

# Major League System

## Chapter 181 - 181: Status Quo (1)

Naoki didn't have much luck either, falling victim to the new and improved pitching from the talented 1st year pitcher.

Judging from Coach Goto's expression, it could be seen that he was also surprised and impressed with the changes in Kazuhiro. Originally he had faith that he would be able to keep the Yokohama batters at bay, however he was judging their skills from the friendly match.

The fact was, Yokohama had improved exponentially in the short span of 3 months. From an outsiders perspective it was mind boggling to see such improvement after even a year, yet these kids had outdone his wildest expectations.

Coach Goto thought it was particularly so for both Hiroki and Ken, who despite being the best players on the team last time, had the most growth.

His confidence was shaken when the two had produced home runs against Kazuhiro, making it look effortless.

But now it was different.

"You're pitching well Kazu." He said, placing a hand on his left shoulder.

"Thank you coach. I feel like I can improve if I keep facing them..."

Kazuhiro gazed down at his right hand, as if it had all of the answers he was searching for.

Coach Goto smiled genuinely, feeling a sense of warmth as he looked upon his pupil. Yet there was a hint of bitterness that reared its head when he thought of the other star on his team.

Without a word, he turned and glanced at Carlos on the end of the bench, isolated from everybody. He felt his heart ache a little.

'I'm sorry I failed you.' He said inwardly.

It was now Shuei's turn to bat at the bottom of the 4th innings with the score still at 5-1.

Before the batter went onto the field, the coach stopped him and turned to the team. Everyone quickly focused their attention onto the coach, all but one person.

"I need you to do one thing in the remaining 5 innings, and that is to try your best to get onto base. Bunts, singles, walks, I don't care how ugly it is, this is our only chance at overcoming the lead."

The coach's words were calm and even as he surveyed his team, yet there was a sense of urgency in his tone that was instilled into the psyche of those who listened.

Coach Goto never raised his voice, nor did he ever show much outward emotion. His face was always adorned with a soft smile, making him feel nice and approachable, not something you'd usually expect from a coach.

Yet his passion and love for coaching and knowledge of the game were so much that it motivated his players to train hard in order to succeed.

"We need to trust each other. Get on base so your teammate can follow up and do the same. Put us in a position to score, even if it's just 1 run at a time..."

"Can you do that?"

"Yes coach!"

The teens answered with gusto, feeling their morale begin to soar.

With that, the two next batters walked on the field, ready to give it their all.

Coach Goto nodded, feeling a sense of pride swell. While everyone was looking at the game, he made his way over to the end of the bench and gazed at the star player.

"Carlos, we'll get players on base this game so I just need you to hit it big."

Carlos raised his head, an expression of skepticism painted on his features.

"Yeah right. Those guys won't be able to hit those pitches." He remarked with a scoff.

The coach wasn't at all surprised by his response, yet he didn't let it effect him, choosing to turn his back and gaze out at the field.

"It might not be this innings, but I guarantee you'll get a shot to turn things around in this game."

The words were spoken as if he already knew what would happen in the future. He then walked away, leaving Carlos who watched his retreating figure.

"Tch, I'll believe it when I see it."

Carlos had been let down too many times when it mattered by his so called teammates. So much so that he had lost all faith in their abilities, prioritizing his own growth and ideals as a result.

He looked towards Ken on the mound and mused, "Maybe if I had teammates like that guy..."

However, he didn't know that Yokohama was not the same team as before. They were elevated and changed by the very person that he was envious of, improving by following his example.

That was how a true star player shined.

'Hmm? These guys look energized...!' Yuta thought, seeing the tense body of the batter at the plate. He could tell with one look that the guy was going to swing big, no matter what.

With a small smile creeping onto his face, he did what he hadn't done yet in this game, call for a ball.

Ken saw the lead and was a little confused, but he still decided to do as was instructed. He began the innings with a fastball outside of the strike zone with his usual pace, only to see the batter swing and miss with his full might.

'Looks like Yuta noticed that they're getting desperate.' He thought, raising his glove to catch the ball thrown back to him.

The next ball was similar, yet still a ball.

"Strike."

This time the batter almost fell on his backside with how hard he had swung at the ball. Every batter knew how jarring it felt to send a full swing, only to hit nothing but air.

"Strike two."

Visible frustration that bordered on desperation appeared on the batters face as he stood back up and turned to Ken on the mound.

Unperturbed by the display of the batter, Ken calmly looked at Yuta's lead and couldn't help but admonish him in his heart.

'This guy is so savage on the field.' He thought, doing his best not to chuckle.

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

## Chapter 182 - 182: Status Quo (2)

Once again Ken entered his wind up and sent a blitzing fastball, this time right down the middle of the strike zone.

As if he was expecting another ball, the batter did not swing, only to feel regret a moment later.

"Strikeout!"

The player looked crestfallen as he made his way back to the dugout, however he received plenty of consoling words from his teammates when he returned.

Coach Goto's eyes narrowed, focusing on the smiling catcher.

'He's got good instincts...'

As the next batter came up to the field, Carlos grabbed his gear and waited. His eyes met the coach's for a moment before he shook his head in disappointment as if to say "I told you so."

The next batter was sent back quicker than the last, also falling victim to the intense pitches of the opponent.

As Carlos made his way to the batters box, both the field and the audience went quiet, as if affected by the intense atmosphere.

Like old rivals, Carlos and Ken stared at each other from their respective positions. With the sun sitting right above their heads, it was like a scene out of a movie.

"Let's see how you do when the count is 0-0." He announced, getting into his overbearing stance.

"Hehe..." Ken chuckled dryly in response, not bothering to engage in the theatrics. He would let his pitching do the talking, like usual.

After receiving the lead from Yuta, he felt his body heat up in anticipation.

WHOOSH

DING

The ball was struck by the metal bat, yet it was clear just by the sound that the hit was a little off target.

"Foul."

A grin formed on Carlos's face. Out of the 5 balls total he'd faced from Ken, this was the first time his bat had made contact with the ball.

His already firm confidence began to overflow, filling him with strength.

Yuta frowned. The course was a difficult one, yet the guy had still managed to make contact with it.

'Let's try one of the outside corners.' He thought, placing his glove out in front of him.

Ken nodded, before sending his pitch directly to the outstretched glove above the plate.

DING

"Foul."

'Again...'

DING

"Foul."

It seemed that the previous scenario that happened against Akira in the first innings was repeating itself. Yet instead of Carlos intentionally fouling the ball, he was doing his best to just make contact.

The more pitches he saw, the more he could make out from them. With his natural talent he'd always been great at making contact, but it was proving rather difficult right now.

'One more pitch, then I'll go for the knockout.'

As long as he saw a pitch enough times, he was confident in being able to get a hit.

Feeling a little flustered, Yuta called for an inside pitch. However, Ken shook his head in response, already having a pitch in mind.

After a few more head shakes, he finally got the lead he wanted.

Yuta seemed a little surprised, however he quickly gathered his composure and placed his glove into position.

A small grin appeared on Ken's face as he entered his wind up.

WHOOSH

PAH

Carlos's eyes widened in shock after not feeling the expected resistance on his bat. He quickly turned to see that the ball was indeed inside the catchers glove before turning his attention to Ken.

"3 outs, changeover!"

Ken jogged towards the dugout, sending a taunting gaze Carlos's way.

"So it turns out you do have a breaking ball... Interesting." He mumbled to himself before heading back to grab his glove and hat.

Yuta quickly caught up to Ken and asked him, "Why did you throw your forkball now? Wouldn't it have been better to use it later?"

What he said made sense. Now that Carlos was aware of his forkball, it probably wouldn't be as effective later on. However, at the same time it was also another pitch that the guy had to worry about when facing him.

Ken shrugged and replied nonchalantly. "I guess I just wanted to strike him out."

'It's actually for a mission though...' he said in his heart.

Yuta felt like the argument was a bit immature, but he couldn't help but laugh out loud. Sometimes it felt like Ken was like a wise old man, but other times like this he seemed like a petty kid.

If he was honest, he preferred the petty version of Ken. It matched well with his own play style.

The next couple of innings went by without any changes to the status quo. While the Yokohama batters were at least able to hit the occasional pitch from Kazuhiro, Shuei could not even touch Ken's balls.

If one were to explain in the simplest terms, it would be that Ken's form seemed completely refined, whereas Kazuhiro was still in the midst of evolving.

Unfortunately for Yokohama, even if they could hit the balls, no one could convert. Both Ken and Hiroki had managed to hit doubles, whereas no one else even made it to first base.

However, even they were starting to have trouble with those pitches the further along the game went. By the time Hiroki went up to bat in the 7th innings, he'd been struck out after only 5 pitches.

Yet since there had been no more scoring from either side, the bottom of the 7th innings started with the same score of 5-1 in favor of Yokohama.

This was the first game in this tournament that had gone past 5 innings, yet everyone still seemed to be rather comfortable.

All of the strength and endurance training that they'd gone through after practice with Ken seemed to have done wonders for their stamina.

But it could also be the fact that they just needed to stand around and do nothing while Ken struck out every batter on the opposing team.

Either way, it seemed that the longer game had no impact on them.

Even Ken on the mound who had thrown close to 60 balls didn't even look like he was breaking a sweat.

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

## Chapter 183 - 183: I failed? (1)

Shinji stood at the batters box with his bat gripped tightly. If one looked under the helmet they could see him gritting his teeth, an obvious sign of frustration.

He stared at the unassailable titan upon the mound and felt almost helpless.

'Why can't we hit his pitches...'

This was the one question that was burning in his mind. If the ball was just fast, then they would surely be able to at least hit it every now and then. But there was something more, something that made it nigh impossible to strike.

But he couldn't tell what it was, even after facing another 3 pitches.

"Strikeout!"

"Two outs! Nice pitching"

"1 more for another 3 up, 3 down. Let's go Kenny!"

Ken's eye twitched after being called something only his parents called him. He slowly turned his head only to see Yusuke giving him a big thumbs up from 2nd base, a wide grin on his face.

He slowly reciprocated the gesture, however inwardly he was already thinking of ways to get back at the bastard who uttered that name in public.

However, he couldn't remain in such a state for long since the main event had arrived.

Carlos's presence was one that demanded his full attention, like a dangerous predator who had just entered the arena, armed with a metal baseball bat.

Ken stared him down, not losing an inch of ground to the intimidating air of the peak batter. If Carlos was a predator then Ken was a gladiator, armed with a spear in order to thrust through the tough defenses of its prey.

The two locked gazes, the distance between the mound and home plate feeling insignificant in their eyes.

Without a word, Ken lifted his knee towards his chest and stepped forward, putting all of his strength into his front leg before whipping the ball out towards the waiting glove of Yuta.

WHOOSH

The ball careened through the air like a spear, it's aim true.

Yet Carlos wielded his heavy bat, planting his foot and rotating his body. The torque generated from his muscular figure was transferred into his weapon, creating a loud noise at the point of impact.

DOOONG!

Shock appeared on the face of everyone present on the field, all apart from one person.

Carlos couldn't help but feel a sense of thrill overcome him as he watched his ball sail into the left outfield, with no signs of slowing down.



"I always catch my prey." He said, sending a smug gaze to Ken as he jogged to first base.

Ken on the other hand had completely ignored him. He quickly turned his gaze to follow the trajectory of the ball, his eyes trained on Tatsuya in the outfield.

'If it's him, he can make it...'

Tatsuya followed the ball which soared over his head, using his intense acceleration to catch up to it.

"Tatsu! F-Fence!"

Jun called out in worry, seeing his brother run full speed at the back fence. If he were to collide at his current speed, there was no way he would come out unscathed.

Yet Tatsuya seemingly ignored his pleas, keeping his attention focused on the ball above his head. It was only at the last moment that he turned his head and acknowledged the fence.

Like straight out of an action movie, he lifted his left leg and propelled himself upwards off the fence, reaching out his right arm with his glove outstretched.

Those who watched the scene felt their jaws unhinge at the agility and height he managed to achieve in a single move.

Tatsuya felt as if his body was floating in slow motion as he used all of his muscles to reach out and capture the ball before it went over for a home run. To get as much extension as possible, he had to turn his head away from the ball, relying on his instincts to catch it.

THUD

The sound of Tatsuya falling to the ground broke the silence. He let out a small grunt, a result of the impact.

Time seemed to come to a stop as everyone waited with bated breath to see the outcome.

"Tatsu! Are you okay?" Jun asked, his face full of worry.

Tatsuya turned his head and let out a cheeky grin, opening up his glove and showing his spoils of war to everyone. Jun stared in shock, not knowing how to react.

"Out! Changeover!"

"UWAHH!"

"Kyaaa! He's so cool!"

"ORYAAHHHH"

The whole field and crowd broke into crazed cheering after witnessing such an athletic play out of nowhere. One might think that they had just won the game with the way everyone was carrying on.

However, that line of thought might not be far from the truth.

There were two people on the field that recognized it right away.

"DAMN IT!"

Carlos took his helmet off and threw it on the ground, the earlier smug look having disappeared from his visage entirely. He was now filled with bitterness and heartache as his home run, his victory was stolen from him.

Since there were now only 2 innings left, as long as Ken kept his pitching form, that would be the last at-bat for Carlos for the game.

Ken stood upon the mound with mixed emotions. He had not expected Carlos to go after his forkball on the very first pitch, something he'd done to surprise him.

'Looks like I've failed.' He thought bitterly.

Since Carlos wouldn't be batting again this game and he'd only struck him out two times, that would mean he'd fail the urgent mission that the system had given.

His pitching grade would be decreasing from A- to B, putting him right where he started after his shoulder had first healed.

A bitter smile appeared on his face as he inwardly cursed.

Of course he might be able to give up a few hits in order to ensure Carlos got another chance to bat, but that left a sour taste in his mouth. He would be forsaking his own principles and jeopardizing the team's chances at nationals for his personal gain.

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

## Chapter 184 - 184: I failed (2)

He made his way back to the dugout in rather low spirits, however he did his best to plaster a smile onto his face. Since Tatsuya had made a remarkable catch, he made a point to congratulate the teen.

Carlos was inconsolable as he returned to the bench, his face twisted in anger and regret. He gave off an aura that warned others to not approach him, leading to no one coming up to console him.

Without saying another word, he grabbed his hat and glove and returned to the field, taking up his post on 3rd base. With his hat lowered, no one could see his expression.

Coach Hanada was all smiles as he saw the brilliant play from Tatsuya. He couldn't help but ruffle the unruly teen's hair in good spirits upon his return.

His attention turned to Ken who seemed out of sorts. An understanding smile crept onto his face as he nudged the Ace.

"Don't worry about losing the duel. Baseball is a team sport after all."

The coach placed his hand on Ken's left shoulder and consoled him. From his viewpoint, Ken was upset that he couldn't put Carlos away by himself, viewing it as a failure.

Of course he was dead wrong, however Ken still appreciated the sentiment and smiled weakly at the coach whom he respected immensely.

Seeing such concern for him only helped to make his mind up.

'There's no way I can throw the game to face Carlos again.'

Thus began the 8th innings of the game. Since no one had scored since the 2nd innings, the score was still 5-1 in favor of Yokohama.

If there were no new developments then it would likely remain as such.

Kazuhiro kept his current streak, only giving up a single hit in the 8th and a double in the 9th innings. Ken threw only 9 pitches in the 8th innings and was now on the mound for the bottom of the 9th.

His eyes were drawn to Carlos on the opposition bench. He had a towel draped on his head, showing just what kind of despair he was facing.

Funnily enough, Ken was also in a similar situation despite his team currently winning.

He shook his head, as if to remove any unnecessary thoughts. They were 3 outs away from being crowned winners of the Kanagawa Prefectural Tournament and getting a direct invite to Koshien.

Only 49 of the best teams in all of Japan get the honors of visiting Koshien for Nationals, and they had the chance to do it now.

Ken focused his attention onto Yuta who had been leading almost flawlessly this game. He nodded his head and began his wind up, sending the ball on target once more.

"Strike."

"Strike."

"Strikeout!"

An eruption of cheers came from the crowd and dugout at the announcement of the first out of the innings. An air of excitement penetrated the atmosphere, bringing forth more chants.

"2 MORE OUTS"

"2 MORE OUTS"

Ken ignored the chants, not letting them effect him in the slightest. He tried to focus on one thing, and that was Yuta's glove.

'Just pitch it into the glove.'

WHOOSH

"Strike"

"Strike"

"Strikeout!"

"ORYAAA!"

"1 MORE OUT!"

"Nice pitching!"

The cheers got even louder with the last out, causing the crowd to almost enter a fever pitch. He could hear individual voices, mainly Makoto, Ai and even Shiro from the bench. Despite not playing, he was still showing his support in his own way.

Ken turned his attention back to the plate, only to be met with Kazuhiro who was the 1st batter on the team. Usually pitchers weren't lead-off batters, but this guy had great agility and could make contact on the ball.

At least when it was not facing Ken's pitches.

WHOOSH

"Strike!"

The umpire's loud voice called out over the field, bringing with it another cheer.

Kazuhiro gripped his bat tightly, feeling despair grip his heart. Was it going to end like this? Even though he had improved tremendously in this match, would it not be enough?

He subconsciously turned to the bench, only to see the anxious faces of his teammates. His eyes then moved to Carlos who had his head covered by a towel, seemingly not interested in the closing moments of the game.

Kazuhiro bit his lip, feeling a bout of frustration.

'He can turn this game around... I know it.'

'I just need to get on base somehow.'

"CARLOS!" He shouted abruptly, giving both Yuta and the umpire a fright.

There was no reaction from the person who'd been called out, yet Kazuhiro didn't care.

"We'll get you back on the field! Just sit there and wait!" He yelled. However, it seemed to fall on deaf ears as Carlos didn't even raise his head let alone remove the towel.

The umpire was about to chastise Kazuhiro for his earlier actions, however he saw the determined expression on the teen's face and decided to swallow his complaints.

Kazuhiro positioned his body forward, crowding the plate.

An almost instinctive reaction for a catcher would be to throw an inside pitch after being challenged in such a way, and Yuta was no exception. He placed his glove towards Kazuhiro's body and called for a fastball.

If this was in any other circumstance, Ken might let out a hollow chuckle or even shake his head in exasperation. However, this was potentially the final out of a game that would send them to nationals.

As long as they got this out, they would punch their ticket.

He decided to trust Yuta once again and began his wind up before sending the ball whipping right to the open glove.

Kazuhiro's eyes widened as he saw the fastball coming right for his arm. As if expecting such a scenario, he made a wild action and tried to evade the pitch yet he was caught on the left wrist.

"A-Ahhh!"

However, when he fell to the ground he began to hold his upper arm and writhe on the ground for a while.

The umpire who was obstructed by the batter could make the only logical call based on the evidence he could see.

"Deadball! Take your base"

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

## Chapter 185 - 185: All or Nothing (1)

"A-As if! He was over the plate, it's a strike!" Yuta argued, standing up in shock.

He couldn't believe that such a blatant miscall was made in this situation.

However, the umpire didn't seem to be having any of it. He held his hand up as if to signify that he wouldn't be taking any more complaints.

Ken stared in disbelief at the scene. He had seen the play in real time, watching as the ball glanced off Kazuhiro's wrist which was definitely in the strike zone.

As long as the ball was within the strike zone, even if a player was hit by the ball it would be a strike. This was why both pitchers and catchers were comfortable enough to call for an inside pitch when batters crowded the plate.

However, Kazuhiro acted as if he was hit further up his arm in an effort to convince the umpire that the ball was outside the zone.

While the play might be considered underhanded, Ken couldn't help but have a little respect for the guy who would willingly get hit by his pitch. He gazed at Kazuhiro gingerly getting up from the ground and making his way to first base.

He wasn't sure, but he thought that he saw a small grin form on the corner of his mouth.

Yuta also saw this and was about to mouth off to the umpire once more, however after seeing his expression, he decided against it. The last thing he needed was to be ejected, especially with only 1 out remaining in the game.

Carlos felt a small shock run through his body as the umpires words called out the deadball verdict. He slowly removed the towel from his head and looked out onto the field, seeing Kazuhiro sitting on first base staring back at him intently.

His eyes relayed his resolve.

It was currently the 2nd batter's turn at the plate, meaning if he wanted a chance to bat then the next two players would need to get onto base somehow without getting out.

Even though it seemed almost impossible, Carlos couldn't help but feel his heart beat in anticipation. Yet as he looked at the next two batters, his expectations plummeted.

He already had no faith in his teammates, why would he entertain such an improbable notion at this point? It would only lead to being let down and even more heartache.

'I need to get on base...'

The Shuei player who was in the batters box at this moment grit his teeth, anxiety filling his body. He glanced between Kazuhiro on base and Carlos on the bench before taking a deep breath, his face showing resolve.

'If we can get him up to bat we'll have a chance.'

"It's not over yet!" He shouted, facing Ken on the mound.

Yuta felt a little stifled because of the previous call from the umpire, but he did his best to calm down.

'One more out.'

He called the lead and placed his glove above the plate, his face taking on a serious expression.

Ken nodded, winding up and whipping his arm out like usual. However, the ball seemed to lose traction from the sweat which had filled his palms, not allowing him to get as much control or spin as usual.

The moment it left his hands he knew he'd messed up.

DONG

The ball was struck, running along the ground towards third base. Seeing this, the batter ran with all of his might towards first base, as if his life depended on it.

Ken almost audibly let a sigh of relief as he saw the ball roll towards Makoto on third base. As long as he scooped it up properly, he'd be able to send it to 2nd base and secure the game for them.

"FIRST!"

In the middle of collecting the ball, Yusuke yelled out from 2nd base, startling everyone on the field. It turned out that Kazuhiro had taken a massive lead prior and was already sliding towards the second base by the time Makoto was about to throw the ball.

"ORYAHHHH"

With his powerful muscles, Makoto sent the ball flying towards Hiroki on first base who already had his glove up and foot on the base, expecting the ball.

As the ball rocketed towards first, Ken turned his attention to the runner. It was going to be close, but it looked like the out would be secured.

"Argh!"

Unfortunately for them, the throw from Makoto was too high, something that they realized too late.

"Damn it."

Ken quickly ran towards first base in order to cover for the overthrow, however something happened that he didn't expect.

Hiroki bent his knees and used his toned muscles to launch himself into the air, stretching his limbs as far as he could.

After what seemed like an eternity, he finally landed on the ground with the ball secure in his glove.

However...



"Safe."

In the time that he was airborne, the runner managed to get onto base safely.

"Ah... Sorry." Makoto let out an apology to the team.

In his haste he had thrown the ball too hard, leading to the current situation. If Hiroki hadn't been quick enough to react and jump for the ball, it could have been much worse.

BA BUMP

Carlos felt his heart beat loudly in his chest, sending another shock through his body. He couldn't believe his eyes.

Coach Goto quashed the excitement that was building inside and made his way over to Carlos, wearing his typical smiling expression.

"Go and get ready to save us this game." He said, placing his hand on the teen's shoulder.

Carlos was too stunned for words. He suddenly remembered what the coach had told him earlier, that they would get him an opportunity to turn the game around.

He was too conceited, even scoffing at those words.

Yet here they were in the 9th inning, and this opportunity was so close.

Without saying a word, Carlos placed his helmet on and marched onto the field with his bat in hand and knelt on the ground. He focused on Shinji who was now in the batters box, about to face Ken.

'Please... just get on base.' He prayed inwardly.

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

## Chapter 186 - 186: All or Nothing (2)

Without realizing it, Carlos had placed his trust in his teammate, something that he had not done since the end of elementary school. However, he was too embroiled in the moment to understand the monumental change that had overcome him.

Shinji's attention turned to Carlos who was kneeling by the side.

'I just need to get on base...'

Yuta was starting to feel the pressure of the moment as the stakes were rising. He knew that letting Carlos up to the plate would be dangerous, so he wanted to end things now before it got to that point.

'Let's just take it easy for now.' Yuta thought.

He called for a ball on the outside, wanting to try and bait a swing and get an easy strike on the board.

Ken nodded and began his wind up. He had used the rosin bag earlier to ensure that he wouldn't repeat the same mistakes as last time.

The ball came out just as he expected with no issues, however his face changed in the next moment as the batters form changed.

'Bunt!?!'

DING

He didn't have much time to think as the ball went to the ground and rolled along the foul line towards third base. Makoto managed to get to the ball first, only to watch it begin to roll into the foul zone.

However, by some turn of fate, the ball rolled back into play, stunning both him and Ken. As if in sync, they both looked at the umpire in question.

"Fair ball!"

The Shuei players in the dugout and on the field screamed and cheered, filling the atmosphere with their cries. They had clawed tooth and nail in order to get onto base, sacrificing whatever was needed to get the job done.

Coach Goto was among the cheers as he pumped his fists in triumph and elation. None of his players knew that his voice could reach such a volume, but they were too caught up in the moment to care.

Makoto quickly picked up the ball and was about to throw it to first base, however Hiroki was already signaling not to throw the ball.

Ken's face fell. Just what the hell was his luck right now?

First a walk, then a pitching mistake and now a bunt with 2 outs that had teetered on the foul line.

Now that he thought about it, could it be that the system had been pulling the strings from afar? Ensuring that Carlos had another chance to bat so that he could complete the urgent mission?

The prospect was far too terrifying for him to consider at this stage, yet it would explain the situation he was currently in.

However, this was not the worst outcome for him.

As long as he could strike out Carlos, he'd be able to complete the urgent mission, retain his pitching grade and make it to nationals. This was honestly the best outcome he could have hoped for.

Of course now the stakes were a lot higher. If Carlos hit a big one, it would force extra innings, dragging out the game that should have been in the bag already.

With Kazuhiro's improved pitching form, he knew just how hard it was to get any more runs on the board.

"I guess it's all or nothing." He mumbled, reaching down to grab the ball.

BA BUMP

BA BUMP

Carlos felt his heart thumping out of his chest, bringing with it a dose of adrenaline that filled his body. He looked up into the sky, thanking whichever god had gotten him into this scenario.

If this were a movie, it would be the ending scene right before the credits.

He made his way up to the batters box and let out a deep breath before turning his attention to the mound. With his hands gripped firmly on the bat, his brown eyes radiated his will to fight.

Ken too stared down at the wild beast ahead of him, his gaze burning brightly. He put the last 3 at-bats to the back of his mind, they were irrelevant at this point in time. There was only the man in front of him that he now needed to beat.

Yuta placed his glove out, calling for a ball high on the inside. As long as the ball was popped up, then they could secure the last out and clinch the game.

However, Ken merely shook his head.

'Huh?'

Yuta was confused. Ken had followed his lead the whole game, so why was he now refusing. He placed the glove in the middle of strike zone, almost as a joke, yet in the next moment a grin formed on Ken's face as he nodded.

'W-What the hell!?'

But he didn't have enough time to suggest anything else as Ken was about to begin his wind up.

The moment he lifted his left leg, Ken felt as if time had come to a crawl. His Crunch Time skill activated, filling his body with strength and confidence.

With the help of this skill and his Fine Motor Control, he was able to pour all of his strength into his pitching motion, exponentially increasing the speed and power of his pitch.

As the ball rolled off his fingers, time returned to normal.

Like a bolt of lightning, the ball was sent straight for the open glove of Yuta, kicking up the dirt in its wake.

WHOOOOSH

Carlos's eyes widened as he saw the ball leave Ken's hand. Before it even came into range he instinctively knew that this was one of the fastest ball he'd ever faced in his life.

His bat which usually seemed light to him, suddenly felt weighed down. There was surprise in his mind from this feeling, but a large part of him felt that it wasn't all that bad.

PAH

"Strike!"

Instead of being frustrated, Carlos was puzzled. He looked at his bat, turning it over in his hands, as if seeing it for the first time in his life.

'What is this?'

He turned his gaze to the coach in the dugout, only to see his proud and expectant expression. It wasn't just him who looked like this, every one of his teammates gazed upon him with hope.

As if to confirm it, he turned to the field and saw his 3 teammates on base.

A look of understanding appeared on his features, like the missing piece of the puzzle had just fallen into place.

'So this is what it's like to carry the weight of the team in your bat.'

At this realization, an imperceptible smile crept onto his lips.

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

## Chapter 187 - 187: Conclusion (1)

Carlos took up his stance in the batters box and looked towards the mound.

His features were different from before, surprising Ken. He no longer had an untamed wildness within his eyes, it was more like intense determination and drive. Almost as if he had suddenly discovered a purpose which was not just his own.

Ken felt as if the entire aura of Carlos had changed. Instead of projecting outward wildly, it was now focused to a point, appearing calmer.

Yet this did not ease his mind at all, if anything he felt that the current Carlos was much scarier than before.

"This could be a problem." He muttered, feeling his body tingle in response.

But even though the difficulty had increased, a large grin formed on his face. This is what he loved about baseball.

With his smile still painted on his expression, Ken entered his wind up, feeling time begin to slow down once more. Now that he knew it was coming, he was able to pour even more strength and power into his pitching form.

WHOOOSH

The ball became a blur as it spun at high velocity through the air, blitzing its way towards the open glove of Yuta.

DOOONG!

An almighty sound forced its way into everyone's ears as the bat connected cleanly with the ball. Depending if one was fielding or batting, it could either be the worst sound in the world or music to one's ears.

Ken felt his heart drop as he saw the ball soar into the air with grace.

Everyone on the field held their breath as it teetered on the foul line towards the foul post. As long as it hit the yellow post the game would be over in an instant, allowing Shuei to fight it out in extra innings with great momentum.

"GO GO GO!"

"No..."

There were two opposing thoughts being shouted between the two dugouts as they watched on with hope. One hoping for the ball to go foul, the other awaiting the metallic sound of the ball hitting the foul post.

"Foul!"

"Argh so close!"

"Thank goodness..."

Yuta felt his legs go weak, forcing him onto his knees. He felt as if his heart had jumped into his throat during the whole encounter, causing him to hold his breath unconsciously.

Despite just missing out on the game tying home run by a hairs breadth, Carlos didn't seem too concerned. The ball had been faster than he expected, causing him to swing late and send it into the foul zone.

Ken was filled with relief that he was given another chance. Despite throwing his fastest ever pitch, it seemed that this guy was still able to get enough contact on the ball to almost end the game.

The count was now 0-2 meaning he just needed 1 more strike to put the game away.

Ken let out a deep breath and adjusted his cap.

'I'll put everything into this one.'

Suddenly, Carlos felt his body tremble. On the mound, Ken's figure seemed to grow even taller, blocking out the sun. It was as if the shackles which were confining him had been removed and he was now let loose, free to reign destruction on the world.

His wind up was like the precursor to his powerful killer move, causing those who faced it to feel nothing but dread.

"HUP!"

\*DING\*

Ken let out a shout and watched the ball fly forwards. He heard the familiar sound of the system notification, yet he had no time to check. Instead his eyes were glued to the batters box, awaiting the outcome of his pitch.

Despite his trembling body, Carlos managed to recover in time to witness the ball leaving Ken's fingertips. He had already calculated the speed of the previous ball and would not make the same mistake as last time.

The heavy bat which he wielded sliced through the air filled with intent.

WHOOOOOOSH

Carlos held his bat up high after swinging through, his eyes looking off into the distance.

Slowly his face morphed into a genuine smile. He suddenly felt a big sense of relief wash over him, sapping the strength from his body abruptly. The once heavy bat turned as light as a feather.

...

"Strikeout! Game set!"

The whole field and audience erupted into cheers.

"YESSS!"

"ORYAAAHHH"

"We're going to nationals!"

Ken was probably the only one who didn't celebrate right away. He felt a sudden exhaustion as all the tension dissipated from his body.

He stared at Carlos's figure still standing in the batters box and saw the genuine smile on his features. It was only now that Ken could confirm that his Shuei teammate's feelings had reached the teen.

They may have lost the match, but this event would likely become a large turning point in Carlos's career. Since he was in the 3rd year of high school, they wouldn't get the chance to play against each other again until they went pro.

Before Ken could think any longer, he was suddenly assaulted from all sides by his teammates who jumped and bounced around him upon the mound.

"Nice one Ace!"

"That pitch took GUTS! GUTSSSSSU!"

'That's right... We won.'

"Hahaha."

Ken suddenly grinned dumbly, feeling a sense of accomplishment overcome him. It had been a long battle, but they finally ended up on top.

The dugout also joined in on the party taking place on the field crowding the other players. Shiro was even crying, feeling proud of his team.

The only one who still hadn't moved was Yuta who seemed to be in a state of shock.

'That pitch...'

He stared at the ball in his glove, his hand inside the glove still feeling numb. He had caught almost 5000 pitches from Ken this year, yet this one was by far his best, exceeding his previous speed by a mile.

"Y-Yuta, would you like some water?"

Not expecting the interruption, Yuta turned to the voice and was greeted by the cute manager with glasses and deep green eyes. He was momentarily stunned as he took in her appearance, feeling his face heat up in response.

"T-Thanks."

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



## Chapter 188 - 188: Conclusion (2)

He took the water bottle from her and took a small sip before tipping the remaining contents over his head. It ran down his hair and cooled down his face, bringing him back to reality.

He flashed a grin and handed her the bottle.

Perhaps it was because he was elated from their win, or maybe Yuta had enough of waiting, but he felt rather bold in that moment. Taking a page straight out of Tatsuya's handbook, he looked Yuko in the eyes.

"Hey Yuko, we should go out sometime." He said casually.

"Eh?"

On another part of the field, Kazuhiro clutched his left wrist and walked back to the dugout. He stopped right in front of Carlos and let out a small sigh.

"Sorry, I wasn't strong enough."

He placed his hand on the teen's shoulder and continued on his way, feeling tears of frustration well up in his eyes.

It wasn't only him. Shinji also mumbled his apologies to Carlos before retreating, leaving the stunned youth rooted in place.

'Why aren't they blaming me?' He thought, feeling a bitter taste in his mouth. He stared at the ground, his earlier smile now replaced with a confused expression.

He felt an arm wrap around his shoulders before pulling him in.

"You did well Carlos. You're gonna be a great player in the future."

The soft yet impactful voice of his coach caused a shock to run through his body.

"I... I couldn't live up to their expectations." He said bitterly.

After saying these words, he felt the coach's strong arms pull him in a little tighter as they continued to walk to the dugout.

"Don't say that. You did your best young one." For the first time, Carlos heard his coach's voice break a little. This seemed to destroy the emotional dam he'd built up over the last 6 years, bringing with it a flood.

Without warning he began to cry, the warm tears flowing down his face like a waterfall.

He felt bitter, but a large part of him felt liberated. The last at-bat was the most fun he'd had playing baseball since elementary school.

After arriving at the bench, each one of his teammates came up and consoled him, apologizing for holding him back. They poured out their true feelings, causing him to second guess everything he'd done.

'Is this the way they've felt the entire time?'

As if to back up this sentiment, Coach Goto ruffled his curly hair.

"It took you a while, but now you know what it's like to be a true star player."

His eyes widened, as if he'd finally figured it all out.

Seiji Hanada breathed out a sigh of relief. Despite having confidence in their team and hanging onto a 4 run lead for most of the game, his heart felt as if it had been doing gymnastics every time Carlos was up to bat.

However, the last ball that Ken had thrown was something else, it gave him goosebumps just thinking about it.

'I've only seen pitches like that in the pro league...'

He wasn't exaggerating either, the pitch was magnificent. He wasn't at all surprised that a 3rd year even on the level of Carlos couldn't touch the ball.

"Nice work coach."

The assistant coach snapped him out of his train of thought, bringing him back to the current reality.

"Ah, I didn't really do anything." He said after a while, looking at the teens celebrating on the field. Despite saying so, he was feeling a sense of pride wash over him.

It was only after another 5 minutes that everyone began to calm down, yet it still felt so surreal. The coach rounded everyone up for the ceremonial bow on the field.

Ken stood across from both Kazuhiro and Carlos. The Ace had his left wrist wrapped up since he'd been hit by his pitch, whereas the curly-haired teen gave him a smile. There were still tear marks left on his face, evidence of his earlier emotions.

"Thank you for the game!"

The two teams bowed to each other, signifying an end to the proceedings.

Before they went their separate ways, Carlos came up to Ken as if he wanted to say something. Ken was slightly taller than the half-Dominican, but it was not by much.

"That was really fun. Thank you for showing me your type of baseball."

His voice was deep, yet his tone was earnest and pleasing to the ears. Ken was honestly a little surprised that he was receiving thanks, especially after coming out victorious.

"I didn't do anything, it was your teammates who were able to convey their feelings to you towards the end."

Ken then held out his hand, a little grin forming on his face.

"Let's see each other in the pro leagues."

The tone in which he used was filled with absolute confidence. Not only was Ken acknowledging that Carlos had the ability to go pro, he was also declaring his own intentions.

Carlos stared at the outstretched hand and let out a chuckle. He grasped the hand reciprocated the smile.

"Next time I won't let you win."

"We'll see about that."

On another part of the field, the two coaches stood apart from each other casually. The earlier rivalry and pettiness seemed to have been forgotten as they performed a solid handshake.

"Well done on raising a bunch of stars." Coach Goto said, his usual smile replaced with a genuine one.

If he was completely honest, he didn't mind losing such a match. He felt that his team had grown closer together with the revitalization of Carlos and sudden improvement of Kazuhiro.

He was already looking forward to competing again next year.

"Your team isn't so bad yourself coach. We'll have to watch out for that Kazuhiro again next year." Seiji replied sincerely.

"Heh. How can you say that when you have a sniper of your own. That last pitch was something I've never seen from a High Schooler before."

Coach Hanada couldn't deny those words and he no longer tried to be humble, nodding in agreement.

"He's definitely special." He admitted.

Coach Goto relinquished his hand and began to walk off with the rest of his team. Yet when he was only a few meters away he suddenly turned around, flashing his usual smile.

"Make sure you win the whole thing okay?"

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

## Chapter 189 - 189: Celebration (1)

"BAR BE CUE!"

"BAR BE CUE!"

"BAR BE CUE!"

The whole bus was in a festive mood as they chanted out their destination. The coach had promised he would take them out to a Barbecue restaurant if they managed to qualify for nationals.

Of course the school wouldn't fund such a thing, so the expense would come directly from his coffers. Yet with the smile painted on his face, it was clear that he didn't mind too much.

As they finally pulled up to the restaurant, Coach Hanada apologized to the staff in advance since he knew the teens would struggle to remain orderly after their game.

The restaurant was rather empty at the moment since it was around 3pm, so the owner didn't seem to mind. The old man even offered to throw in some desserts for free at the end of the meals.

"Thank you so much owner" Seiji bowed.

Ken found his way to a booth and slid to the end, hoping to get a little alone time in order to check on the system. Since the game ended, he'd been crowded by his teammates who were reveling in their victory.

Of course he didn't think it was annoying, in fact he was just as happy at the result. However, he knew that there were many rewards waiting for him beyond the system window.

Just thinking about the skill and elixir he would receive filled him with excitement.

Yet not even a few moments after taking a seat, a wonderful smell assaulted his nose, snapping him out of his thoughts.

"Is this seat taken?"

Ai brushed her hair behind her ear and smiled, looking at him expectantly.

"Ah, nope." He responded, making a bit more room for her.

Only after smelling her did he realize just how bad he smelled at this moment. He subconsciously reached under the chair in order to get his bag, however he remembered it was left on the bus.

'Damn it...!' He cursed inwardly. What was the point in packing deodorant if he didn't use it.

Shiro was about to slide into the long chair in front of the two, but he was pushed aside by two large mounds which acted like a barrier. He fell to the ground emphatically, looking as if he'd just been run over by a truck.

"Ai! Look who I brought!"

Yuko dragged someone behind her, obstructed by her large chest. It was only when he caught up that both Ken and Ai saw Yuta whose face was beet red.

It looked as if Yuta's daringness back then had paid off as he was now being dragged along to a date so soon. Yet now that he was here, his confidence had reverted to that of a newborn kitten.

"We can now have a double date" Yuko stated, her face full of smiles.

'Eh...!' Ken almost choked on his saliva at these words.

Ai too had a similar reaction, however her face heated up in an instant. She stole a glance at Ken as to check his expression.

Thankfully, Ken's poker face was working perfectly, masking his internal awkwardness.

"A-Anyway. Senpai, when did you two start dating?" Ken asked, trying to keep the topic off him and Ai.

Yuta's eyes widened as he stared at Ken in a dumbfounded manner.

"I-I don't know?." He admitted. One moment he'd been trying to act cool, and the next he was whisked away by the woman he'd casually asked on a date.

Ken took one look at the expression on Yuta's face and felt it looked oddly familiar.

"Hey, doesn't that face look exactly like the one your Dad makes?" He said to Ai, pointing at Yuta.

There was a few moments of silence before...

"Pffft"

"Hahahaha!"

Ai couldn't help but burst into giggles. Whenever her father was in trouble and didn't know the reason, he would make such a face.

Both Yuko and Yuta looked at each other with confusion, not understanding what was so funny. Their eyes moved to Ken who was watching Ai with an amused expression, a smile evident on his features.

A few moments passed before Ai was finally able to calm down.

"Ai, let's go to the bathroom." Yuko announced, getting up from her chair.

Shiro who had just picked himself off the ground suddenly felt the same sensation he experienced prior, right before he was propelled backwards and into the lap of Makoto.

The contrast between the soft and bouncy barrier that threw him and the stone-like muscles he'd fallen onto was like heaven and earth. He felt his bones bend and crack from the impact, feeling as if his soul was about to escape his body.

"Shiro? You can't sit on my lap, I'm not into that." Makoto said simply, picking up his frame with one hand and placing him on the opposite seat.

The sound of chatter soon filled the restaurant, creating a harmonious yet noisy atmosphere. Coach Hanada was busy placing the orders for the meat and vegetables, taking close account of the expenditure.

While he was paid well, it wasn't to the point where he could blow all of his savings on a team dinner. If they were ever to win nationals, he may even need to declare bankruptcy before the after party.

Once he was done, the coach returned to the seating area and called for everyone to be quiet. It took a little while, but he managed to get the rowdy teen's attention after some time.

"First off, I wanted to say congratulations to you all for qualifying for Koshien this year."

"ORYAHH!"

Makoto's loud voice called out, only to receive a glare from the coach.

He quickly shrunk down, forgetting that this wasn't a place where he could yell as he pleased.

The coach cleared his throat and continued.

"Ahem. As I was saying... I am proud of how you all performed throughout the tournament. Your work ethic this year has been a big reason for your improvements."

He paused for a moment as surveyed the room, his gaze resting on Ken for a little longer than the rest.

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

## Chapter 190 - 190: Celebration (2)

"But this is just the beginning... This is not the time to relax or stagnate. We still have a long way to go before we can become true champions."

His voice washed over the teens, with his last two words hanging in the air.

For many youths who played baseball, their only goal was to make it to Koshien during their 3 years of High School. Only in the prestigious schools would they aim higher, wanting the honor associated with winning on such a big stage.

'True Champions...'

Ken had only played 1 game at Koshien in his 1st year of High School where his team was decimated. It was probably the only time he was thankful to be on the receiving end of the mercy rule.

If it wasn't for Daichi back then, they would have lost without getting a single run on the board.

'But if it's with this team...'

Ken looked at his team now and couldn't help but feel they had a much better chance.

Although they had the same faces, these guys were completely different than his past life. In a way, they had also been affected by the system, benefiting from its functions.

He felt even more thankful for the system and his transmigration in this moment.

Coach Hanada gave a beaming smile and raised his glass which had contents that looked suspiciously like beer inside.

"We will have time in the future to pursue this goal, but today let's celebrate our current achievements."

The players also raised their glasses which were filled with juice and soda.

"To Nationals!" The coach said with a grin.

"To Nationals!"

Not long later, the sound of sizzling meat and chatter filled the room as everyone continued to get along. Barbecue and beer usually went hand in hand, something that Ken was painfully reminded of in this moment.

'Man I wish I could have a drink...'

\*\*\*

Ken said goodbye to Ai as they went their separate ways from the train station. He was nursing a full belly after stuffing his face full of barbecued meat since he couldn't drink any beer at his current age.

In a way he was thankful since drinking in front of the open flames usually made him sweat even more than usual. Not that it would have mattered too much since he smelled of dried sweat thanks to playing essentially a full 9 innings under the hot summer sun.



Since he was finally alone, it was time to access the system and check out his rewards. He felt a bit like an addict since he couldn't wait to open up the system window, however he didn't want to think about that now.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ

"Argh damn it, what is it now?"

Ken reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone, wanting to see who would bother him at such a time. Yet if he was in his right mind he probably could have guessed who.

"Daichi... Ah crap I was meant to mail him."

Only now did he remember that he promised to let his brother know if he won the final game or not.

"H-Hey lil bro." Ken answered in a slightly guilty tone.

"Hey man, were you too busy celebrating to even send me a mail? Or were you off on a date with your new girlfriend."

"Ah..."

Daichi's tone sounded like he was only teasing, so Ken didn't take it the wrong way. He just felt a little awkward considering his guesses were rather close.

"Are you sure you're not following me?" He replied, letting out a hollow chuckle afterwards.

"What? So you really were on a date!?" Daichi seemed a little too surprised which seemed to annoy Ken, but he wasn't exactly wrong in his reactions.

"Heh heh heh, no... But we went to a barbecue restaurant to celebrate qualifying for Nationals this year."

"You and Ai did?" The reply had an undertone of sarcasm to it.

"No... The whole team idiot."

Ken felt his good mood stall for a moment, wanting to dish out some punishment to his little brother. However, when he remembered just how solid and strong the teen was, he quickly dismissed the thought.

"Hahahaha."

The sound of laughter came out from the other side of the phone, bringing a smile to Ken's face. He didn't even need to ask if Daichi's team won, considering he had such a carefree tone.

There was a small silence after the laughter died down.

"You better not lose before you face us." Daichi stated, his tone serious for the first time this conversation.

"You stole my line." Ken replied, feeling his spirits rise.

As long as neither of them lost, they would face each other at some point during Nationals. Whether it was in the first round or the last one.

The two chatted for a while longer. It was their first phone call in about a month, but they frequently mailed each other to stay in touch. Of course it wasn't as good as having his brother close by, but it was better than nothing.

"Ah, did you tell dad about making it to Nationals yet?" Ken asked.

"Dude, your memory is horrible. Dad's probably flying over the Pacific Ocean right now." Daichi quipped, facepalming on the other side of the line.

Ken felt his smile widen. He hadn't seen his father in almost 3 months since he had been in America for work. If he was currently in the air then he might be home either tonight or the next morning.

"Sorry, I was too caught up with—"

"Your date right?" Daichi butted in before bursting out with laughter.

Ken rolled his eyes and was about to hang up.

"Alright chat later~"

BEEP BEEP BEEP

Ken stared blankly at his phone for a few moments as the sound of being hung up on echoed in his ears.

"That bastard..."

He carefully placed his phone in his pocket before he did something stupid like throw it in annoyance. When he raised his head he was surprised to see that he was already in front of his house.

Without realizing, he'd been on the phone to Daichi all the way home.

"Ah crap, I'll need to look at my rewards later"

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

## Chapter 191 - 191: Unforeseen Rewards (1)

"Mom I'm home."

Ken opened the door and was met with the delicious smell of curry wafting through the house. In any other circumstance he'd be ecstatic, however since he was already full to the brim with barbecued meat, he felt a little nauseous.

"Welcome home Kenny."

His mother poked her head around the corner and saw the sick expression on his face. Yuki's thoughts instantly moved to the worst case scenario. Without a word, she walked forward and hugged him tightly.

"Don't worry dear, you're only in the first year of High School. You'll get another chance to go to Koshien." She said warmly, consoling him gently.

"Ah mom... We won our game. We're going to Koshien in August."

"Eh?"

Yuki pulled herself back and held Ken at arms reach. She looked at him intently as if to check if he was playing a prank or not.

"Then why do you look like your pet hamster just died?"

Ken couldn't help but laugh at the absurd pet reference, yet his stomach was still groaning in protest.

After a few more follow up questions, Yuki finally believed that Ken's team had won their game. Her expression was wonderful as she gave him another hug, this time full of joy.

"I'm so proud of you Kenny. Just wait till your Father gets home, I'm sure he'll be just as excited." She said with a smile.

"I wonder if you'll play against Daichi's team at Koshien." She added.

"If we both keep winning, we'll face each other eventually." Ken responded with an expectant smile.

Yuki nodded before turning back to the kitchen. "I'll keep you some curry for lunch tomorrow since you've eaten already. Ah, that's as long as your father doesn't eat it all when he gets home late tonight."

She giggled, feeling very happy in that moment.

Ken thanked his mother, feeling a genuine smile creep onto his face. He hadn't seen her this happy since his father had left for America 3 months ago.

'If I can win at Nationals then Dad will have to do what he promised...'

He wanted both of his parents to be happy. Seeing how lonely his mother was during these 3 months, had only hastened his resolve to try and make things right.

Of course she had done her best to not seem down, but Ken wasn't so naive as to believe it.

"I'm a bit tired so I'm gonna shower and head to bed early."

"Okay Kenny~ see you in the morning." Yuki chimed back before turning her attention back to the food.

Ken retreated into the bathroom only to hear his mother humming a tune, her happiness evident.

A while later, Ken felt his body relax as he hopped into bed. Apart from his full stomach, he felt extremely content in this moment.

Yet there was an itch that he hadn't been able to scratch all day. Now that he was alone, he finally had the chance.

'Time to check the system...'

The moment he called for it, some notifications appeared in front of his face on a blue window.

\*DING\*

[Congratulations, user has broken through their limits and thrown a pitch far beyond what he was capable of.]

[Pitching grade increased by 3]

[New skill acquired: Limit Break]

[Congratulations, user has broken through to S- Grade Pitching]

[Received: 5000 Major points, 1 x Recovery Elixir]

Ken was assaulted by a wall of text the moment he opened up the system interface. At first he was puzzled, yet the further he read on, the brighter his expression became.

'Holy crap! I didn't expect this!?'

The biggest shock was that his pitching had broken through to the S- Grade out of nowhere. For the longest time he felt as if there was a wall blocking his progress which couldn't be broken by regular means.

It turned out that he just needed the right circumstances to evolve. If he used this line of thought then the more he was pushed by stronger teams, the quicker he would be able to improve.

Just thinking about all of the strong teams he would face at Nationals filled him with excitement.

"5000 Major points, a skill and... Recovery Elixir?"

He had never seen the Recovery Elixir before in the almost 18 months of having the system, so he was quite intrigued. But he quickly put it to the back of his mind, wanting to accept all of his rewards before he checked out the descriptions.

MISSION: Kanagawa Prefecture Tournament

\*Task 1: Strike out 30 players [36/30] [Complete]

\*Task 2: Hit 6 home runs [3/6] [Failed]

\*Task 3: Make the finals of the Kanagawa Tournament [Complete]

\*Task 4: Win the Tournament [Complete]

\*Task 5: Win player of the Tournament [Failed]

REWARDS:

[Received 1800 Major points]

"Not too bad." Ken remarked, seeing as how he managed to complete 3 out of the 5 tasks successfully. Since there was no official judging panel for the player of the tournament, he assumed that the system would make its own decision in that regard.

However, that was not all. There was also the urgent mission he received during the last match, something that would have caused him great pain if he failed it.

#MISSION: Baseball's Honor (Urgent Mission)

DESCRIPTION: An opposing player is taking the game lightly, willfully placing their whims above those of their teammates and jeopardizing their success. System has deemed this unacceptable and requested you teach this arrogant player a lesson.

\*Task: Humble the arrogant Carlos Toro by striking him out 3 times in this match and win the game. [Complete]

REWARDS:

[Received: S-Grade Physicality Elixir & Skill: Showdown]

Unable to wait any longer, he brought up his skill list and tracked down the brand new ones he'd just received.

Showdown: Allows user to assign a member of the opposite team as a target for the duration of a game. When pitching to the target, all grades increase by 2.

Limit Break: When certain conditions are met, user gets a temporary boost in all grades by 2. There will be a penalty after usage: All grades reduced by 1 for 5 minutes.

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

## Chapter 192 - 192: Unforeseen Rewards (2)

Ken couldn't help but let out a whistle of appreciation. He could already see some practical applications where these skills would help him immensely.

The only unfortunate thing about Limit Break was that it didn't specify the conditions required, nor did it say he could activate the skill on its own. If it occurred at the wrong moment, it could certainly backfire.

However, a boost in 2 grades could send some of his skills into the SS tier.

He brought up his status window which he hadn't looked at properly for quite a while.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 3 (14180/10000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 16

TALENT ASSESSMENT: S-

POTENTIAL: SS+

MAJOR POINTS: 14180

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS

-SYSTEM SHOP

-LOTTERY (Locked)

-IMAGE TRAINING

-IDENTIFY

-TRAINING PLAN

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: A+

>Pitching: S-

>Fielding: B-

>Game Intelligence: B-

>Mental: A+

>Skills: 17

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. A+)

Balance and Coordination: S

Agility: A+

Strength: A+

Stamina: S

Seeing his pitching grade now at S-, Ken almost cried out with joy. After months of painstaking work, he had finally improved on the skill he needed the most.

This would be a boon to his chances at Koshien in a few weeks time.

Next up it was time to check out his Elixirs.

Recovery Elixir: Recovers injuries no matter how severe. Can only be used 1 time per person.

'Huh!?'

He reread the description a few times just to make sure that he understood it.

'If it says it can only be used 1 time per person, does that mean it can be used on others?'

Every Elixir he had received in the past could only be used on himself. It never even took on a corporeal form that he could see.

But if he was deducing correctly, then the Recovery Elixir could be used on someone other than himself. However, he couldn't be sure.

'Argh, I wish I could ask the system...'

This was the one drawback of the system currently. He had to use his reasoning and sometimes trial and error when it came to things like this since the system could not communicate directly with him.

But Ken had a small hope that it could change in the future. Perhaps when it reached a certain level, the system would be able to talk and answer his questions.

'Speaking of leveling up.'

Ken looked at the abundance of Major points that had come into his possession and couldn't help but smile. It was finally time to rank up the system to level 4.



"First things first though." He murmured.

He wanted to take the S-Grade physicality elixir right away since the system would shut down while it upgraded.

He had taken an A-Grade physicality elixir before and new how painful it was, so before he could talk himself out of it...

[Are you sure you wish to consume: S-Grade Physicality Elixir?]

[Yes/No]

"Yes."

[Warning, user may experience intense pain due to the strength of the Elixir. Would you like to continue?]

[Yes/No]

Ken paled. Why did the system have to remind him of the punishment he was about to go through?

"Damn it."

"Yes..."

A few moments later he felt a cooling sensation enter his veins, spreading out from his heart towards the rest of his body and extremities. It was almost like the feeling one would have when being put under anesthesia.

Unfortunately for Ken, it was not anesthesia.

The next 10 minutes was a grueling battle which took a toll on not only his body, but also his mental state. Were it not for the muting effects of the system, he would have likely alerted the whole neighborhood of a bloody murder in progress.

Only after his muscles stopped cramping could he finally let out a deep sigh of relief. He felt his consciousness begin to blur since the ordeal had taken so much out of him, filling him with exhaustion.

"C-Crap..."

Ken wanted to upgrade the system before he went to bed tonight, since the sooner he did so the sooner he would get to reap the rewards.

He groggily navigated through the system window, doing his best to keep his eyes open.

#SYSTEM ALERT

>The user has chosen to upgrade the system.

>10,000 Major points will be deducted to upgrade the system.

>System will shut down for 72 hours in which all functions will be unavailable until the upgrade has been completed.

[Would you like to commence the upgrade now?]

[YES/NO]

#SYSTEM ALERT

>The user has confirmed an immediate upgrade of the system.

>10,000 Major points have been deducted.

SYSTEM UPGRADE INITIALIZING

SHUTTING DOWN TO INSTALL UPGRADE...

Ken was fast asleep before he even saw the shut down window. The strain the Elixirs put on his body was not something that a teenagers body should be capable of handling.

It was only because of his strong willpower and drive to get better that he could endure such torture. Were it any other regular teenager, they may have given up by now.

Of course there were exceptions, like with all things. Yet the fact remained that Ken was capable of handling such pain and torture, as long as it helped him get towards his goal.

The next morning, Ken woke up with bleary eyes. Out of habit he turned to his alarm clock, only to see that it was already 7am.

An instant panic overcame his body as he thought his alarm clock had not gone off. His whole routine over the past year and a half was to go for a run at 5am, yet this morning he had overslept.

His mind was pulling at him to lay back in bed to get some more sleep, however his discipline quickly kicked in.

In a flash he was dressed and running down the stairs.

He saw two figures at the dining table, one reading the paper and the other sipping a morning coffee.

With his mind still half asleep, he called out.

"Morning Mom, Dad. I'm going for a run." He said, placing his shoes on and heading out the door.

It wasn't until he was 100 meters down the road that he suddenly realized.

"Eh!? DAD."

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

## Chapter 193 - 193: Dad's Home (1)

Ken quickly returned home, only to be met with his Dad's smiling face at the door.

"Go for your run, I'll still be here when you get back. I promise."

He looked amused, yet there was an underlying pride in his features.

Ken paused for a moment before running forward and embracing his father. Only after seeing him in person did he realize just how much that he'd missed him.

"Alright, I'll be back soon." He said before turning around and beginning his run.

"Don't slack off!" Chris yelled out after him.

Around an hour and a half later, 3 figures were sat around the dining table, tucking into a traditional Japanese breakfast.

"Ah man, I can't tell you how good it is to eat some Japanese food again." Chris exclaimed, shoveling in another mouthful of rice.

Ken looked at his mother who couldn't contain her happiness, a beaming smile painted on her face.

"How was America dad?"

"Meh it was alright. Nothing beats being at home though." He replied, before continuing to stuff his face.

A sly grin formed on Ken's face at those words.

"Ahem. You'll be spending a lot more time at home in the future, so you don't need to worry too much."

His words and the nonchalant tone that they were delivered in caused his father to raise an eyebrow in question. Yuki decided to leave the table in that moment, yet Ken didn't miss the hopeful look on her face before she did.

"Both Daichi and I won our prefectural tournaments, so we're going to Koshien this year."

Chris's eyes bulged as he almost choked on his food. Only after taking a large drink of water did he finally manage to breathe again normally.

"A-Ah how could I have forgotten. That's awesome news Kenny!"

He'd been so caught up in work that he'd been neglecting not only his wife, but his two boys also. Chris suddenly felt a wave of guilt, but he tried not to show it on his face in front of the two.

Ken nodded feeling a sense of pride strike him.

"And you know what that means right?"

"Hmm? What do you mean?" Chris replied.

Ken frowned. From his father's expression he could tell that Chris was earnest in his confusion, which likely meant he had forgotten about their promise.

"You said you would quit your job as the foreign adviser if I was able to win Nationals."

Although he was a little disappointed, he could empathize with his father. There would probably be a lot that would go into a job as lucrative as his.

Since he'd also been in the workforce before, he knew what it was like.

A look of realization finally dawned on his father's face, but it was replaced by a frown not long after.

"Look, Kenny..."

Before he could finish what he had to say, a sound of a plate falling into the sink interrupted them from the kitchen. They both turned to see Yuki's back which was trembling slightly.

"H-Hey honey, why don't you tell Ken the good news?" She said, changing the subject entirely.

Ken was a little confused and turned to his father suspiciously.

"Ah I almost forgot."

He reached into his pockets and produced a few pieces of paper and laid them out on the table.

"We're all heading to the Yokohama Warriors game later this afternoon."

"Oh nice!" Ken exclaimed excitedly.

He hadn't seen a professional game live since regressing. It would be great to try and compare his current play against the pro's and get an idea of how much he needed to improve.

"I got another few tickets, did you want to bring anyone along?" Chris asked curiously.

Before Ken got a chance to think about who he'd want to bring, his mother swooped in and snatched the tickets out of her husband's hands, startling the two.

"Let's invite your girlfriend and her family!"

Yuki's eyes were sparkling as she looked at Ken expectantly.

"Girlfriend?" Chris's eyebrow raised in question, looking to his son with surprise.

Ken felt his face redden as he tried to deny the accusation.

"We're just friends mom, don't make it weird."

However, he didn't mind the idea of going to a baseball game with Ai. He also wouldn't mind seeing her Tetsu squirm in front of his mother for the duration of the match.

Now that he thought of it, he never did figure out how they patched things up after his mom punched Tetsu in the face. However, this was not the time to think about such things.

"I'll call Naomi now~" She said with glee, skipping towards the landline phone.

As Ken let out a sigh after seeing how excited his mother was, he saw his father looking at him oddly while stroking his chin. His eyes were narrowed as he seemingly evaluated his son.

"You've grown..." He muttered.

There was a hint of sadness that flashed imperceptibly on his features before it returned to normal.

Chris felt guilty for having missed out on so much during his work trip. Not only had his son gone through a growth spurt, he was also starting to date girls, turning into a man while he was not present.

There was also the fact he hadn't seen his son play baseball since middle school, almost a full year ago to this day. He then remembered Ken's words about quitting his job and staying home, because he planned to become a professional baseball player.

He even went as far as claiming he'd win nationals, doubling down and forcing him to take those words seriously.

Yet he didn't even remember them until now, almost as if he took these words as a child's fanciful dreams. After all, only the best 49 teams could compete at Koshien every year out of 3000+ high schools.

The odds of qualifying for Koshien in a single-elimination format was already low enough, let alone winning against the best teams in Japan.

Now both of his sons would be competing at nationals, showing just how talented and resolved they were to go all the way.

'I guess I have a lot of thinking to do.' He thought inwardly.

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

## Chapter 194 - 194: Dad's Home (2)

On one hand, he was the head of the family and needed to ensure that the ship did not sink. His own father would fly all the way to Japan and kick his ass if he found out he wasn't supporting his own family.

But he did not want to sacrifice being a part of his own family in favor of supporting them financially, this was like putting the chariot before the horse.

Before he knew it his family would drift apart, going their separate ways and chasing their dreams without him.

"Dad?"

"Hmm?" Chris snapped out of his line of thought, rubbing his eyes.

Ken looked a little concerned, but he repeated his words.

"The game isn't until 4pm, how about you go and get some rest?"

Chris was about to refuse, however Yuki appeared behind him and squeezed his shoulder gently.

"You're probably still jet lagged from such a long flight. Don't worry about us and go get some rest." Her tone was filled with love and concern, bringing a smile to his face.

Who could refuse after hearing such concern from their beautiful wife and caring son.

A small smile graced the corner of his lips as Chris stood up and kissed his wife on the forehead.

"Alright, maybe I'll try get a good nap in." He said, sending a wink to Ken before heading upstairs to bed.

Yuki turned to Ken, her eyes sparkling.

"Take these tickets to Ai's house. They'll find it harder to refuse the offer in person."

A wicked grin formed on her face as she handed 3 tickets to Ken. Her tone was such that Ken knew he couldn't refuse this request.

He let out a long sigh and took the tickets before heading out the door.

"I'll be home soon."

Ken pulled out his phone and began to text Ai right away, letting her know of his intentions to visit. Since it was a Sunday, he wasn't sure what their routines were and did not want to be rude.

In all honesty, he was a little hesitant to go over to Ai's house and that was mainly due to one person.

The last time he saw Ai's father Tetsu, the guy had been slogged in the face by his mother after spilling the beans about their fight. To this day he still did not know what Tetsu's feelings were towards him or his mother.

BUZZ BUZZ

He received a mail back from Ai, letting him know that she was free for him to visit.

"The quicker I get there, the faster it will all be over." Ken muttered before breaking into a brisk jog along the road.

After around 15 minutes he arrived in front of the bakery. Before he could even debate whether or not to go in, a figure wearing a tank top and a bakers apron walked out from inside.

He was covered in flour as usual and his black and gray stubble made him look like a ruffian. This paired with his muscular arms made those who saw him second guess their intentions.

However the moment this man caught sight of Ken on the road, his face visibly paled. For a moment he looked torn between running back inside or acknowledging the figure in front of him.

Thus began the next 15 seconds of awkward staring between the two men while Tetsu took part in his mental battle.

Thankfully, some part of his brain worked, prompting him to make the decision.

"K-Ken my boy! It's good to see ya." He said, moving forward and placing his hand out for a handshake.

'What the hell?'

Ken was perplexed by the behavior of the guy in front of him. He could clearly see that his words and attitude were forced, yet he had no idea why.

Feeling as if he had no other choice, Ken accepted the handshake and gazed at Tetsu suspiciously.

"Why are you being weird?" He asked bluntly.

"W-Weird? Yer just imaginin' things." However, with the way Tetsu's eyes were darting all over the place, it was clearly not as he said.

"Well if you have anything to say I'd suggest you say it now." Ken added. Since he was about to invite them to a baseball game, he didn't want to worry about an awkward atmosphere between them all afternoon.

That would be far too draining.



Tetsu flinched for a moment before he raised his head and met Ken's gaze.

"Dude what the hell? Have ya got roots or somethin?"

After finally looking at Ken, he noticed that the kid had grown once more. He now towered over his average height, making him look like a short ape with big arms.

"That's what you wanted to ask me?" Ken replied, rolling his eyes.

"Tch."

Tetsu clicked his tongue in annoyance before trying to compose himself.

"I was told ta be nice to ya otherwise I'd get in trouble." He replied, looking like he'd been the subject of bullying.

Ken's eyes widened, staring at the ruffian in front of him. If it weren't for the apron he was wearing and the bakers flour on him, Tetsu would look right at home alongside gangsters.

Yet this guy had been bullied by both his wife and daughter by the sounds of it. If Ken also added his mother into the mix, then that would make 3 women who had made his life hell.

"Hahahaha!"

Ken couldn't help but laugh out loud, feeling his obliques start to seize up from the strain. The thought of Iron Chin Tetsu being bullied by women was just too hilarious to not laugh at.

Tetsu's face turned up into a frown as he stared at Ken's laughing figure. He felt an itch in his knuckles, wanting to let out a little of his frustration.

However, the moment he thought so, he suddenly remembered all of the punishment he'd received from the two ladies of the house.

"A-Anyway. Ya better tell em' I was nice to ya." He said, shaking his fist.

Yet instead of a threat, it almost looked like he was pleading for his life. This only served to make Ken laugh even harder.

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

## Chapter 195 - 195: First Impressions (1)

Not long after, Ai arrived out the front of the house and saw her father and Ken on the road. Instantly she assumed that her dad was giving Ken a hard time, so she quickly stepped forward and slid past.

"Hey Ken, let's go inside." She said with a smile, grabbing his arm and dragging him with her.

On the way past she narrowed her eyes at Tetsu as if to remind him to be nice.

Tetsu felt wronged, yet there was nothing he could say in that moment for his defense.

"Sorry to intrude." Ken said aloud.

It was only after seeing Ai's mother that he noticed his arm was touching something soft. This caused his face to redden slightly, yet any attempts to extricate his arm were met with a stern resistance from the woman in question.

"Ken! It's nice to see you." Naomi said with a smile.

She saw his current predicament and had no reaction. Ken even thought he witnessed her sending a wink to Ai beside him, stoking his curiosity.

'Don't tell me...'

While Ken was seemingly uncovering a conspiracy, Naomi snapped him out of his thoughts.

"What brings you here dear? Did you just come for a visit, or were you after some baked goods."

Her tone was kind, yet it was clear she was hoping he was here for the former.

"Ah actually I came to deliver these."

After a few more tugs he was finally able to remove his arm from Ai's grasp, fishing out a few pieces of paper from his trousers. He handed them over to Naomi before explaining.

"My dad got some tickets for the Yokohama Warriors game this afternoon. I was wondering if you'd all like to come along?" He asked politely.

"Oh how wonderful!" Naomi exclaimed, almost snatching the tickets out of Ken's hands. It was almost as if she was worried he'd change his mind or something.

Ai too seemed to have an excited expression on her features.

"Will your dad also be there?" She asked softly.

Ken nodded, a smile unconsciously forming on his features.

"Wonderful! We have much to discuss." Naomi said excitedly.

'Hmm? Much to discuss?' Ken raised his eyebrow in confusion. They had never met before, so what could they possibly discuss.

However, there was no point in asking such a thing since Naomi seemed to be in her own world at the moment. She quickly began to tidy up the shop, all the while speaking under her breath.

"So much to do..."

"...venue"

"we'd need flowers..."

As Naomi sped around the place, Ken could hear certain words, yet the contents were indiscernible at this time. At one point he even though he'd heard her utter the word marriage under her breath.

He glanced at Ai for confirmation, unsure of what was going on.

Ai felt her face heat up under Ken's gaze, but she quickly tried to compose herself.

"I think what mom is saying... Is that we'd love to come." She asserted.

Ken breathed out a sigh of relief. While he wasn't too bothered if they came or not, his mother did not share his same opinion.

"Okay great! We'll see each other later then." Ken replied, turning around and heading for the door.

"Ah okay see you this afternoon." Ai replied, a little disappointed.

She was hoping that they'd be able to spend a little time together today before the game, however it seemed that it would not be happening.

Her eyes narrowed on Ken's retreating figure, trying to figure out how he could never pick up on any of the hints she dropped. Her reply to his mail this morning even stated she was excited to hang out with him today...

'His head is just stuffed with baseball...!' She complained inwardly.

Ken on the other hand was oblivious as he walked out of the Koyama residence. Thankfully Tetsu had already made himself scarce which meant he didn't have to go through another awkward conversation.

He broke into a run once he reached the road and began his journey back home.

Tetsu revealed himself from his hiding spot behind a wall and watched Ken's retreating figure.

"The further I stay away from him the better" Tetsu mumbled, wiping away the sweat from his brow.

Some might say that his actions were cowardly, but they had never met his wife and daughter. He was a staunch believer in the phrase "Never pick a losing battle."

Since his aggravator was not around, Tetsu went back inside only to see his wife tidying and muttering under her breath like a madman.

"Er, what's goin' on?"

He looked to Ai who had her cheeks puffed out like a hamster, something she usually did when disappointed. This only served to make his intuition tingle even further, bringing with it a deep-seated wariness.

There was only one thing he could do in that moment, and that was retreat before anyone noticed his presence.

As he backed away slowly, he managed to knock into a shelf, creating a clashing noise.

Suddenly, both women turned to him at the same time, causing a shiver to run down his spine.

"Honey! Hurry up and get changed. I won't have you embarrassing us tonight, not on such a special occasion." Naomi barked out.

"Dad! Were you mean to Ken earlier? Is that why he didn't want to stay longer?"

Ai was next, stepping forward with an accusatory expression on her face.

"Tetsu! Why aren't you getting ready already?"

The two women inched closer toward him, filling him with fear.

'W-Why am I being bullied again!?' He shouted inwardly.

\*\*\*

Chris finally woke up after a 4 hour nap, his mind feeling considerably lighter. The time difference between Japan and LA was 16 hours, this paired with the 12 hour flight made it hard to make the adjustments so quickly.

After taking a shower he felt like a new man.

He quickly looked at the time and nodded in satisfaction. With his access to employee entrances, getting into the stadium would make things considerably easier for them.

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

## Chapter 196 - 196: First Impressions (2)

Once he arrived in the kitchen, he saw his wife and son waiting for him, dressed nicely.

"Hey, is that my shirt?" Chris said, pointing to a nice button up that Ken was wearing.

Ken nodded, his expression one of pain and sadness. He had thought he was old enough to pick out his own clothes, yet his mother wouldn't let him tonight. He was currently dressed as if he was going to a work function.

"Oh sorry honey~ Kenny has gone through a growth spurt so I had to borrow some of your clothes. I mean, he's so lucky to have such a tall and stylish father."

Yuki's words were suspicious, however Chris's expression brightened after receiving such high praise from his wife.

"Hehe, well what can I say darling, you have great taste as usual." Chris replied, straightening up his own shirt.

Yuki's face fell in the next moment before she uttered her next words.

"Ah, let's see if we can find something a little more... stylish for you to wear honey."

With that, she walked forward and grabbed her husband's arm, gently ushering him back towards the room.

Ken couldn't help but let out a vindicated laugh as he saw that his father would also have to suffer through his mom's dress-up routine.

It wasn't until 20 minutes later that the duo returned to the kitchen. This time, Chris was wearing a more business-like number, just like his son.

The two looked at each other, both wearing a helpless expression on their features.

Before they knew it, both Ken and Chris broke into laughter, leaving Yuki with a questioning look on her face. Yet it didn't take long for her to break into a smile, she had truly missed moments like these when the house was filled with laughter.

"Okay let's hurry, I told Naomi we'd meet her at the train station."

\*\*\*

Soon enough, the trio arrived at the train station. With both Ken and Chris's abnormal height, they were able to spot Ai and her family waiting near the entrance of the platform.

Ken stuck his hand up and waved, but Ai had already spotted his head that seemed to be bobbing above the crowd as he walked along.

As they got closer, Ken's eyes widened in appreciation as he saw the summer dress Ai wore. It was white with yellow flowers and flowed nicely along her figure, accentuating her budding curves and long legs.

Tetsu's eyes also widened as he looked up at Ken's father. While he was not as tall as Chibi the mustachioed gangster, this guy was handsome and exotic, with certain traits one would only find from westerners.

Both Yuki and Naomi stepped forward, giving each other a warm hug.

"Thank you for inviting us Yuki, we are so excited to go see a professional baseball match with you all." Naomi said, flashing a smile.

"And this must be your handsome husband Chris who I've heard all about. It's a pleasure to meet you, I'm Naomi." She leaned in for a hug, to which he had to bend down in order to participate.

Since he had spent a lot of time in America, he wasn't too fazed about hugs, yet the same could not be said for the others in attendance. Both Tetsu, Ken and even Ai had their eyes wide in surprise.

In Japan it was rather uncustomary to hug those whom you'd just met.

"This is my husband Tetsu."

Tetsu was probably the most dumbfounded by the situation, not even realizing he'd been introduced by his wife. All he saw was the large hand of the tall human stretch out in front of him.

Thankfully, his brain was able to pick up the pieces and accept the handshake in time before it was awkward.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Ken's father Chris."

"T-Tetsu."

Naomi completed the introductions, pointing out her daughter on the side. Ai felt a little awkward in the moment, hoping that she would not be pressured into hugging.

However, upon receiving a smile and a polite bow, she breathed a sigh of relief.

While she wasn't adverse to hugging, she'd never done so outside of her own family. The only person in attendance that she wouldn't mind completing the deed with was Ken who was standing in front of her.

At the thought, her cheeks blushed slightly, contrasting with her white dress and painting an alluring sight.

Unfortunately, Ken was too busy gawking at Naomi who had already begun having secret conversations with his mother. The two were like old friends as they huddled together as if they were making arrangements.

"Should we enter the platform then?" Chris asked with a smile, deferring to Tetsu.

"A-Ah, sure thing."

With Naomi and Yuki together, as well as Chris and Tetsu walking off, it left Ai and Ken together trailing the pack. Only now did he find the time to actually appreciate her outfit and how cute she looked.

"You look very pretty this afternoon." He said, feeling his throat seize a little while saying so.

It was weird, he usually found it easy to talk to Ai when he was alone during their commute back home after practice. Yet he was being awkward in this moment.

"Thank you. You're looking quite handsome yourself" She replied, flashing him a cute smile.

Ken almost let out a groan in response, "My mother actually picked out my outfit, not taking no for an answer. Apparently she doesn't trust my style."

Ai paused for a moment. She'd only seen Ken outside of school clothes a few times before and apart from the times where he was working out, he'd looked okay.

"Your outfit when you came over for dinner that time was good, well apart from the jeans." She said earnestly.

Ken felt his face flush red, "M-My mom picked out my shirt then too..."

"Pfft..."

"M-Maybe ... You need some work... then."

Ai felt her sides hurt as she tried to hold her giggles from escaping between words.

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

## Chapter 197 - 197: Before the Game (1)

The trip was rather uneventful, even bordering harmonious as the 6 boarded the train and headed towards the stadium. After the initial awkwardness, Chris and Tetsu seemed to be getting along well, bonding over baseball.

"Eh!? You played over in America?" Tetsu exclaimed in shock, his loud voice attracting attention from other passengers on the train.

Chris nodded, feeling some pride swell.

"I played in High School before I returned to Japan for college."

The two continued to chat, talking about the differences between the two countries baseball programs. Ken breathed a sigh of relief, he wasn't sure how things would go, but since the two shared a love for baseball he should have never doubted his fathers ability to talk about the subject.

The train was rather packed, with plenty of passengers wearing the Yokohama Warriors jersey's to show their support.



After himself and Ai settled down, the conversation seemed more natural. There was always an initial awkwardness which could probably be boiled down to teenage hormones, yet he seemed to be enjoying himself at this moment.

"This will be my first time seeing a professional baseball game live." Ai said, a look of excitement in her eyes.

This only served to pique Ken's curiosity. In his past life, Ai had chosen to join the Fashion Club at school since she was passionate about the subject. He had never seen her show an interest in baseball prior, so what had changed.

"Did you always like baseball Ai?" He asked, his gaze falling on her fair features.

"Ah, no not really." She admitted, feeling a little insecure.

"So what changed?" Ken was relentless, posing the hard questions as if they were nothing.

"A-Ah..." Ai fidgeted for a little bit, as if deciding whether or not to reply.

Only after a few moments did she answer, albeit in a quiet voice.

"I-I saw that you guys were having so much fun in middle school, so I thought I'd take a look for myself. My mom and dad also thought it would be a good idea to join." She lowered her head, yet peeked out of her lashes in order to see his reaction.

"Oh." Ken nodded, feeling as if it was a satisfactory answer.

Initially he was worried that he had too much of an influence on her not joining the Fashion Club, but it seemed like he wasn't the only reason.

"Well how is it? As fun as you thought it would be?" He asked with a grin.

Ai smiled sweetly in response and nodded.

"To see you all working so hard to get better has motivated me to pursue fashion seriously." She admitted, feeling grateful.

'Huh?' Ken's eyes widened in surprise.

"Initially I was too timid and afraid of failure to try properly..."

Ai gripped the hem of her dress tightly.

"B-But you taught me that with enough hard work, you can achieve anything." Her face reddened after saying this, but Ken could see the appreciation in her features.

Not expecting such a confession, Ken quickly averted his gaze, feeling his heart beat faster in response.

'Was it meant to be like this?' He thought in confusion.

Despite the turn of events, he couldn't help but feel a sense of relief. There was always a part of him that felt like he influenced Ai into the baseball club. He was worried that she may be giving up her dreams thanks to him.

But it turned out he was wrong, dead wrong.

"That's great to hear Ai. I'll be cheering you on." He said genuinely.

"T-Thanks."

"Wow, you two suit each other. I still can't believe you didn't tell me about your girlfriend."

Ken almost jumped in fright as he heard his father speak out beside him. But it was only after he saw the look of confusion on Ai's features that he recognized his dad was speaking in English.

"Damn it Dad, what if she understood English?" He turned to his father and admonished him, only to receive a teasing grin in response.

"Ah so what? Can't a Father be proud of his son?" Chris asked rhetorically.

"I didn't know you could speak English so fluently?" Ai said, her tone showing how impressed she was.

"What were you guys talking about?"

Just before Ken was about to answer, Chris butted in.

"I was just saying how you two make a cute couple."

"Geh"

"Hahahaha!" Chris laughed heartily as he saw the two turn beet red. He even saw Tetsu's face morph a few times, adding into his amusement.

"Ehhhh? Ya reckon' my son's not good enough for your daughter?" Chris said teasingly, draping his arm over Tetsu's shoulder.

Thankfully, they arrived at their destination in the next few moments, after which the air was cleared.

From the train station the walk was only around 10 minutes to the stadium. They joined the mass of people and continued forward. Due to both Chris and Ken's height, they were constantly receiving the looks of others.

This only increased as Chris pulled them out of the line and moved towards the security guards at the gates.

"Hey Chris! I didn't know you were back in the country."

One of the security guard's expression brightened as he saw the tall figure approach him. He seemed genuinely happy to see Chris, judging by his attitude.

"Haha yeah I just got back last night, wanted to take my son and his girlfriend to see the Warriors." He replied laughingly.

"Well it's good to see you again. Here I'll let you in." He said, moving to the side and opening the staff entrance for the group.

"Thanks Hiro, I'll see you next week." Chris replied before ushering in Ken and the others.

"Uwaahh, is that guy a celebrity?"

An immature voice sounded out from the line, yet no one responded.

"Hey Kei, that guy looks about as tall as you~"

"Hmm?"

A tall youth with bleach blond hair turned his head and looked at the group that was headed in through a special entrance. Ken also happened to look back at the same time, locking gazes with the other.

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

## Chapter 198 - 198: Before the Game (2)

A hint of recognition flashed in Ken's eyes before he was forced to continue his walk through the gate.

"Did you know that guy?" The same immature voice asked him.

"Nope."

The two were silent for a few moments before the shorter one announced.

"Ah man this is so boring. Why are we even here?"

The tall youth named Kei let out a sigh before rubbing his glabella in exasperation. He had wanted to bring his friend to a professional game, hoping to spark some inspiration.

He turned to his friend and assessed him.

Tatsuo Shiraki, the genius short stop and lead off batter from Shinjuku High. He had messy brown hair and dull green eyes, he could be called handsome if it wasn't for the perpetually bored expression on his face.

He was average height and had an average build, yet he was a speed demon and baseball genius.

'If only he took it seriously...!' Kei sighed inwardly.

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Upon entering through the staff gate, Ken's mind was buzzing. He had recognized the tall figure in the line, as well as the shorter figure beside him. They were players from Shinjuku High.

Funnily enough, Shinjuku High was the team that knocked them out in the first round of the Nationals in his previous life. He would never forget the humiliation of that match on such a big stage.

Just remembering the bored expression of the short figure as he stole bases from him during the match. No matter how many times he tried to pick him off, the guy was too quick.

Although the odd thing was, he never heard anything about the prodigy afterwards. Even if he combed his memory, it was as if the kid had disappeared off the face of the Earth.

"Did you guys want to go see the team warming up?" Chris said, breaking Ken out of his line of thought.

"Eh really!?" Tetsu seemed the most surprised and excited out of anyone.

"Yeah sure why not? I'm sure the coach won't mind as long as we don't get in the way."  
He replied with a smile.

With that, the group made their way onto the field, walking towards the bullpen. Chris was like a celebrity as those who walked past greeted him in a friendly fashion.

Seeing the professional facilities, the Koyama family was quite taken in. While Tetsu had played at Koshien before, it was so long ago that he'd forgotten the feeling of a professional stadium.

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As they moved closer to the bullpen, the sound of the balls hitting the leather gloves entered their ears. There was a crispness that one wouldn't hear from a High School game, showing the level difference between the two.

"We can watch from here, just try not to disturb anyone." Chris said casually.

Ken could see a few familiar faces, particularly the American Jason Matthews who was casually throwing some balls. Since he was a closer, he didn't need to get completely warm in this moment.

His pitching motion and wind up seemed so effortless, yet his control was pinpoint, showing just what kind of mastery he had over his body.

He happened to look Ken's way before a look of recognition appeared onto his face.

"Ah it's Kenny boy!"

At his shout, the rest of the players turned in his direction and saw the group outside the fence. Save for a few that recognized Ken, the rest called out to Chris.

"Hey Chris, welcome back."

"We thought you left us for good."

A bitter smile appeared on the coach's face as he saw the players abandon their warm ups in favor of going to say hello to the familiar face.

Chris sent an apologetic smile to the coach who was now glaring at him, but he didn't want to be rude to the players so he kept up appearances.

James walked up to the fence and said hello to Ken, a fond smile on his expression.

"Hey kid you've gotten taller." He held his hand up, trying to measure where Ken stood as opposed to him. Since he was 193cm (6'4), he was still a couple of inches taller than the teenager, but he still looked impressed nonetheless.

"Hi James, it's good to see you again." Ken replied. Since they were speaking in English, no one else in the group besides Chris and Yuki could understand him.

In the next moment, James's eyes narrowed and he leaned forward.

"Have you improved since the last time we met?"

Ken was startled for a moment before a smile graced his lips. He thought about his current pitching grade and the increase in stats which he hadn't had a chance to look at thanks to the system being offline.

"Of course. We just made it into Nationals."

James let out a little whistle of appreciation before a mischievous grin appeared on his face suddenly.

"Show me."

"Eh?"

Ken looked around, feeling a little uncomfortable. He didn't plan on pitching at this moment, especially since the players were meant to be warming up.

"What's wrong? Are you scared that you'll embarrass yourself in front of your little girlfriend over here?" James taunted, yet he looked amused rather than antagonistic.

"B-But won't I get in trouble?" He replied a little fearfully.

As if to respond to his worries, James lifted his head and yelled out in broken Japanese.

"Oi Yamamoto, come catch some of Kenny boy's pitches."

"Eh?"

Chris turned his gaze to Ken, yet seeing how flustered his son was, he quickly understood the situation.

"Ah James, we wouldn't want to disturb your practice anymore." He said, raising his hands while trying to politely decline.

However, James seemed to be adamant about seeing Ken pitch again.

It was only now that the disturbance had escalated that the coach left his corner and came over. He nodded to Chris, yet his expression didn't seem too pleased.

"What's this all about James?" he asked.

"I want to see Kenny Boy here pitch a few balls." James stated simply, his face settling into a stubborn look.

The coach turned his attention to Ken who looked as if he'd swallowed a rock.

After letting out a long-winded sigh, the coach relented, opening the door to the bullpen and gesturing for Ken to come inside.

"Eh? EHHHH?"

"Hurry up. The quicker you throw your balls, the quicker we can continue our warm ups." The coach stated.

'H-How did things end up like this?'

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

## Chapter 199 - 199: Foreign Ritual (1)

Ken felt anxious as he stepped into the bullpen. Not only did he have his and Ai's family watching, but he was also surrounded by the players from Yokohama Warriors.

There was also the annoyed expression on the coach's face who looked like he wanted to get back to warming up. He couldn't be blamed for being nervous in this moment, yet there was a part of him that was excited.

Isn't this what he always wanted? To become a pro?

What other teen would ever get such a chance at the age of 16?

The answer was none. Japan had a strict policy against clubs and scouts talking to teenagers who were still in High School, they were only allowed to talk to the parent or guardian directly.

Ken turned to his father who was watching him intently. It seemed he also wanted to see how much he'd improved since the last time he was in this very bullpen.

"Excellent. Show us what you've got Kenny boy." James said, handing him a baseball.

He took the ball and gripped it in his hand, feeling the familiar sensation of the leather against his skin. Ken could feel pairs of eyes staring into his soul in that moment, so he didn't dilly dally, quickly moving towards the mound opposite Yamamoto.

After rolling his shoulder a few times, he sent a throw to the catcher, intending to warm up a little. It was pretty obvious after a few throws that his button up shirt was going to get in the way of his pitching action.

Despite feeling a little awkward about it, Ken unbuttoned his shirt a little, evoking a few whistles and laughs from the professional players.

"Oh my, I'm blushing."

"Is it hot in here or is it just me?"

"Hahaha."

However, some of those laughs dissipated after they saw the defined chest of the boy in question. It was clear from a glance that the kid was in great shape, despite only seeing the tip of the iceberg.

A few of the players who hadn't been present that day started to look on earnestly.

After around 15 balls, Ken felt warm enough to begin throwing properly. As he was about to enter his stance, he was interrupted by a loud voice.

"Ah, someone remove the landline phone just in case. We got in trouble when you broke it last time."

There was a wicked grin on his face as he sent a wink to Ken.

Ken smiled, feeling a lot of his anxiety disappear. Since James had called out in English, there were only a few people who could understand him, Ken and his family being those.

He sent a thankful look to James before turning towards the catcher and letting out a deep breath.

Unknowingly, Ai had gripped her father's shirt, feeling a bad case of second-hand nervousness. While she had seen him pitch plenty during their High School games, she wanted him to succeed in front of all these professionals.

Ken emptied his mind and stared at the glove that was held out. He had only one thought in that moment, and that was to show how much he'd improved.



Without a word, he squared up and lifted his left knee to his chest and pushed forward. As his foot planted solidly on the ground, his arm whipped around and sent the ball flying from his fingertips.

Those who watched on could tell right away that the form was immaculate, honed from thousands of hours of practice.

The ball tore through the air with intent, spinning violently from the torque generated from his fingertips. Yet it was guided with precision to its intended target until...

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Ai pumped her fist, quietly cheering in her heart.

James frowned deeply, as if something was off, seeming slightly disappointed.

There was silence in the bullpen afterwards, almost as if no one had expected such a result in the first place.

Clap

Clap

It was actually the coach who walked forward, clapping his hands dramatically. Whatever annoyance was on his expression earlier was replaced with surprise and appreciation.

He looked at Ken's figure up and down a few times before nodding.

"That was a great pitch young man. But I could tell you were holding back." He said, matter-of-factly.

"Eh?"

Ai's parents had the same expression of surprise at this statement, especially Tetsu who looked like he was about to faint.

'T-That was holdin' back!?'

He almost didn't want to believe it. Even in his glory days at Zama High he had never seen such a pitch from a freshman, including when he went to Koshien.

Ken nodded.

"I can't pitch in these shoes." He stated, pointing to the trendy dress shoes he was currently wearing.

If he couldn't plant his foot correctly, there was no way he'd be able to generate his usual power, especially when standing on a mound of dirt.

"Ah..."

James's expression returned to normal after realizing such a fact. He had originally thought that the kid was not taking it seriously, however what he said had made sense.

"What size shoe are you?" asked the coach.

Ken was a little taken aback at the question.

'Surely they're not gonna make me try with cleats on...'

Yet that was exactly the case. After telling them his size, the coach returned with size 12 cleats and prompted him to put them on.

Instead of refusing, Ken just shrugged his shoulders. He'd already come this far, what was the harm in going all out. He felt a little odd without the system, but he wasn't in a situation where he needed its help.

After getting the cleats on, he stood up and made his way back to the mound. There was now no issues with pitching properly.

This time, those who weren't paying attention earlier suddenly quietened down and turned their attention to his figure upon the mound.

Once again Ken performed his wind up, yet this time there was more intent and savagery within his movements. It was as if a stalking leopard had pounced forward, using its powerful claws in order to inflict carnage upon its prey.

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

## Chapter 200 - 200: Foreign Ritual (2)

SHIIIIIIICK

The sound of fabric ripping sounded throughout the bullpen, yet no one paid attention to it in that moment. They followed the ball which had been propelled forward with sheer force, spiraling through the air with ill intent.

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"Mmm that's better." James called out, his face filled with glee. He was about to walk forward and compliment the young kid when he suddenly noticed his shirt hanging off of his body.

"Ah! What happened to your shirt?" He exclaimed in confusion.

It was torn in such a way that it looked like he'd been attacked by a wild animal.

Ai quickly covered her eyes with her hands, feeling her face redden. Yet her fingers parted imperceptibly in order to stare a little longer.

Ken felt the breeze tickle his skin as it made use of the large tears to gain entrance to his body. He looked at his mother who seemed to be annoyed that such a nice shirt was ruined.

"Someone get this kid a jersey." The coach yelled out before heading over to Chris who was still outside the bullpen.

He leaned in with his eyes locked onto Chris's.

"Just what the hell have you been feeding this kid?"

There was no accusation in the tone, only appreciation. It seemed that he was more than satisfied with Ken's performance, despite being a professional coach for the Yokohama Warriors.

"I-I'm not sure." Chris replied. In fact, apart from Tetsu he was the most shocked person in attendance.

Apart from the last time they were here to see Dr. Yukichi, the last time he'd seen Ken pitch was in the second year of middle school. It was only now that he realized just how monstrous his son had become in that short period of 2 years.

Tetsu was not only shocked by the pitch, but also by the well toned and chiseled body of the teen in front of him. From the clothes Ken usually wore, he'd just assumed the kid was a scrawny and tall dude, yet he was dead wrong.

He turned to see his daughter peeking through her fingers at his body and couldn't help but feel his face flush red.

"Damn it, don't look." He snapped, placing his large soft hands over her eyes.

However he soon felt a bite on his pinky, causing him to yelp out in surprise.

By the time one of the staff arrived with a jersey, Ai had already burned the image into her mind. She had a satisfied expression on her face which matched well with her flushed cheeks.

After getting changed, Ken now looked a little odd. With a baseball jersey on and his nice business pants, he looked ridiculous to put it nicely.

"Hahahaha! Quite the look you've got there Kenny Boy" James commented, placing his arm around the youth's shoulder.

Ken felt embarrassed in that moment. If he was honest, he wished that he could just go home right now. The thought of having to be in public dressed like this was enough to make any teenager mortified.

James held him a little closer, leaning in a little before speaking.

"If you keep improving, I'm sure we'll see you in the big leagues soon." He said, his tone full of confidence.

"Thanks Mr. Matthews." Ken replied, feeling grateful for the man's words of encouragement. It felt good to be acknowledged by a professional of the sport, something that had never happened to him prior.

But it seemed he wasn't done yet.

"Just don't get cocky. Everyone in our batting line up would have been able to hit that ball, if not foul it. You've still got a few years to improve, so don't let it get to your head."

Whatever confidence Ken had gained quickly fell down the toilet. He had thought that since he could strike out players like Carlos that he'd at least stand a chance against some of the pro's. Even if they were at the end of the batting lineup.

However, James's words seemed to bring him back down to Earth.

There was no way he wouldn't trust the words of a guy who had played in the Majors for over a decade. After all, his ultimate goal was to reach the Majors with his brother.

"Yes sir, I'll do my best." Ken replied, giving an earnest smile.

"Good!"

Seeing the sincerity in his response, James was in a good mood. He was happy seeing the kid he had his eye on had improved so much in a short span of time, better yet he was not even cocky about it.

Too many times back home he'd find some good seedlings, only for them to rot away due to pride or improper work ethic. He knew enough about people to know when they were sincere or not.

"Go grab some pants from the locker room with your Dad, you look ridiculous." He said, giving Ken a slap on the behind as he walked past.

Not expecting the contact, Ken's cheeks tightened out of reflex and he covered his buns. He had seen the infamous butt slaps during Major League games, however this was the first time he'd been on the receiving end of one.

He suddenly heard a contagious laughter coming from the other side of the fence, something he recognized instantly.

His father was holding his sides and laughing hysterically, with tears flowing from the corner of his eyes while the rest of his group stared at him in puzzlement.

By the time Ken left the dugout, Chris was still in fits. It wasn't until Ken was standing in front of him that he finally managed to calm down.

"W-What's so funny?" Ken asked, a hint of annoyance in his tone.

Chris chuckled and put his arm around Ken's shoulders, a knowing look creeping onto his face.

"You reacted the exact same way I did after receiving my first butt slap in America." He replied, his face still showing amusement.

"Ah..." Ken seemed to have accepted his fate as the group moved back towards the facilities.

"Let's go change your pants before we head to our seats." Chris said, consoling his son.

James watched the retreating figure of Ken and their group heading to the locker room, a smile ingrained on his features.

'Sorry for lying to you Kenny Boy. I just don't want you to become complacent.'

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

