excited, his hand would subconsciously shake.

A small smile formed on Ken's face as he went and sat down on the bench. It wasn't long before Shiro was talking in his ear excitedly, reenacting the play dramatically.

"Go get your gear ready." Ken said simply, expecting the next batter to get out quickly.

Ken too went and grabbed his hat and glove, rotating his shoulder to loosen it up.

"3 outs. Changeover."

The umpire yelled from the field, prompting the starters in the second team to stand up. They had all been assigned their positions before the game started, likely based on the last 2 days of evaluations by the coaches.

It didn't matter too much to Ken since he never planned on letting them play.

'I'm not giving up a run in these 3 innings.'

He needed to put on a stellar performance and cement his position in the starting line up, dethroning Akira as the Ace and taking his rightful spot.

Ken walked onto the field and adjusted his cap, making his way towards the mound. He turned around and looked at home plate, feeling a wave of nostalgia threaten to overcome him.

This was the same place where he had pitched many times, yet this was different, he was different. Not only was he no longer injured, he was also a much better player than before thanks to the system.

As the handsome figure of Tatsuya Aoyama, one of the lady-killer twins walked over to the batters box, Ken felt a serene sense of calm wash over him.

"Ken, are we going to warm up your arm?" Shiro asked, donned in his catchers gear.

Meanwhile in the first team dugout, Akira was currently in a terrible mood. He glared at the first year who had embarrassed him, sending his first pitch flying like it was nothing.

"Pah, who would have thought that Aki would get blown out of the field on the very first pitch against a first year?"

"Hahaha he's got spirit!" Makoto replied, laughing heartily.

"I wonder how good his pitches are?" Yuta mused, rubbing his chin in curiosity.

After getting some warm up throws in, Ken nodded. It was time to show everyone his skills.

Tatsuya stepped up to the plate and gripped his bat tightly. Him and his brother were the lead off hitters for Yokohama thanks to their blistering speed and ability to make contact with the ball.

Shiro squatted down, feeling a little nervous. During their warm ups before the game, He had only caught 3 of Ken's pitches, all of which were wildly different.

However, seeing the calm and determined expression on Ken's face, he managed to calm down a little after a while.

'Let's aim for a ball first. I need to try and get used to his pitches.'

Shiro placed his glove on the outside of the strike zone, receiving a nod from Ken.

Ken began his signature wind up, planting his foot and bringing his knee towards his chest. In the next moment his left foot extended and touched the ground, followed by his arm flying out like a whip.

WHOOSH

DING

The ball was struck, heading past Ken on the mound and over to 2nd base where Yusuke was standing. With practiced ease, Yusuke bent down leisurely and threw the ball to first base in one motion.

"Huh?"

To his surprise, Tatsuya had managed to make it to first base safely, overrunning the base by almost 10 meters, showing how quick his acceleration was.

A play that he had made hundreds of times caused Yusuke to be lax. He underestimated the speed of the lead off hitter, not retrieving the ball with a sense of urgency.

"S-Sorry Ken." Yusuke called out, feeling a little flustered. It was such an easy play, yet he had messed it up, putting more pressure on Ken.

Ken waved his hand, dismissing the apology. Of course it would have been good if they had gotten Tatsuya out at first base, but that was not the problem.

While he was aiming for Shiro's glove, the ball actually ended up a few inches to the right.

However, Ken didn't show any worry on his face. An Ace must be calm and composed no matter the situation, there was no need for him to be depressed at such a time.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 106 - 106: Back on the Mound (2)

Coach Hanada wore his usual poker face, but he leaned to the side and said some words to one of the assistant coaches.

"Go grab the radar gun and get a measure on his pitches."

"Yes Coach."

Unaware of what was going on in the dugout, Ken squared up his shoulders and looked down at the batters box. Jun, the other Aoyama twin was waiting patiently, his sharp eyes staring down at the mound.

'That last pitch was off. Just pitch it into my glove Ken...!' Shiro once again placed his glove on the outside, wanting to waste some pitches so the pitcher could get into a rhythm.

The next pitch came flying out of Ken's fingers, this time further outside instead of inside. Thanks to Shiro's good reflexes, he was able to reach his glove out in time and secure the ball.

"Ball."

Coach Hanada's eyes moved to the assistant coach who he talked to earlier, only to see he was still in the process of getting everything set up. He narrowed his eyes, focusing on Ken on the mound.

'He still seems composed, almost as if he was expecting this result...'

The coach couldn't help but let his mind run wild. Just what was with this kid and why did he seem much more mature than a regular 1st year.

'I think that last ball was around 130km/h. As long as he can improve his control, we might be able to use him this season on the mound. With his batting ability, he would be a key player on both ends.'

The next pitch came, this time right down the middle. Jun didn't hesitate to pull the trigger, swinging his bat and making connection with the ball.

However, it seemed he mistimed it slightly, sending the ball high into the air above Ken.

"Ah damn."

Tatsuya who already had a massive lead, quickly ran back to first base.

PAH

Ken easily caught the ball which slowly drifted down a few feet in front of him and headed back to the mound. His face still somber.

"Out."

"Hmph. He got lucky there." Akira huffed, clearly having a bone to pick with the new first year.

'Just a few more...'

Ken felt as if his muscles were finally calibrating after such a huge layoff. It was as if there was a wall that he needed to break through in order to map his image training to his physical output.

Shiro on the other hand was currently sweating profusely.

'Argh, I never know where his pitches are going to land. This is the worst.'

The assistant coach who was in possession of the radar gun finally sent a thumbs up to Coach Hanada, letting him know that he was ready.

The next batter walked up to the plate and turned his attention to Ken.

'Hiroki...'

Suddenly, Ken's entire demeanor changed. His once somber atmosphere seemed to heat up an entire realm, showing his will and determination to have a frontal battle.

Hiroki Kondo was a boy of average height and had an average frame. That was until one saw his body which held rippling muscles underneath.

He was one of those kids who grew up on the countryside, working in the fields with his parents from a young age. This gave him undeniable strength and dexterity which translated to him being a demon in the batters box.

If someone were to ask Ken who the best player on Yokohama's team was, he would without a doubt say it was Hiroki, at least that was the case until Daichi's talent awakened.

With Ken on the mound and Hiroki's amazing batting and defense, they were able to make it to nationals in his previous life.

Ken couldn't help but feel excited facing off against his good friend. Of course Hiroki had no knowledge of this, only seeing that Ken's aura had changed drastically.

"Oho, he's getting fired up now." Yuta commented.

"It's a battle between men HAHA" Makoto interjected.

Even Coach Hanada could see the changes in Ken.

"It seems that he instinctively knows that Hiroki is our best player. Geniuses are scary..."

Shiro could see the changes in Ken, but he was unsure of how to lead him. Especially since all of the pitches had not gone to where his glove was yet.

He let out a small sigh before deciding to place his glove on the outside once more, however surprisingly, Ken shook his head.

'Huh? Where does he want to go then?'

He kept moving the glove until ending up right in the middle of the strike zone, only to receive a nod.

'WHAT!?! Right down the middle??' Shiro almost jumped in fright from the shock he just experienced.

Ken on the other hand wore a frightening smile, filled with the will to fight. He would not run away from Hiroki, he respected him too much to act cowardly.

Seeing the expression on Ken's face, Shiro could only do as he said. However, he needed to keep an eye on the ball in the case it was off target once more.

Ken performed his wind up and sent the ball rocketing from his fingertips.

PAH

Before anyone could register what had happened, the ball arrived into the webbing of the catchers glove, causing a silence to fall upon the field and both dugouts.

"W-What was that?" Shiro turn the glove towards himself, blinking a few times as if not believing that the ball was in his glove.

"S-Strike."

The umpire called out the decision after a few moments, only after getting over his shock.

Even Coach Hanada was stumped. It was almost as if the ball teleported into the catchers glove in a fraction of a second.

"What's the speed!?" He suddenly remembered that he sent the assistant coach over with a radar gun and quickly looked over towards him.

The assistant coach was too busy staring at the radar gun with his mouth open and did not even look his way.

"Damn it." In a huff, the coach ran around the field and pushed the man out of the way.

"Oh my god..."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 107 - 107: Trust me Bro (1)

'144km per hour!?'

Coach Hanada's eyes widened in disbelief after seeing the outlandish number on the radar gun.

How could a first year high school student at the age of only 15 or 16 possess such strength?

Hiroki who had faced the ball head on suddenly reevaluated the person on the mound. He had been so surprised by the sudden speed that he did not even have a chance to swing at the ball.

"Nice pitch. Throw me another."

Instead of being cowed by the intense speed of the pitch, Hiroki felt his fighting spirit ignite. It wasn't often that one could face such fast balls against high schoolers, let alone a first year.

"Heh, you don't have to tell me twice." Ken responded, his face still burning with determination.

Shiro was still staring at the ball in his glove, not even noticing that Ken was waiting on the mound for him.

"Timeout please."

Ken requested a time out since ironically, his catcher had yet to catch up to the proceedings.

"Shiro, come here." Ken beckoned, finally getting his attention.

Like a lost little lamb, he made his way over to the mound.

"K-Ken, why didn't you tell me you could pitch so fast." He complained. "I'm not even sure that I can catch them properly."

"Don't worry. Just put your glove in the middle of the strike zone for the next pitch, I'll make sure the ball finds its way there."

"Oh and for the 3rd ball..." Ken placed his glove over his mouth and whispered into Shiro's ear, only to receive a confused look in response.

"Okay head back to your spot." He shoed Shiro away like a small animal.

After thanking the umpire, he finally got back into position and waited for play to resume.

Both Coach Hanada and the assistant coach were holding their breaths. They were hoping that the last pitch was not a fluke, so they watched with rapt attention.

It wasn't just those two, both the players in the dugouts and the ones on the field all had their eyes focused on Ken on the mound. He was like a tall tree which stood grandly, yet had an air of danger surrounding it. (Takagi literally translates to Tall Tree in Japanese)

"Play!"

The umpire called for play to resume, prompting Ken to begin his wind up.

As he began, Tatsuya who had a lead on first base quickly took off to steal second base. It seemed that everyone had forgotten he was on first, including both coaches.

Shiro fidgeted a little, however there was no way he would be able to split his focus in the moment. If he moved his glove even an inch, he couldn't guarantee that he'd be able to catch the pitch headed his way.

Ken on the other hand ignored the runner. His complete and utter focus was on one thing, his showdown with Hiroki.

SWHOOSH

PAH

The sound of air being struck followed by the ball landing in the glove rang out in everyone's ears.

"Strike two."

This time, the atmosphere in the first team's dugout was solemn.

Hiroki had rarely failed to make contact with a ball he swung at. In fact, he had never been struck out in high school, making him a bane for pitchers early in the batting line up.

The fact that he had missed the ball so spectacularly indicated that Ken was the real deal.

"147km per hour... Is he a monster?" The assistant coach mumbled.

"Heh..." Hiroki couldn't help but laugh, tightening his grip on the bat.

"BRING IT ON!"

Tatsuya, who was now sitting safely on second base blinked a few times in confusion. Usually whenever he stole a base he would receive some cheers, however everyone seemed to have forgotten about him.

Since he was used to all the attention, especially females, he couldn't help but feel stifled.

He took another lead, intending to steal another base and make the defense pay.

'If you won't pay attention to me then I'll just steal an entire run.'

Ken gripped the ball in the glove, holding it to his chest. His eyes were drilling into the glove which was placed just below the strike zone, close to the ground.

Without hesitating, he began his wind up and whipped the ball out again.

Shiro noticed the ball was a little slower than the last, but he saw the trajectory and panicked. Instead of heading towards his glove, the ball was heading right down the middle of the strike zone.

'What do I do? What do I do?' He panicked inwardly, feeling as if time had slowed down.

'Place your glove below the strike zone and don't move it no matter what. Trust me bro.'

Ken's instructions from before rang out in his mind. His instincts were screaming at him to lift his glove, but Ken's words spoke the opposite.

Generally, a battery (pitcher and catcher duo) would need to build up experience and trust between each other before making such a request. But since this was the very first time the two had played with one another, the task was almost too much to handle.

While they were friends and even sat next to each other in class, it was only the third day of high school. How much could one trust someone they'd only known for a few days.

If he didn't move the glove and the ball continued on its current trajectory, it would likely hit him square in the chest, a rather painful affair even with a chest protector.

However, if he moved his glove and the ball ended up below the strike zone, it was his crown jewels that were in the firing zone.

After a serious mental debate, Shiro finally decided to keep his glove where it was. If he was hit in the chest then at least he wouldn't be incapacitated, or risk putting an end to his whole family line in the process.

'Damn you Ken.' He gritted his teeth, keeping his eye on the ball.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 108 - 108: Trust me Bro (2)

'This is it!' Hiroki felt the ball was a tad slower than the last and also right down the middle. An imperceptible grin formed on his face as he calculated the timing and trajectory of the ball.

"Goodbye."

SWOOOSH

Hiroki's face turned from grinning to complete and utter shock as his bat sailed over the baseball which seemed to have dropped right before crossing over home plate.

PAH

Shiro who had braced himself for impact, suddenly felt the ball appear in his glove like magic. He almost couldn't believe what had just happened, even though it took place right in front of his eyes.

"Was that a forkball?" He muttered, catching the batters attention.

"What? He didn't tell you what pitch he was throwing?" Hiroki turned his head and asked, his tone sounding flustered.

Shiro shook his head. "This is the first time I've caught Ken's pitches, I didn't even know he could throw a fork." He admitted.

Hiroki let out a sigh of disappointment, however a smile appeared shortly after. He walked over to Ken who was still at the mound and held out his hand.

"I completely lost, that was a brilliant battle. Welcome to the team, my name is Hiroki Kondo."

Ken felt a wave of accomplishment after managing to strike out Hiroki so he was in a good mood. This was the first time that he had thrown the forkball with his right arm, so he knew it was a gamble, however it had paid off.

"Thanks, I'm Ken Takagi." He grasped the hand of Hiroki and smiled with satisfaction.

Meanwhile, Tatsuya was standing on his newly stolen third base with a stifled expression on his face.

'Why is no one noticing me!' he screamed internally, tears flowing down his face.

Coach Hanada felt as if his mind was going to explode. Just where had this boy come from?

'That forkball would have fooled even some of the best batters in University.' He thought inwardly, directing his attention back to the radar gun.

"137km/h... Even his breaking balls are fast."

"HAHAHA, the kid's got guts. Don't mind Hiroki." The captain Makoto slapped Hiroki on the back on his way to the batters box, his muscles almost bursting out of his uniform.

Hiroki winced in pain, however he seemed used enough to the treatment from the muscle head captain.

Everyone in the first team dugout seemed abuzz with excitement after seeing such a promising first year. Everyone except for one who had turned 4 shades of red by now.

'How can that bastard be so good? He's only a first year.' Akira ground his teeth, feeling his face heat up as his position was threatened.

"F-Fluke! It has to be a fluke!"

He had never struck out Hiroki, even in practice. So his brain moved to the only logical explanation that he could think of, or in this case, illogical explanation.

"Pffft."

"Yeah right."

A few muffled laughs and even obscenities were thrown at Akira after his outburst, causing him to grow even redder in the face.

Hiroki who had just arrived in the dugout after walking off the field turned his attention to Akira, his eyes narrowing.

"You better sort your crap out, otherwise you'll find yourself in the second team with all the other you make fun of."

After saying so, Hiroki ignored him and went to find a spot on the bench.

It was rather apparent that the team only tolerated Akira because he was their Ace pitcher, not because they liked him as a person.

Since he sucked up to the best players on the team and trashed anyone who couldn't make it, they had quite an unfavorable opinion of him. So much so that they felt a huge sense of relief after finding out that there was now an even better pitcher on the team.

'I-Impossible...' Akira placed his head in his hands, feeling his whole world crumble around him.

Meanwhile on the pitch, the captain Makoto had a giant grin on his face as he stared down at Ken on the mound. His whole body was screaming that he was ready to go.

"Wait you two." Coach Hanada stepped onto the field with his hands in the air, stopping play.

"Ken, come off the mound. I'm replacing you."

"WHAT!? C-Coach what do you mean?"

Surprisingly, it wasn't Ken who reacted so strongly, but Makoto in the batters box. He had just warmed up and was ready for a showdown with their brand new canon-armed 1st year.

"There's no point in Ken continuing to pitch. Shiro here doesn't have the capability of catching the pitches right now."

"Huh?" Makoto turned around to look at Shiro who instantly felt intimidated by the large and muscular frame of the captain.

"Tch, so he noticed." Ken murmured.

He had thought that Shiro might have been good enough to catch his fastballs considering he used to play for Fujimi.

'That Kenji used to pitch at 130km/h so why can't Shiro catch my pitches?' he thought, making his way off the mound.

"Fortunately we have someone who can replace you. Katsuya, you take the mound." The coach called out to the dugout, eliciting a nervous exclamation in response.

He then walked back to the dugout with Ken, leaving the depressed Makoto in the batters box, his earlier fighting spirit now flushed down the drain.

Coach Hanada placed his arm around Ken's shoulder and pulled him closer, a smile planted on his face.

"Why didn't you tell me you could pitch so fast? Man, Chris must have been training a monster like you since you left the womb." His tone was merry, understandably.

Ken tilted his head in confusion, "How fast was I pitching?" he asked.

"What? You don't know?"

This time it was the Coach's turn to be confused.

Ken shook his head. "No, in truth I stopped pitching all of last year thanks to a shoulder injury."

Coach Hanada's jaw dropped, almost dislocating thanks to the shock that came with Ken's words.

"A-Ah don't worry, I'm all healed. My dad took me to the physiotherapist who cleared me to pitch." Ken panicked, thinking that the Coach might look at benching him because of it.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 109 - 109: Ascend to the Peak (1)

Coach Hanada stared at Ken like he was some sort of freak, which wasn't far from the truth. He had heard that athletes could sometimes improve their performance by taking well-timed rest periods, but a year was too exaggerated.

Of course he was over the moon about securing such a player, however there was one thing that wasn't sitting right with him.

"Ken, why didn't you apply for any prestigious baseball schools? Surely with your talent you could have easily made a team."

Although he was a little hesitant at first, the coach decided to ask the question in order to clear up some doubts. Since they would be together for the next 3 years, he wanted everything out in the open.

Ken saw the hesitation in the coach's eyes, but softly smiled once he was asked. He was happy to know that Coach Hanada was still the forthright and honest coach that he knew in his previous life.

Therefore in order to be transparent, he told the truth.

"I entered the tryouts for Osaka Toin and was even offered a scholarship."

These words caused the coach to look even more confused. But before he could ask why he didn't accept, Ken continued.

"However, the scholarship was only valid if I gave up pitching and played at 1st base."

"HUH!?"

For the second time in a matter of moments, the coach's jaw had dropped in shock.

"Just what kind of idiot would turn down a pitcher who can throw at 147km/h!? And for what? To isolate him on 1st base where he can't use his arm? Foolish!"

'147km/h? What?'

Now it was Ken's turn to be shocked. Since when had he been throwing so fast?

Even in image training he could only pitch at maximum 130km/h so what had changed?

'Is it possible that the image training is limited by my own assumption of my abilities?'

Ken was deep in thought, not even noticing that the coach was staring at him as if he was expecting an answer.

"Huh? Sorry?"

"I find it hard to believe that Osaka Toin, one of the best baseball High Schools would tell you to stop pitching. Unless they were blind of course. Could you tell me more of what happened?"

"Ah, since my shoulder was still injured a couple of months ago I was pitching with my left arm. It lacked a bit of power compared to my right." Ken said nonchalantly.

Since he had already moved on from the whole ordeal, it wasn't painful bringing it up any longer. This was especially the case now that he knew how much he had improved since his shoulder had healed.

Coach Hanada paused for a moment, before gripping his heart.

'Oh man, I need to stop talking to this guy. If I get any more shocks I might end up having a heart attack.'

After a while the coach let out a sigh, feeling the energy leave his body.

"Okay okay, head back to the bench. You can throw with Yuta at tomorrow's practice."

With that, the coach returned to his spot in the dugout and told the umpire to continue the game. His eyes moved over to the first team's bench and paused his gaze on Akira who still had his head in his hands.

'Mmm, it seems that Akira is feeling threatened. Good.'

The coach was not stupid, he knew exactly how Akira acted to others in the team. However, since he generally behaved and sucked up to him whenever he was around, the coach did not have a good reason to reign him in.

They were also in the position of needing his skills since they lacked any better pitchers. However, with the addition of the first year monster Ken, he now had another option, significantly reducing the value of Akira.

Ken made his way over to the bench and opened up the system out of habit, only to see something flashing at him.

[NEW NOTIFICATION]

#HIDDEN MISSION: Show your resolve (limit time mission: 48hrs) [Completed]

*Task: Incorporate your image training into physical training within a limited time frame, showing your resolve to be the best.

REWARDS:

>Unlock Skill: Doryoku (Effort)

>Unlock Mission: Ascend to the Peak

'Huh!?'

Ken stared at the screen for a few moments in disbelief. He had somehow uncovered a hidden mission within the system, just by merely pitching a few times.

Of course he had worked to his limits the night before in the image training which likely was a prerequisite for such a thing in the first place. However, it still felt as if a pie dropped from the sky right into his lap.

'Just what are these rewards?'

Ken opened up his skill window with curiosity.

Doryoku: You are rewarded based on the effort you put in. Increases training benefits up to 20% when giving it your all.

'Holy crap! What is this skill?'

With the addition of this new skill, he would be able to get a huge advantage when compared to his peers just by working harder. Since he already had the Disciplinarian skill, he could potentially improve 40% faster than everyone else.

'Hold on. I had to stop pitching for a whole year in order to get the Disciplinarian skill, so how did I get something so overpowered after only 1 day?'

What he didn't know was that healing his shoulder was actually the biggest gain from the year long quest. Even if he had gone to physiotherapy or gotten surgery for the injury, it would have never been the same.

Not to mention the painful and long physical therapy associated with recovering from such an injury. The system had essentially saved his professional career without Ken fully understanding.

Ignorant of the full impact the system had on his life, Ken turned his attention to the missions tab.

#MISSION: Ascend to the Peak (part 1)

*Task: Throw 150 pitches both physically and in image training per day.

TIME: 30 days remaining.

REWARDS:

>Gold Lottery Ticket

>Unlock Mission: Ascend to the Peak (part 2)

'Wow the reward is pretty good...' He thought inwardly.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 110 - 110: Ascend to the Peak (2)

Ken was already motivated to improve at a fast pace thanks to his promise with his father. He planned to win at Nationals this year, which would require intense training both for himself and his teammates.

This mission meant that he would also receive a tangible award from the system for his hard work.

DONG

The sound of the metal bat rung in his ears, pulling Ken out of his daze.

His eyes caught the ball flying towards the center outfield, clearing the distance that Ken had hit with his earlier home run. Katsuya who had just stepped onto the mound seemed crestfallen that his very first pitch resulted in such an outcome.

Despite hitting a home run, Makoto did not look impressed. His eyes were drawn to Ken who was sitting in the dugout, his hands still grasped around the bat.

Ken couldn't help but smile at the captains antics.

"Makoto... Why aren't you running?" The coach's annoyed voice rang out as he stepped in between the two.

"A-Ah, sorry!" Makoto must have forgotten that they were in the middle of a match, either that or he didn't take the other team seriously. Ken was more inclined to believe the latter.

He quickly began his run around the bases, but he looked a bit bored.

The next few at bats weren't much better than the last. Despite Ken already securing two outs, the innings did not end until Akira sent a fly ball out to left field.

The final score was 2 runs to 7 in favor of the 1st team.

"Okay okay, I think we've seen enough for today." Coach Hanada stopped everyone as they were about to change over.

Ken wasn't too surprised considering the disparity between the two teams. In his previous life, he had managed to keep the 1st squad to only 5 runs, however they never got any runs in return.

"We'll be running some role specific drills to finish the rest of the day." He explained.

"Coach Kano will take the fielders and I'll take the pitchers and catchers. Dismissed."

A large portion of the players including Yusuke headed over to the first squad dugout where the assistant coach was, while Akira, Yuto and another two players headed their way.

They were Shogo Morikawa the relief pitcher and Yasuki Hattori, the backup catcher. Shogo looked a little down, probably because he knew that his opportunities would dwindle thanks to Ken's abilities.

Once everyone had arrived, Coach Hanada spoke up. "I'm going to pair you all up, let's get some pitches in so I can check up on your forms. Once that's done I'll create a training menu for you all to complete at home."

"I'll be switching the match ups every 20 pitches. I want you to all be comfortable with each other in the coming weeks."

The coach continued, "First off, Akira you're with Shiro. Ken you're paired up with Yuta, Shogo you're with Yasuki."

The players who were called walked over to the bullpen and took their positions.

"Um, coach what about me?" Katsuya stood around awkwardly. It turned out that there were only three catchers while there were 4 pitchers.

"Hmm. Head over to the fielding squad for now, we'll chat about your options after practice today."

Ken overheard the conversation and felt a little sorry for Katsuya. Even in his previous life, Katsuya had not been given an opportunity to pitch.

"Ah okay, I understand."

Everyone could only watch as the first year left the vicinity. Of course while most felt bad for him, they couldn't allow another person's situation affect their own, especially if they wanted to keep their place in the team.

Akira especially looked determined. Seeing that Ken had been paired up with Yuta, the starting catcher, told him just how much the coach valued Ken. This served to light a fire under him, forcing him to evaluate his behavior.

"I've been wanting to catch your pitches... To think I'd get an opportunity so soon." Yuta said with a friendly smile, patting Ken on the back.

Ken smiled in response, feeling his excitement peak. Yuta was liked by everyone on the team thanks to his agreeable personality and friendly demeanor. However, Ken knew just how hard he worked, especially when it came to researching opponents.

"Let's get some work in." He replied.

Just like that, the training commenced.

After around 20 pitches the coach switched up the teams. This happened another 4 times, bringing the total number of pitches close to 130.

Both Akira and Shogo were showing visible signs of fatigue, their pitches becoming slower and less accurate. Ken on the other hand, felt as if he could pitch another 100 more.

"Ken, Akira, Shogo, go and ice your shoulders. Catchers go and join the tail end of the fielders drills."

Before Yuta could leave Coach Hanada tapped him on the shoulder, telling him to stay back. They waited in silence until the rest of the players left before speaking.

"So what do you think?"

Yuta's easygoing expression hardened a little before answering. "All I can say is he's a monster... Not only was he fast, he was consistently so, even as the pitch count got higher and higher."

"With both his stamina and speed, he is only lacking in control. If he were to master that, we might just have the best High School pitcher in Japan..."

The coach was a little shocked with Yuta's high praise, especially since the guy was a research nut. He probably knew every notable pitcher that was still in high school right now thanks to his obsession with scouting potential problems for the team.

However, he had to agree with him for now. While there were some other 3rd year students who could pitch faster than Ken, they would generally run out of stamina rather quickly compared to others.

This was due to the physiology of teenagers. Their bodies were still growing, therefore they did not have the muscle mass to persist at the same level for 100+ pitches.

"Do you think he'll be ready in 2 months for the prefecture tournament?" Coach Hanada asked seriously.

"I need to see if he is consistent enough first. If he's not a hard worker then it will just be a waste of—"

Yuta's words were cut off by the sound of a ball hitting the net. Both he and the coach looked over to see Ken just finishing up his pitching action before grabbing another ball from the bucket next to him.

"Just a few more to reach 150." Ken mumbled, wanting to meet his mission goal for the day.

Silence stretched out between the two before they both looked at each other and smiled wryly.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 111 - 111: Decisions (1)

"Nice pitch!"

The shout of a boy rang out in the bull pen, barely audible over the constant sounds of ball striking leather. There were 8 youths total, 4 catchers and 4 pitchers paired up and seriously working on their craft.

The boy who shouted earlier stood up from his position and headed over to the pitcher. He had short black hair with wide shoulders and a broad chest, which looked even more exaggerated thanks to the chest protector secured tightly upon him.

"That was perfect Kouichi. If you can start pitching like this from the beginning, there will be no issues with you getting some play time at nationals."

The boy named Kouichi let out a smile of appreciation, "Thanks Daichi. But shouldn't you be catching for Yatsuo? You'll be the starting catcher soon after all."

He was concerned that Daichi may be leaving himself open to criticism by training with him instead of the 3rd year Ace. Of course he was happy for the help, but he didn't want his friend to suffer.

Since receiving the Ace position from Ken last year, Kouichi had felt his confidence and ambitions soar. This was especially true after receiving his mentoring from Ken's father and winning the Kanto tournament.

In fact, this was the reason why he had received a scholarship offer from Osaka Toin in the first place. However, upon arriving he was met with a bit of culture shock.

Players were required to train both before school and after, not to mention during holidays. It was as if he was in a professional club, surrounded by excellent players that were extremely talented.

While he had gained some level of confidence last year, it was a rude awakening seeing the level of talent that Osaka held.

Daichi chuckled and responded, "Yatsuo is still refusing to accept me as the next starting catcher."

"A-Ah that's not good..." Kouichi seemed anxious, not knowing how to react.

If they couldn't get along as a team, didn't that mean they would fail before they even got onto the pitch?

However, Daichi didn't seem too worried. He knew that Yatsuo was upset because he would be replacing his friend, his current catcher as a starter.

The thing was, he could tell that the guy was a professional. So as long as he could gain his acknowledgment through his skills, he would be accepted by all in the first team.

"Don't worry about Yatsuo. Just focus on improving yourself every day."

Daichi placed his hand on his friend's shoulder, patting it lightly.

"Oh that reminds me, what school did Ken join? Have you spoken to him since you left?"

At the mention of his brother, Daichi's face darkened. He responded with an abrupt no before placing the ball directly in Kouichi's glove and heading back to the other side of the bullpen.

'Ah crap, I forgot.' Kouichi cringed inwardly, admonishing himself.

A few weeks earlier, Daichi had gone to the coach's office as he was instructed after practice. Thanks to his punctual personality, he was around 5 minutes earlier than scheduled.

He saw a well-dressed man with his back turned to the door, leaning over the coach's table. Since it seemed like he and the coach were in a discussion, Daichi was about to turn around and leave until he heard something.

"Argh, we're going to be weak at first base once again this year. We could place Yamada at 1st, but his batting is too much of a liability." The coach sighed deeply.

"Naoki, I remember you saying that you had found a perfect candidate. Ken wasn't it?"

The well-dressed man let out a small sigh, this was always the hardest part for him, looking over the gaps in the lineup for the coming season.

"Yeah, but he rejected my offer. It's a real shame, I thought for sure he would join considering his brother is on the team already." Naoki sighed once again.

Daichi froze, feeling everything around him go silent. His mind felt numb and before he knew it, he had already turned around to leave.

"Does he not get along with his brother?"

"Ah, maybe it was because of that other thing I said..." Naoki admitted, feeling a little embarrassed.

"Which was what exactly?" The coach sounded suspicious in his response.

"He actually tried out as a pitcher, but I could already tell that he wouldn't make it far. I told him to give up pitching."

"Was he really that bad at pitching that you would tell him to give up?" He sounded a little regretful, but that was about it.

"Err, well you see..."

Naoki then explained what had happened when he watched the Kanto prefecture finals at Yokohama stadium. Where he met Chris and saw the trio of Ken, Daichi and Kouichi masterfully play and clinch the win against Seigakuin.

He also mentioned that Ken was originally a right hander, however it was evident that he had injured his right shoulder.

"Ah, so his injury was bad enough that it effected his pitching. Such a shame." The coach commented, thinking that it might really have been in the best interest if he gave up pitching.

Naoki fidgeted a little, feeling uncomfortable with the coach's assumption. "Actually... He was throwing and pitching with his left arm when he came to tryouts."

"Huh? Left handed?"

"Y-Yeah."

There was an awkward silence that crept through the room as the coach stared at Naoki with a look mixed with both shock and disbelief.

"So you're telling me that in the six months between the finals of the Kanto tournament and our tryouts that this kid switched to left handed throwing? Not only that, he was also pitching?" The coaches words were calm, yet there was a dangerous undertone.

"Yes sir." Naoki replied, feeling anxious.

"And you're saying that despite all this, he was a good enough player for you to offer a full scholarship to?"

"Y-Yes..."

Another bout of silence ensued, followed by a long sigh. Instead of frustration, it was resignation and disappointment.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

- Chapter 112 - 112: Decisions (2)

Chapter 112 - 112: Decisions (2)

'If only I was there, we might have been able to secure such a player.' The coach lamented inwardly.

Since the team was deep within the qualifiers for spring Koshien at the time, he was too busy with the main squad to attend the open tryouts. He also trusted his scouts and assistant coaches to select the right players for the team.

But apparently he might have given them a bit too much credit. His gaze turned to Naoki, the well-dressed man in front of him.

"Naoki. I probably don't need to tell you, but anyone who could learn to play with the opposite hand in such a time frame is a genius. Let's not mention the talent aspect, just the will and determination to do such a thing in order to continue playing baseball speaks volumes about their work ethic and character."

The coach stood up from his chair, feeling as if he had aged 10 years from this conversation. He turned around and stared out the window at the players who were cleaning up the training field and finishing up for the day.

Only after deeply sighing once more did the coach speak up again.

"I can't blame the kid for rejecting your offer. With that much resolve, he wouldn't give up on himself no matter what anyone said to him. Looks like we missed out on a good player."

Only now did Naoki understand what kind of situation he had gotten himself into. He thought that he was doing the kid a favor by telling him to give up pitching, even offering a spot on the team as a bonus.

However, he now knew just how egocentric he was at this moment. Not only did he stomp on the kids resolve, he probably insulted him greatly.

"I hope that he's still fighting to get better." Naoki said after a while, feeling regret at his actions.

By the time Daichi got a hold of his senses, he was already standing out the front of his dorm room. He had unknowingly walked all the way from the coaches office in a daze after overhearing what he probably shouldn't have.

He clenched his fist tightly, feeling a mix of hurt and frustration.

'Why didn't he just tell me? Aren't we brothers?'

'I don't understand...'

This wasn't the first time that Ken had withheld information from him, but this time certainly hurt more than the last. He likely would have been kept in the dark if he didn't just so happen to overhear the coach's conversation.

"Daichi are you ready?"

Back in the present Kouichi yelled out, snapping him out of his thoughts.

"Y-yeah go ahead."

The sound of the school bell rang out, followed by the hurried footsteps of students who were happy to finish for the day. Almost a month had passed since the start of the school year, so most of the first years had begun to settle in.

Ken didn't seem to hear the bell as he stared out the window of the classroom like all those years ago, deep in thought. He was currently torn, not knowing what direction to take moving forward.

His transition into the team had been seamless, likely thanks to his prior knowledge of his teammates and some help from his Charismatic air skill. However, Ken was met with a dilemma.

He wanted to win nationals this summer without a doubt, after all, his parents livelihood was on the line. For this, it wasn't just himself that needed to improve, he needed his teammates to get better.

"Ken, aren't you coming?" Shiro asked, tapping his shoulder.

"Hmm?" Ken finally turned around and saw that the whole class was already in the midst of leaving, apart from those who were on clean-up duties.

He thought for a moment before answering, "You go ahead. I need to do something real quick."

Shiro thought it was odd, however he decided to do as he was told. It wasn't the first time that Ken had been so deep in thought that he ignored the happenings around him.

Ken waited till Shiro left before getting up and grabbing his things.

"It's for the best..." He mumbled, his expression now full of resolution.

With that, he made his way out of the classroom and into the hall.

Ai Koyama watched as the tall and handsome boy left the classroom, her thoughts in disarray. After having joined the baseball club as a manager, she thought that she'd be able to see Ken a lot more, even interact with him on a regular basis. But that was just not the case.

Her expression turned to one of disappointment after once again not being able to converse with him.

Whenever he was training, he never looked her way and he always seemed so intent on getting better. Yet this was precisely the kind of thing that drew her to him.

She didn't like those guys who chased after her, the ones that wanted her only for her looks. Ai wanted a man who was driven and passionate, someone who had a goal.

Ai ran her fingers through the ends of her hair, thinking about her ideal man. The more she thought about it, the more Ken's tall and well toned figure appeared in her mind, causing her to blush even more.

Unaware of his admirer who remained in the classroom, Ken walked towards the faculty office with purpose. With his long legs he was able to make it to the end of the hall on the first floor in time.

He happened to arrive just as Coach Hanada was about to enter.

"Coach, do you have a moment?"

"Ah." Coach Hanada almost jumped in fright, seeing the boy who was taller than him suddenly appear.

He grabbed his heart, something he had been doing often when seeing Ken.

"Oh... It's you Ken. Sure come over to my desk." He gestured, entering through the door.

Ken followed, moving through the small spaces between the desks until they reached the desk near the window in the back corner. He appreciated the organized folders and files stacked neatly upon the small surface.

"What can I do for you Ken? Is this about the Ace position? I know you're only a first year, but trust me I know you can do it. You have the skills to take us deep into nationals." Coach Hanada said, his tone sounding a little anxious.

Ken shook his head, "No Coach, this isn't about that. I'm happy that you chose me to be the Ace."

The coach breathed out a sigh of relief, feeling a weight lifted off his shoulders. He was aware of how much pressure was placed upon the Ace of a team, especially if that player was only a first year.

However, his mind faltered after hearing Ken's next words.

"Yusuke has a serious injury, I'm afraid if he doesn't get it looked at soon it might ruin his chances of playing for life."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 113 - 113: Intervention (1)

On the training field, everyone was going through a bunch of drills with the setting sun on their back. Since it was spring, the air was beginning to warm up with the approach of summer.

The teens dripped with sweat as they called out to each other, working on their skills and unity as a team.

Coach Hanada's expression was graced with his usual poker face as he watched his team practice with the assistant coaches. However, judging by the metronome-like tapping of his pen on the clipboard, it was clear that he was anxious about something.

His eyes continuously moved between two students amongst the training drills. One was a tall and long-limbed teen with a serious expression and the other was average height, yet his body looked to be filled with power.

He saw the face of the latter wince for a moment after bending down to pick up a ground ball in stride, however he quickly hid his expression a moment later and threw the ball back to the player on base.

"Haaaahh" The coach let out a deep sigh, feeling a bad taste in his mouth.

'I hope it's not as serious as Ken says.'

First and foremost, Seiji Hanada was focused on providing a safe, fun and competitive environment for players to enjoy their school lives. Of course he also wanted to coach a team that could aim for nationals.

While he liked to think of himself as a good coach, his real skill was evaluating talents. Something that had been honed through his 15 year tenure in professional baseball clubs.

Which was why he instantly saw the 3 shining stars of the new batch of first years. The blinding Ken, the steady Shiro and the dark star Yusuke.

His eyes set upon the talented youngster who seemed to be shrouded, as if something was preventing him from living up to his full potential. The coach always felt there was something, but he could never put his finger on it.

However, now that Ken had pointed it out, it was staring him right in the face. He'd only been watching Yusuke for a few minutes before he could already see wincing of pain, or a slight hobble during movements.

"Okay nice work everyone!" The coach yelled out, getting everyone's attention.

Hearing the coach's voice, some people let out sighs of relief while others didn't seem satisfied just yet. Surprisingly, Akira was one of the players who didn't feel as if training was long enough.

Ken turned his attention to the coach, hoping that he would take heed of his words earlier that afternoon. However he felt confident. After all, the man that he knew in his previous life would never let a student play and risk his entire future.

"Let's do some stretches and cool down before we head home. Find a partner and work together."

Shiro as usual gravitated towards Ken.

"Yusuke, I'll be your partner." The coach said, heading over to a corner of the field.

Yusuke was surprised, however he still agreed and followed shortly after. They had yet to officially nominate the starting team, so he was hopeful that the coach wanted to talk to him about this.

Ken stood in place, watching the two before letting out a sigh.

After completing his stretches, Ken turned only to see Yusuke with his head down, still listening to the coach. The coach stood up and patted him gently on the shoulder before walking off, his poker face once again plastered on.

As the instigator of the situation, Ken felt rather guilty, however he believed that Yusuke would be thankful for this in the future.

Just as he was about to retreat to the locker room, he saw Yusuke walking over towards him.

"Let's talk over here." Ken said, without letting him speak.

A look of surprise appeared on his face before realization suddenly hit. The look in Ken's face told him that he already knew something, did that mean he was the one who ratted him out to the coach?

A burst of anger assaulted his psyche, causing him to grit his teeth and clench his fists. However, he still followed Ken to the edge of the field.

When they finally arrived, Ken turned around and stared at Yusuke who looked as if he was about to snap.

"What is it you wanna talk about?" Ken's face was void of expression, almost looking disinterested.

This only served to piss Yusuke off even more.

"Was it you? Did you tell the coach that I have an injured knee?"

The words were full of emotion, portraying the betrayal that he felt in that moment.

"And if it was?"

"Y-You!"

Without warning, Yusuke grabbed onto the front of Ken's uniform and pushed him back into the fence. Thanks to his height, Ken could still see the boy's expression, one of hurt and frustration.

"What gives you the right to do such a thing? Why has the coach barred me from the club until I get approval from a doctor?"

He didn't wait for Ken to respond before continuing to yell at him. "Tell me... Do you feel so threatened that I might outshine you that you would sabotage me like this? TELL ME!"

The commotion seemed to attract the attention of all the other players, causing them to turn to their direction. Coach Hanada also saw what was happening and was about to yell out, however he stopped after seeing Ken raise a hand in his direction, waving him off.

"Is that what you really think Yusuke?"

Ken's deep voice broke the silence, barely audible above the warm afternoon breeze.

Instead of continuing to yell, Yusuke felt his eyes tear up in frustration as he held onto Ken's shirt like a vice grip. He stared right into the calm and seemingly uncaring face of Ken, his mind in turmoil.

"No..." He finally uttered, loosening his grip and dropping his head.

Seeing this, Ken relaxed a little. After the outburst, Yusuke must have been feeling drained.

"Good."

Ken straightened the creases on his uniform and looked up at the crowd that was staring his way. He shot them a glare, essentially telling them to mind their own business.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 114 - 114: Intervention (2)

Thankfully, Yuta with his excellent emotional intelligence was able to read the atmosphere and began to move everyone along.

It was only when everyone had left that Ken spoke up to the vulnerable kid in front of him. This was someone that reminded him of himself in his previous life, a naive kid who just wanted to play baseball with everyone.

Even now he still held vestiges of his former self, however he had matured. After learning the hard way, he had been given another chance to rewrite his story, one where he could be a better person, a better son.

Most of all, he would use this chance to achieve his dream of becoming a professional baseball player and live without regrets. If he could also pull up others with him, then there's no way he would just sit idly by and allow them to drown.

He already knew what it was like to lose baseball, it was pure misery. So Ken could not in good conscience allow Yusuke to continue on the same path, not if he had the power to change it.

Ken placed his hand on Yusuke's shoulder and spoke.

"Do us all a favor and get your knee checked out. You have a bright future, there's no way I'd let an injury get in the way of our rivalry."

Yusuke flinched at these words, slowly raising his head and looking Ken in the eye. He was shocked to hear such a declaration from this person's mouth.

This past month he had been chasing after Ken in everything. Running, fielding, batting... But Ken was always far ahead, his tall frame blocking out even the sun.

No that wasn't it. He was the shining star ahead, drawing all eyes towards him with his amazing work ethic and talent, leaving people like him in the dust.

He saw it the first time they met in the locker room. The bright light that emanated from the man in front of him, threatening to blind him if he stared too long.

'He thinks I'm his rival?'

Yusuke was speechless.

Once again tears began to form on the edge of his eyes, however for a completely different reason. He wiped them with the back of his hand and finally composed himself.

"Okay I'll do it." Yusuke replied.

Two days later in the faculty office, Ken once again found himself at the coach's desk however this time it was Coach Hanada who had requested him.

Seiji Hanada closed the folder on his desk and carefully put it aside in the correct pile. His meticulous attention to detail was evident purely by the clean and organized state he kept his workspace in.

He let out a sigh, before finally turning to the tall student on his left.

Before speaking a word, he took a closer look at him, as if trying to figure out his secrets. Yet a few moments later he shook his head and chastised himself.

'There's no way he could have known, it was just a lucky coincidence.'

Saying these words in his mind seemed to calm him down a little, allowing the coach to finally broach the subject.

"I just got word from Yusuke's family this morning. They've found a tumor in his left knee which had been pressing against the ligaments and causing inflammation."

"Oh my goodness." Ken placed his hand over his mouth, doing his best to act surprised considering he was already aware of this information thanks to the system.

"They've schedule surgery for tomorrow to remove the thing. Thankfully it was caught early otherwise things could have gotten much worse." The coach said gravely.

Ken paused for a moment, his curiosity getting the better of him.

"What would have happened if they didn't locate it?"

"Well, they didn't go into specific details. But if Yusuke had continued to train, the tumor could have grown in size or even spread further, compromising his leg. Worst case, it could have ruptured and caused life threatening injuries if it was malignant."

"Thank god that you stepped in coach." Ken said with relief tinged in his voice, this time he wasn't acting.

He wasn't sure what effect his new actions would have in this life, therefore after hearing the worst case scenario of life threatening injuries, he was glad that they stepped in before it got bad.

Coach Hanada shook his head, feeling a bit uncomfortable with the compliment.

"It was you Ken, you're the reason why Yusuke will no longer be in danger." The coach was full of smiles as he said this.

"Chris has raised a great son. Not only are you hard working, you also look out for your teammates in practice, guiding them when they're in need. Even Akira has started to mirror your work ethic, something I would never have thought possible."

At this praise, Ken was flabbergasted. Of course he felt great being complimented, especially since this was his coach who he deeply respected since his previous life. Yet inwardly he felt unworthy.

'I still have my flaws.' He admitted to himself.

"Anyway. What I'm saying is that next year I'm thinking about appointing you as captain."

"Huh?" Ken's train of thought was abruptly halted after hearing the admission. He stared at the coach in disbelief.

"Hahaha! No need to look so surprised my boy. Just keep training like usual and take us to nationals alright Ace?" The coach seemed to enjoy seeing the shocked look upon Ken's face, since it had usually been himself always being shocked by Ken.

After a pause, Ken managed to compose himself and responded with a slight bow. "Yes sir!"

Once the conversation was done, the two headed down to the field for today's practice. The coach had to announce the news to the team about Yusuke's situation, however he spared the nitty gritty details.

Since no one knew of the seriousness of the injury there was not too much commotion. Ken received a few looks his way thanks to the public incident on the field between himself and Yusuke a couple of days ago.

However like the coach, he employed a poker face, yet his left much to be desired.

Feeling the eyes on him, Ken inwardly wished he could receive a poker face skill from the lottery wheel, it would surely save him a lot of hassles in the future.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 115 - 115: The Three Managers (1)

"Haaaahh. I can already feel that summer is coming."

A girl with long brown hair tied up in a bun commented, fanning her face while hiding in the shade of a tree. She was wearing a shirt with the characters for manager written on the back.

"Yuko, won't we get in trouble for sitting around and doing nothing like this?"

Next to her was a budding woman with long and sleek black hair tied neatly in a ponytail. Her blue eyes seemed worried as she voiced her anxiety.

"Ai, you should know by now that Yuko doesn't care since she's in her final year of high school. I'm sure she never even wanted to be a manager to begin with"

To her left, another teen appeared and handed them both a drink from the vending machine. She had a warm smile on her face with cute dimples that accentuated her cuteness.

"But Kaori, why would she even join if she didn't want to be a manager?"

Both Kaori and Yuko turned their attention to the newest manager, a knowing smile forming on their faces.

"Oh you know, the same reason as you." Yuko replied, sending a wink her way.

Ai's face reddened, however she tried to play it cool. "W-What do you mean? I'm here so I can support the team on the way to nationals."

Despite saying so, her large blue eyes betrayed her lie.

"Hey don't go and insult our intelligence girl." Kaori moved closer and nudged her gently with her elbow.

"We all know that you're here too look at a certain boy." She said with hint of playfulness and teasing in her tone.

Was she that obvious?

Thinking back to all the times she'd been looking at Ken throughout training made her embarrassment even worse. She quickly held her hands in her face, feeling it heat up.

Seeing this, both Kaori and Yuko giggled. Their favorite past time was to tease their cute little junior.

However there was no malice, no bad intentions.

Yuko let out a deep sigh. "Two full years I've watched Yuta from the sidelines, yet nothing has happened. He is so friendly and approachable, yet he always seems to keep me at arms length."

Ai tilted her head, not expecting the sudden confession from her Senpai. She took another look at Yuko and evaluated her.

She was cute with deep green eyes hidden behind glasses, and shapely with a large bosom. Even Ai who had gone through significant growth in the past couple of years could not compare, making her feel a little envious.

'If Yuko had no success with someone she's been pursuing for two years, then what chance do I have?' She thought inwardly.

Kaori let out a sigh also, however it wasn't full of resignation, it was more like admiration. Her eyes were on the two second year twins who were dashing around the agility drills.

"Jun... He's just so cool." She murmured.

Yuko looked at the cute girl and couldn't help but bonk her on the head.

"Ah! What was that for Yuko!?" Small tears formed on the corner of her eyes, making her look like a cute puppy.

Yuko huffed, "Why are you even entertaining those Aoyama twins. Don't you know they're players?"

Hearing such blasphemy, Kaori puffed out her cheeks and instantly came to her crush's defense. "Jun is not like that! His brother is the one who dates everyone in school, Jun is a little shy despite being an identical twin."

"Ah... Sorry." Yuko recognized her mistake and quickly apologized.

Their antics seemed to amuse Ai who let out a chuckle, covering her mouth to not make it obvious.

However, this did not work. The laugh got the attention of the two other managers.

"Oho. You can afford to laugh young lady?"

Ai felt an aura surrounding both the women, making her regret her actions.

She panicked, quickly bowing her head to apologize. However, the two laughed shortly after at her cute reactions. Ai was pulled into a hug, feeling the warmth and camaraderie that she wasn't used to.

"By the way, why do you even need to chase after guys? I heard you've already been confessed to 3 times in the first month of high school." Kaori asked Ai.

"What!? 3 times already?" Yuko was shocked, feeling her own inadequacy hit her hard. It was a devastating blow.

Unaware of the crisis Yuko was currently experiencing, Ai's face turned a little sour.

"I didn't know any of those people who confessed... What could they possibly know about me that would drive them to confess? My looks?" Ai scoffed, feeling a little vulnerable.

She turned towards Ken who was in the middle of pitching in the bullpen. His sharp jawline and serious expression spoke of how dedicated he was to improving his craft.

Ai didn't know why, but a big part of her wished to support him in any way she could. But she was afraid of distracting him, which was why she kept her distance, cheering him on from afar.

Both Kaori and Yuko looked at each other, seemingly understanding each other without words. They couldn't help but want to root for Ai.

"Hang in there Ai!" Kaori said, puffing air out of her nose.

"Yeah, keep working hard until he's forced to notice you." Yuko added, clenching her fist and holding it out.

Ai turned her head after hearing such words of encouragement, not expecting such a thing.

"You guys..."

"Mmm I'll do my best." She said, a beautiful smile creeping onto her face.

Ken who was on the mound in the bullpen suddenly felt as if he had eyes drilling into the side of his face. He quickly turned only to see the three managers jump up in shock and quickly act as if they were busy.

A look of confusion crept onto his face, however he shook his head a moment later. Now was not the time to get distracted, he still needed around another 50 pitches before he completed today's mission.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 116 - 116: The Three Managers (2)

Ken opened up his mission tab and checked on his progress.

#MISSION: Ascend to the Peak (part 1)

*Task: Throw 150 pitches both physically and in image training per day.

(103/150) Physical

(0/150) Image Training

TIME: 1 day remaining.

REWARDS:

>Gold Lottery Ticket

>Unlock Mission: Ascend to the Peak (part 2)

Just thinking about what he could get with the Gold Lottery ticket gave Ken a huge burst of motivation.

WHOOSH

PAH

Yuta felt his hand beginning to go numb as he caught another one of Ken's pitches. Remembering his comment almost a month ago to the coach where he was worried about Ken's work ethic, he suddenly felt exasperated.

If he had known that he would have to catch 150 pitches from this freak every day, he certainly wouldn't have brought it up.

It was weird, Ken would never stop until he reached the 150 pitch mark, even if it meant he had to change catchers. Yet he would never go above that mark.

'Perhaps he's sticking to the limits of his shoulder.' Yuta thought.

However, the fact that this guy could pitch so consistently even at a high pitch count, made him excited. At first the control was an issue, however it quickly improved, much faster than he anticipated.

"Yuta-Senpai, did you need a rest?" Ken called out, wiping the sweat from his brow.

"All good!" He replied with a stale smile.

'Damn this kid is relentless...'

After another 20 minutes or so, Ken was done with his pitches for today. He headed over to the bench and began looking for something.

A frown formed on his face as he began to sift through the bags.

"K-Ken here you go."

He heard a small voice to his left, breaking his focus.

"Ah, A-Ai..." Ken felt his face heat up out of reflex, seeing the long haired beauty dressed in the managers outfit. He had been so focused on training and the situation with Yusuke that he had barely noticed her since she started at the club.

He looked down to see exactly what he was looking for, the ice compress for his shoulder. Ken could see that it had already been filled with ice, meaning Ai had prepared it for him beforehand.

"Thanks."

A genuine smile formed on his face as he took it from her. However his expression stiffened once his hands brushed against hers, causing his face to redden once more.

"OH MY G—"

A sound came out from behind him, causing him to turn quickly. He caught the tail end of two women falling over behind a tree, creating quite a disturbance.

"Uh, I better go. Thanks again for the compress." Ken said, turning back to Ai.

"N-No problem. Great work out there."

As Ken jogged off, there was currently an argument being had behind the tree where the commotion was earlier.

"What the hell are you doing!? You interrupted Ai's moment!" Yuko was bonking Kaori on the head, chastising her for the outburst.

"I-I'm sowwy" She replied, tears running down her face.

Ai saw all this and couldn't help but laugh. Despite feeling a little awkward, she had finally worked up the courage to speak to Ken, even though she was being spied on by the other managers.

This was just the first step. She would continue to support him, until he finally noticed her as a woman.

"I'm home" Ken called out, taking his shoes off after heading through the door.

"Welcome home Kenny." Yuki called out from the kitchen.

Ken raised his nose in the air and took in the smell of his favorite meal. He walked into the kitchen and asked.

"Mmm is that curry?" He asked, feeling his stomach growl in anticipation.

"Sure is." She responded, turning to smile at her son. However in the next moment her face scrunched up.

"Go bath, you're ruining the delicious smell of the curry."

Yuki made a shooing motion as if he was a pest.

Ken could only laugh in response. He lifted up his shirt and gave it a smell, only to recoil right away.

'Damn, why is it that teenagers body odor smells so bad?' He commented inwardly. He could have sworn that he never used to smell this bad in the past.

"Okay okay, I'll go bath then."

Some time later, Ken relaxed on his bed, his stomach full of curry and rice. He was staring at the system window in front of him, just waiting for 9pm so he could enter the image training and finish his mission.

He always made sure to enter after 9pm, in case his mother walked in on his catatonic state. Ken did not know if he could be woken up during image training, or what the consequences would be if he was.

Therefore he strictly adhered to this rule.

The moment the clock struck 9, he pressed the button and found himself standing in Koshien stadium once again.

#PITCHING MISSIONS:

- > Pitch 500 strikes - 100 Major points [Complete]
- > Pitch 500 breaking balls - 100 Major points [Complete]
- > Pitch 125km/h 500 times - 100 Major points [Complete]
- > Pitch 130km/h 500 times - 100 Major points + Silver Lottery ticket [Complete]
- > Throw pick-offs 100 times - 100 Major points [Complete]
- > Strike-out AI Middle school (upgradeable) - 500 Major points + Silver Lottery ticket

He ran his eyes over the missions and smiled. Since he had been pitching at least 150 balls every night for the past 29 days, the only thing left was to strike out the AI.

Ken gathered himself, taking a few deep breaths. Today would be the day he would complete both the AI mission and the first Ascend to the Peak mission.

Having pitched almost 5000 pitches in 4 weeks, Ken was confident that he had made significant headway in this regard. The system too believed such, considering his pitching grade had skyrocketed to the A- grade in this time.

He had to thank the Disciplinarian skill, as well as his Doryoku skill for allowing him to progress so fast in such a little amount of time. Ken could already tell that the increase in grade allowed him to control where his pitches went far easier than before.

"Let's do this... Daichi!"

At his words, a plain-faced Daichi appeared in the batters box with his ugly batting form.

"Hehe."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 117 - 117: Spin the Wheel! (1)

[Mission Complete]

Received:

1000 Major Points

1 Silver Lottery Ticket

Ken exited the Image training with a smile on his face. He had finally completed the High School missions for pitching. However, that wasn't the only reason why he was in such a good mood.

#MISSION: Ascend to the Peak (part 1) [Complete]

*Task: Throw 150 pitches both physically and in image training per day.

TIME: 0 days remaining.

REWARDS:

>Gold Lottery Ticket [Claim reward]

>Unlock Mission: Ascend to the Peak (part 2)

"Hehehe, I got some good rewards today. First it was mom's curry, and now this."

Without messing around, Ken opened up the new mission.

#MISSION: Ascend to the Peak (part 2)

*Task: Swing your bat 500 times both physically and in image training per day.

TIME: 30 days remaining.

REWARDS:

>Gold Lottery Ticket

>Unlock Mission: Ascend to the Peak (part 3)

[Accept?]

[Y/N]

Seeing the new mission, Ken breathed out a sigh of relief. He originally thought that the next mission would require him to hit 150 balls a day or something, which would have been a problem.

He imagined having to go to the batting cages every day. Since it was around 400 yen per 20 balls, he would have had to spend at least 3200 yen a day which equated to \$20 USD. There was no way he could keep up that kind of expenditure for a month.

So seeing that he just needed to swing his bat was a relief.

'Enough about that, let's spin the wheel.'

In the blink of an eye, Ken already navigated to the silver lottery wheel and pressed the spin button.

The familiar spinning of the wheel only served to increase his excitement.

'Come on, give me another pitching skill.'

After a few moments, the wheel slowly came to a stop.

[Congratulations, you have received A-Grade Balance and Coordination Elixir]

Ken frowned.

"Damn it, I can't even use this?" he complained in a hushed tone.

Since his Balance and Coordination was already in the S grade, taking an A-Grade Elixir would have no benefits for him. This was literally the worst thing that he could possibly get.

Without hesitation, he selected the re-spin option and once again watched the wheel spin.

[Congratulations, you have received B-Grade Strength Elixir]

Ken blinked a few times, seeing the even crappier selection than what he had previously got, yet it was equally as useless.

[SYSTEM HAS DETECTED ELIXIR WILL HAVE NO EFFECT ON USER. WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONVERT INTO MAJOR POINTS?]

[Y/N]

"Oh? That's a thing?" He mumbled.

He was a little annoyed that the option didn't come up when he had received the A-Grade elixir, but that was probably because he still had a re-spin remaining.

Without thinking too much, he selected Yes considering it had no other uses.

[User has been credited with 500 Major Points]

Ken thought that was not too bad, at least until he remembered that a silver lottery ticket cost 1500 major points in the system shop.

"Give me back my tickett~" He lamented.

Soon after he was able to snap out of his depression and finally used his last Silver Ticket.

[Congratulations, you have received Skill: Lively fastball]

Lively Fastball: Your fastballs will come alive, moving unpredictably through the air. Requires flexible fingers and exceptional motor control.

"Yes!" Ken fist pumped, trying his best not to make too much noise.

This was exactly what he needed right now, adding another layer of unpredictability to his pitches.

All he currently had in his arsenal was speed and the forkball. While this may be enough to get into nationals, he was certain that players like Daichi would be able to hit him as long as they faced enough of his pitches.

In a standard 9 innings game, the opposing batters would face him at least 3 times. Now that he received the Lively Fastball skill, he wasn't worried about being predictable.

Even this evening when he went up against the middle-school level AI, he failed one time before passing. Just remembering the horrible form of Daichi smacking his best pitch packing for a single made him slightly annoyed.

'That won't be a problem next time' Ken grinned widely, his mind running wild.

Caught up in his imagination of striking out Daichi at Nationals, he forgot about the biggest prize from his mission. The Gold Lottery Ticket.

'Hehehehe, how'd you like that pitch Naoki?' Fantasizing about the expression on the scout's face when he threw a 145km/h fastball down the lane only made his grin continue to grow wider.

[USER STILL HAS A GOLD TICKET REMAINING. WOULD YOU LIKE TO SPIN?]

It seemed that even the system was getting impatient, as it sent him a notification to hurry the hell up.

"Ah crap, I almost forgot."

Wiping the drool off the side of his mouth, Ken moved to the golden wheel and clicked the spin button without any fanfare. He was curious as to what gifts the ticket would bring him this time, as each reward had been better than the last.

Ken held his breath as the wheel began to slow down on its own.

DING

[Congratulations, you have learned the "Training Plan" function.]

Training Plan: Formulate a training plan for yourself or others to improve. Costs Major points depending on what is needed to be improved.

'So it's another function? Just like Identify?' Ken mused inwardly.

It seemed that he could unlock system functions only through the Gold lottery tickets. Identify allowed him to see what the potential and stats of players were, while this Training Plan function made it so he could help them improve.

'Isn't this exactly what I needed right now?'

Since his goal was to win nationals, he needed his teammates to improve alongside him if he wanted a decent chance. The system had not only given him the "Ascend to the Peak" mission line, but it also graced him with the means to improve his teammates.

Any and all resentment from being given a B-Grade Elixir earlier was forgotten. Ken even sent a wordless prayer to the system, asking for forgiveness for his earlier transgressions.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 118 - 118: Spin the Wheel! (2)

'With this I can work with the coach and design ideal training plans for our players.'

Ken's head was instantly filled with fanciful ideas of building up a professional squad out of a High School team.

Of course not all the players had the potential to be pro's, but that didn't mean they couldn't be good enough to win nationals.

"Arghh I'm fired up!"

This time, Ken seemed to have forgotten it was currently 12am and his mother was sleeping. He paled when he suddenly heard the footsteps of his mother thundering towards his room.

'Oh crap...'

He heard the door creak open slowly, feeling a dark aura pour in through the doorway.

"Kennnnnyyyyy~" The voice of his mother sounded like a ghoul, causing the hairs on his body to stand up.

Ken gripped his bedsheets up to his chin, fear evident in his features.

"M-M-Mom I'm sorry! I got too caught up read—"

"GO TO SLEEP!"

"EEK"

The sound of the door slamming caused the room to almost visibly shake, or perhaps that was Ken shivering in fear that made it appear so.

He had almost forgotten just how scary his mother was if she didn't get enough sleep. Even his father who was one of the bravest men he knew, would make his presence scarce whenever this occurred.

Once his beating heart finally calmed down, Ken decided it was no longer worth the risk of staying up so he decided to go to sleep.

The next morning Ken woke up at the usual time, feeling a little out of sorts. Thanks to using the Image Training every night for the past month, he had only been sleeping for around 5 hours every night.

'I guess my sleeping pattern is catching up with me.' He remarked, rubbing his bleary eyes.

He got up and washed his face, sluggishly getting changed into his workout gear.

"Morning Mom." Ken said sleepily, on his way to the front door.

Eerie silence was the response, causing him to pause his steps. He could feel a dangerous aura behind him, silently screaming at him to not turn around.

"I-I'm going out for a run..." He said in a panicked voice, quickly picking up pace and running out the door without even stopping to put his shoes on.

It wasn't until he closed the door that Ken breathed out a sigh of relief.

"That was scary... I might go a different route this morning and take my time."

Ken put his shoes on and started his run. Thanks to it being spring, the sun was beginning to rise a little earlier in the day, however it was still rather dark at this time.

He always felt alive on his morning runs, allowing his body to warm up and embrace the day. Yet ever since Daichi had left for Osaka, his run had been a little lonely.

If it wasn't for his determination to get better, it might have been a lot harder to keep up this kind of consistency. But once he got into the rhythm, it allowed his mind to roam free.

'Ah, I should really test out this new Training Program function on myself.'

During his run, Ken remembered that he could also use his new function on himself.

[TRAINING PLAN]

PLEASE SELECT A SKILL YOU WISH TO IMPROVE:

>Pitching: A- [500 Major Points]

>Fielding: B- [100 Major Points]

>Balance and Coordination: S [10,000 Major Points]

>Agility: A+ [2000 Major Points]

>Strength: A [1000 Major Points]

>Stamina: S [10,000 Major Points]

The first thing he noticed was how exaggerated the cost was.

'Isn't this just to make a training plan for improving a skill? So why is it so expensive?'

He stared at the list in front of him for a while, not sure of what decision to make. If he assumed making it to S grade gave additional rewards, then the best course of action would be to upgrade his Agility.

However, this was quite costly. Agility also wasn't a much needed skill for his position as a pitcher.

Of course it would have impacts on his ability to run between bases, but he hadn't even talked to the coach about where he was in the batting line up. If he was a lead-off hitter, it might make sense to choose this.

This led to another point, just how much would it cost to create training plans for his teammates? If they were as expensive as his own, then could he afford to spend his major points on himself?

It would make more sense to dedicate his Major points into strengthening the team, giving them the best chance of winning nationals.

With these thoughts in his mind, Ken decided to dismiss the window for now until he learned some more information.

CRASH

THUD

Ken felt a bout of pain as he crashed into something hard, causing him to tumble unceremoniously to the ground. He had been so focused on the system window in front of him that he had not even been paying attention on the path in front.

Since the sun was barely peaking over the horizon, it did not help his circumstances.

"Argh damn that sucked." He admitted, standing up and dusting himself off.

He turned his head to try and see what he had run into, only for his body to seize up.

"I'm so sorry! A-Are you okay?"

A beautiful yet soft voice full of concern rang out, causing Ken to flinch in response.

'A-Ai!? What is she doing here?'

Ken was dumbstruck. How could he have done such an embarrassing thing in front of this girl of all people.

"Ken is that you?" She asked, however in the next moment her voice turned to panic.

"A-Ah Ken, are you injured? Oh no, what happens if you can't play baseball because of me?"

She began to fuss, checking him over for injuries. Since the situation was so urgent, she completely forgot about her usual shyness.

Ken felt a little weird being fussed over by someone that was not his mother, but he was still too stunned to talk. He saw that a bicycle was on the ground, along with some bags which had spilled out in the collision.

'Crap, I must have run into her while she was riding.'

There was fresh bread and pastries on the path, but the thing that caught his eye was the blood on Ai's elbow, likely where she had made contact with the ground.

'T-This girl is hurt, but she's the one checking over me without even complaining.'

Only after a few moments was he able to speak up.

"I'm fine, don't worry about me. Let me see your arm." He said after working up the courage.

He grabbed her arm gently, surveying the scrape which marred her beautiful pale skin. The girl flinched in response, not expecting the sudden physical contact. Yet after feeling the strong yet gentle hands on her, she relaxed.

"O-Ow."

"Sorry! Come, let's head to my place and get you patched up. My mom has a first aid kit." Ken replied.

"Ah... But my bike." Ai looked at her bike which seemed to have seen better days, it was likely she wouldn't be able to ride it like this.

"Ah! The pastries and bread... I was meant to deliver them to Mrs. Masuda."

Ken instantly felt embarrassed, having caused all this mess. However, he quickly made a decision and bent down to pick up the bike, slinging it over his shoulder and carrying it like a bag.

He also collected the bags of bread and pastries and handed it to the girl beside him.

"Let's drop these off and head back to my place."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 119 - 119: Morning Walk (1)

As the sun began to rise on the horizon, two figures cast long shadows as they walked toward their destination. One was tall and wearing workout gear while slinging a pink bicycle on his shoulder, while the other was carrying bags full of baked goods.

While the scene might look romantic from an outsider perspective, the two people in particular were dead silent. Only the sound of their footsteps and the rattling of the incapacitated bike rang in their ears.

Ai was currently staring at the ground as she walked forward, her cheeks flushed in embarrassment. She didn't know what to say to break the silence that she felt was picking away at her sanity.

Ken on the other hand was mortified.

'How could I have been so stupid...'

He blamed himself for hurting the woman beside him, even if the wound was just superficial. Caught up in his own thoughts, he didn't realize the atmosphere had become so unbearable.

"S-So..." Ai stammered, raising her head to look at the boy beside her.

Seeing his stoic face and the lack of reaction to her voice, she couldn't bring herself to continue speaking. Instead she just gazed at him, appreciating the chiseled jaw and some of the foreign yet appealing features on his face.

'Now that I see him up close, he's even more handsome.'

Ai's cheeks suddenly felt on fire as she realized what she was thinking.

As if feeling the gaze on him, Ken turned, only to see Ai's beautiful blue eyes staring at him. This only lasted for a moment before both turned away, blushing.

'Argh damn it. Is this some kind of Shoji manga?

He chastised himself for putting on such an embarrassing face. However, it didn't seem like he had much choice in the matter considering his body was reacting on its own.

Being accompanied by the woman he had a mega crush on in his previous life seemed to be enough for his hormones to go out of control.

Despite having the mental age of a 24 year old, he was in fact still unaccustomed to the fairer sex. Therefore he honestly did not know how to act in front of Ai.

'Damn, this is more pressure than the bases loaded with 2 outs in the bottom of the 9th innings...'

"Um Ken." Ai's gentle voice called out to him as she stopped in place.

"Y-Yes?" Ken turned around, his heart skipping a beat.

"This is Mrs. Masuda's house." She said, pointing to an apartment he had just walked past.

"Oh... I'll wait here for you then."

He inwardly sighed, feeling exasperated at his lack of social skills. Just what kind of man was he if he couldn't hold a conversation with a 16 year old girl.

Ai walked up and buzzed the doorbell. It wasn't long until an older woman arrived at the door to collect the bag of pastries with a smile.

She tried to give money to Ai, however she politely declined, stating that her parents had said this delivery was on the house. Unfortunately, she underestimated the wily tactics of Grandma's when trying giving away money.

"Honey, take this money and go treat you and your boyfriend to some nice breakfast."

"W-What are you saying, w-we're not a c-c-couple!"

Mrs. Masuda's eyes narrowed in response, her whole body poised to act.

In the moment of Ai's flustered denial of their relationship status, the Grandma swooped in and placed the money in Ai's breast pocket. Then in a matter of untold speed, she ran in the door with pastries in-hand and slammed it shut, leaving the girl bewildered on the front porch.

Ken's eyes widened in shock. He was pretty sure that this Grandma would give the Aoyama twins a run for their money with her acceleration speed.

He had half a mind to try using Identify on her.

"Pfft HAHA—"

Seeing the crestfallen look on Ai's face, along with the whole situation, Ken couldn't help but stifle a laugh, quickly placing his hands over his mouth.

Ai turned her head to look over at Ken and saw him trying to hide his laugh. Instead of being angry, she also found the whole situation to be ridiculous.

A smile crept onto her face as she gazed at him.

'So he has this kind of side too?' she thought inwardly.

Ever since noticing him, Ai had only seen the hard working and dedicated Ken. This was the first time seeing that he could also laugh at silly things and have fun.

Subconsciously, she began to relax.

On her way past Ken, she nudged him with her shoulder and stuck out her tongue.

Ken froze for a moment, not expecting such a reaction. However, he suddenly felt a lot less awkward around her.

The two continued to walk along the path, this time feeling a little closer. Ken even took the initiative to begin the conversation.

"Wow, who would have thought that Grandma Masuda had such agility."

Ai nodded, "She actually used to practice ninjutsu in her younger years."

"What!? She was a ninja?" Ken almost dropped the pink bicycle on his back in shock.

"Pfft.. Hahahaha"

A velvety laugh poured out of the girl beside him as she began to clutch her sides and giggle to her hearts content. The laugh was infectious, causing a smile to subconsciously appear on Ken's face.

It was then that he knew, he had been duped.

"Ha ha ha." Ken laughed sarcastically, however he was inwardly surprised and impressed at the same time. Even though he pursued Ai in his past life, he had never witnessed this side of her.

The two continued to talk back and forth for the remaining 20 minutes of the journey back to Ken's house. Since the ice had been broken, it was as if the two were old friends, sharing their interests and blabbing about anything and everything.

Ken learned that Ai's parents ran a bakery and she often delivered pastries in the morning. This was news to him since he had been running every morning for almost an entire year.

Now that he thought about it, he had decided to run a different route this morning for some reason. Since his mind was feeling all fluffy, he couldn't quite remember why he had chosen to do so.

Ai also loved western fashion and even made her own clothes in her spare time.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 120 - 120: Morning Walk (2)

Ken couldn't contribute too much to the conversation outside of his love for baseball. He did talk about Daichi joining his family, however he left out the specifics of his abusive mother, feeling it was a little too heavy for their first proper conversation.

Soon enough, the duo arrived in front of Ken's house.

Ken carefully placed the bicycle on the ground and asked Ai to wait there for a moment.

"Mom, I'm home."

After opening the door, Ken called out to his mother. However, a moment later he suddenly felt a familiar dangerous aura coming from the kitchen, causing him to freeze on the spot.

'Damn it! I forgot that mom was in that mood.'

Ken panicked, trying to figure out what to do next.

"M-Mom, I need the first aid kit please."

It wasn't ideal, but he would have to do the first aid on Ai himself.

His mother peaked her head around the corner, her eyes seeming almost red as they reflected the sunrise which peaked in through the window.

"You don't look injured." She hissed.

Ken gulped, feeling his body stiffen out of instinct.

"I-It's for my friend. We collided by accident."

After being stared at intently by the beast, Ken had no choice but to tell the truth.

Yuki paused for a moment before answering. "Bring them in."

Ken shuddered, silently praying for the woman he was about to bring into his home.

He poked his head out and motioned for Ai to come inside, doing his best to not show how panicked he was feeling.

Ai felt a little nervous as this was the first time she had entered a boys house, however she gathered her courage and walked in the door.

"Sorry to bother you" She called out sweetly, before taking off her shoes.

The moment her words ended, Ken felt as if the atmosphere suddenly changed, putting him on edge even more than before.

"Kenny, you didn't tell me we had a young lady visiting~"

His mothers sweet voice rang out as she suddenly appeared in front of them both, a wonderful smile on her face.

Ken stared in shock at the sudden transformation of the banshee into this woman in front of him.

Yuki looked between her son and the teen that he had brought with her, her face full of warmth and smiles. However, Ken could still feel a little undertone of annoyance directed at him whenever their eyes met.

"A-Ah, this is Ai Koyama. We're in the same class and she's also a manager at the baseball club." Ken said, finally remembering his duty to begin the introductions.

"Ai, this is—"

"I'm Kenny's mother, you can call me Yuki~" She said, not even allowing Ken to finish talking. Her eyes darted to the blood on Ai's elbow and instantly went into motherly-mode.

"Oh honey, your elbow looks painful. Come inside, I'll make sure to clean it up." With that, Yuki led Ai inside by the hand and took her to the dining room to be patched up.

Ken stood awkwardly at the entrance, not exactly knowing what was going on. His mother had done a complete 180 once Ai entered the house, yet instead of being relieved, he actually felt in even more danger.

"Kenny, go grab the first aid kit please darling~"

Ken shuddered. His mother never called him darling, which made him uneasy. But in order to avoid any more trouble, he quickly made his way into the cupboard and procured the first aid kit.

His misery didn't end there. All the while his mother was patching up Ai, she kept saying embarrassing things like how this was the first time he'd brought a lady to the house. She even said how she was relieved that he was taking an interest in women.

He could only silently wish for a swift death as he sat uncomfortably at the dining table and listened to the folly coming out of his mother's mouth.

Ken didn't even want to look at Ai's face, afraid he would see her mortified expression.

Thankfully, after 5 painful minutes which felt like an eternity, she was done.

Placing the bandage on her elbow, Yuki smiled sweetly. "Thank goodness it was only a small scrape, it won't leave a scar."

Ken breathed out a sigh of relief and was about to quickly usher Ai out of the house before he was tortured any further. However, his mother had other plans.

"Ai honey, I'm just about to serve some breakfast. Would you care to stay and eat with us?"

"Oh, I wouldn't want to impose Mrs. Takagi." Ai replied, however her eyes moved to Ken who looked as if he swallowed a sour lemon.

Ken was about to get up and insist that he would walk Ai home, at least that was until he felt a murderous gaze from his mother assault him.

He quickly swallowed whatever he was about to say and spoke up, doing his best to smile. "Y-You should stay. Mom is a great cook."

Ai smiled in response, inwardly happy she would be able to spend more time with Ken.

Seeing the wonderful smile that seemed to accentuate her beauty even more, Ken suddenly felt a bit better. He wouldn't mind being bullied by his mother if he got to eat with such a beautiful woman.

'What am I thinking? She's like 15 or 16 right now...'

Ken felt at odds. Since his mental age was 24, he couldn't help but feel an overwhelming guilt whenever he thought of Ai as a woman.

'Friends... We'll just be friends okay.'

Without waiting for a response from Ai, Yuki quickly got to her feet and announced that the food would be ready shortly.

Not long later, Yuki set a bowl of rice and some wonderful side dishes such as miso soup, grilled fish, omelet, seaweed and even natto on the table.

The spread was amazing as usual, at least for both Yuki and Ai.

Ken looked down at the lonely bowl of rice in front of him and couldn't help but sigh.

'Yep, she's still pissed at me.'

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.