

Major League System

Chapter 221 - 221: Showdown (1)

Yuta crouched down before giving the signal for a high fastball, hoping that their opponent would tip it into the air for an easy catch.

Ken nodded, feeling a sense of anticipation as to how fast his fastball would be now.

He adjusted his cap and let out a deep breath. In the next moment his eyes narrowed as he began his wind up, lifting his left knee high before stepping forward in a single fluid motion.

Daichi held his breath as Ken began his pitch. He had only seen Ken pitch with his left, which lacked power, so he was feeling a little anxious.

However, the dugout looked on with expectation. Since becoming the Ace, Ken had been nothing but consistent, becoming their guardian deity and keeping their scorecard clean.

"Hup!"

Ken subconsciously let out a noise as he put all of his strength into his body and let his arm whip the ball out. He could feel his muscles working diligently, rippling underneath his skin.

'So fast!'

Yuta's eyes widened as he saw the pitch coming towards his glove. He braced for impact, only to hear the wind roaring in his ears.

WHOOOOOSH

A dreadful sound of the bat swinging through the air sounded, blocking everything else out. It was as if a hurricane had suddenly descended, feeling as if it would destroy everything in its path.

However...

PAH

Yuta felt the sudden impact of the ball in his glove and instantly felt his hand go numb. Yet instead of wincing, he let out a sigh of relief and turned his attention to Tatsuo in the batters box.

"Hmm? That felt a little off." Tatsuo mumbled, taking a look at his bat as if it was going to confirm something.

"W-WHAT!?"

Shiro heard the coach exclaim loudly next to him and couldn't understand why. He saw his slack jaw as the coach stared at something in the distance.

Curious, Shiro followed the line of sight all the way to the jumbo screen, only to seemingly have the exact same reaction.

"159km/h!?"

"M-Monster..."

The Shinjuku dugout suddenly paled after seeing the dreadful pitch of Ken fly straight past Tatsuo's bat. There was a mixture of awe and disbelief as they tried to understand what had happened.

To this day, they had never seen Tatsuo miss a pitch that he had swung at. Granted he'd only been in the club for 6 months and never came to practice, but they had already elevated his status to one of their top players.

All through the Tokyo Prefecture Tournament he had never missed a swing, yet their first match at Nationals had overturned their expectations.

"N-Nice pitch!" Yuta said eventually, standing up and throwing the ball back to Ken on the mound.

Ken felt good after the pitch, but he felt like he could still improve.

"So fast..." Daichi stared at Ken on the mound in wonder, feeling his heart beating wildly in his chest.

'I want to catch it...!' He suddenly felt a burning desire to catch Ken's pitches. Just thinking about what kind of leads he could do with such pitches made him excited.

"He's improved so much." Chris stated, feeling pride well up from inside.

Once again Yuta asked for another fastball, this time calling for an inside ball. With how monstrous the last swing had sounded, he was worried about it making contact.

Tatsuo stepped back into the batters box and took the same stance as earlier, this time making a few adjustments so that it felt more natural.

"W-What?" Chris's eyes widened in shock.

"What is it dad?"

"That kid... Who is he?"

Daichi looked at Tatsuo and answered as best he could.

"Tatsuo Shiraki, he seemed to appear out of nowhere at this years Tokyo Prefecture Tournament. Even the Osaka Toins scouts don't know much about him. Why?"

Chris frowned for a moment before shaking his head in exasperation.

"It looks like he has a distinct feel for the mechanics of baseball." He said, not explaining any further.

However inwardly he was shocked. If his guess was correct, then the kid was a genius who instinctively knew how to manipulate his body to get the greatest effect.

There were professionals in the field of biomechanics who had spent years trying to perfect even the smallest of actions to increase a players strength and longevity. It was a whole science dedicated to improving performance at the highest level.

Yet this kid after only a single swing was able to tell that the stance and form was not suitable for him. The minor adjustments were similar to what he did for his son Daichi, due to him lacking the height to make the most out of the form.

The difference was, Chris had plenty of research to back up his decisions, whereas Tatsuo purely did it by instinct.

'What a monster.'

Chris couldn't help but feel nervous for his son on the mound in that moment, yet he was thankful they were able to amass 3 runs in the first innings.

Unaware of the thoughts of his father, Ken sent a nod to Yuta and got into position. He noticed the slight changes in the form of Tatsuo, but could not understand the intricacies like his dad.

He performed his wind up and whipped the ball out, using his flexible fingers as a spring to create the maximum spin possible. The action felt a lot more natural than before, putting less strain on his body in the process.

The ball seemingly danced through the air with the additional spin, yet it's destination was true. It seemed even faster than the previous pitch as it spun at high velocity, intent on blasting through the strike zone.

'Mmm good.'

Tatsuo planted his left foot and swung the bat, using the energy from his twisting body to generate as much power as possible. It felt a lot easier than before and lacked the awkwardness he had experienced.

Once again, Yuta felt the roaring wind enter his ears and couldn't help but flinch.

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

Chapter 222 - 222: Showdown (2)

WHOOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike!"

DING

Ken felt great after the pitch. Inwardly he knew that he'd gone faster than the previous one. After receiving the ball back from Yuta, he turned to the Jumbo screen and felt his eyes widen.

'160km/h?'

He blinked a couple of times in confusion, not knowing when or how his pitches had gotten so fast in such a small amount of time.

'It must be because of my skill showdown.' He thought.

[Correct. User currently has SS grade pitching thanks to Skill showdown]

Ken nodded and was about to thank Mika for her input, until his face froze.

'Wait, did you say SS grade? Showdown is only meant to increase my grade by 2, meaning I should have S+ at most right?'

He suddenly turned pale. If his Limit Break skill had triggered, it would add another 2 grades onto his pitching. However, there was a drawback to this skill which would decrease all his grades by 1 for 5 minutes.

'I can't afford to have my pitching drop to an A+ against the Shinjuku opening batters...'

Yet in the next moment, Mika's words filled him with shock.

[User has pitched 100mph and has been upgraded to S+ Grade Pitching]

'Eh?'

Now that he thought about it, he remembered hearing a notification upon pitching the last ball. Since he was on the mound though, there was no way he'd open up the system window in front of so many people.

While it was likely impossible, he was worried someone might notice it.

He couldn't help but let out a grin, reveling in the unexpected reward. It seemed that hitting certain milestones would give special rewards, something he couldn't have been sure of until now.

As he turned his attention back to Yuta, he suddenly noticed the crowd were cheering loudly, breaking into a chant in time with the drums.

"YOKO HAMA"

"YOKO HAMA"

It seemed that his feat of reaching 160km/h or 100mph was well received by the crowd. He felt a wave of happiness, but quickly tried to control himself. He still needed to get Tatsuo out or none of it would matter.

The last swing had felt awfully close to hitting the ball despite the overwhelming speed he threw it at. Therefore he needed to be careful with the next one.

BA BUMP

BA BUMP

Tatsuo felt his dull heart beating out of his chest after experiencing the last ball. There was no hint of frustration in his face, quite the opposite actually.

He entered the batters box once more and couldn't help but grin. His batting stance had been altered again slightly, with his knees bending a little more.

'Throw me another fun pitch.' He said in his heart.

He didn't want this feeling to end, so he was clinging on tightly.

Yuta was at a loss of what to do next. He could tell that if the bat made contact with the pitch it would be sent flying into the stands. After stressing for a while, he finally locked eyes with Ken on the mound.

The deep brown eyes seemed to penetrate his mind, injecting him with his fight spirit.

'I'll beat him. No matter what.'

Unknowingly, a smile formed on Yuta's face as he stared back, finally finding his confidence.

'What the hell am I so worked up for? This is Ken we're talking about.' He thought, chastising himself for his earlier worries.

Ever since Ken had joined the team, he'd never let them down whether it was batting, pitching or even training. He was always there, leading by example, not afraid to get in the trenches when he was needed.

'Okay Ace, give me one down the middle.'

"Hehe, don't mind if I do." Ken uttered, lifting his leg in the next moment.

"Sayonara."

Imbued with the pitching upgrade, Ken's body flowed with power and finesse as he extended his long leg outwards. The Earth seemingly trembled as his foot struck the ground with authority before his arm whipped out from the side and sent the ball rocketing forwards.

Like a bullet, the ball shot towards the middle of the strike zone, intending to maul through anything that got in its way.

'Yes! This is it!'

"Hahahaha"

Tatsuo couldn't help but laugh with pure joy as he locked onto the ball. He twisted his body and swung with all of his might, wanting to send the ball into the crowd.

'Maybe I'll be able to smile like that too after I hit this ball?'

His mind replayed the scene of Ken jogging around the bases after his home run. He felt a bout of anticipation as his bat approached the ball.

The timing of the swing was immaculate, setting up for a perfect encounter between bat and ball. If it made proper contact, there was no doubt that the ball would disappear amongst the crowd in the next moment.

WHOOOOSH

Yuta braced himself, feeling a pit form in his stomach. As he watched the ball, he heard the brutal sound of the bat cutting through the air before it appeared in front of him.

'Damn it.'

DING

PAH

"Foul tip! Strikeout!"

"ORYAHHH!"

The Yokohama players went crazy, despite it only being the first out of the innings. It became even more odd when the next chant broke out from the team.

"RA MEN"

"RA MEN"

"RA MEN"

Tatsuo who had felt the ball nick his bat suddenly felt odd. He looked around in confusion before seeing his friend Kei motioning him to come back to the dugout.

He turned to see Ken on the mound who was wearing a triumphant grin and juggling the rosin bag in his hand. In the next moment he turned around and headed back to the dugout.

Apart from Kei, the entire Shinjuku dugout were facing a real crisis. If their genius couldn't get a hit from this pitcher, then what chance did they have?

"Are you frustrated?" The tall teen with blond hair spoke up, his tone gentle.

Tatsuo frowned, feeling as if he had a stick caught in his throat. He merely nodded in response, still gripping his bat.

In the next moment he felt a large hand pat the top of his head startling him for a moment.

"Looks like you're finally playing baseball, Tatsu."

Kei's face broke into a smile, his features softening, finally feeling like he had finally gotten through to his friend.

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

Chapter 223 - 223: Insight & Change (1)

As soon as Tatsuo stepped off the field, Ken felt his body relax a little. The earlier hot sensation seemed to have disappeared, hinting that the showdown skill had now lost its effect.

Ken let out a hollow chuckle. Despite only pitching 3 times, he felt as if he'd been out under the morning sun for at least an hour. Sweat trickled down his face and he felt a certain sense of accomplishment.

Yet his job was far from over.

"Batting Second, Left Outfield, Chiharu"

The next Shinjuku batter was now up. Surprisingly, he seemed timid, almost as if he'd lost his confidence before heading onto the field.

This didn't escape Yuta's perception, as the Smiling Buddha called for a nasty inside fastball without hesitation.

Ken tried his best not to show any emotion in front of the batter, however inwardly he was cursing the guy. Since Daichi had taken over his spot in his previous life, he never got to know this side of his Senpai.

'To think I once thought he was a warm and approachable person...'

But the thing was, despicable or not, Yuta seemed to always get the job done. So without further ado, he nodded and got into position.

"Eek"

The ball dug inside, scaring off the timid batter who almost fell on his backside from the fright of the fastball.

"Strike"

"Nice pitch~"

Ken received the ball from Yuta and felt gratified. Since his pitching increased 2 grades, he felt a lot more confident and relaxed.

It was a weird sensation, especially since he'd gotten used to pitching at the S- grade.

He had wondered what would change as his pitching grade increased. Would it be speed? Power? Or something else entirely.

However, now that he'd experienced the leap from showdown, he was able to intuitively realize the difference.

In essence, pitching now required less effort to control and manipulate the ball. He was able to reach higher speeds more regularly, while also putting less strain on his body and in particular, his shoulder and arm.

It would be like comparing a high school kid to a veteran Major League player. Sure the former might be able to throw at the same speed once or twice, but the latter had years and years of experience to perfect their techniques.

Suddenly, Ken began to understand the gradings of the system a little better.

Despite being a game-like system, the increase in grades were a result of insights rather than things like experience points. This also explained why he was stuck at A-pitching for so long, yet was able to leap into the S grade after having a breakthrough.

Of course this didn't include his Physical Fitness which was directly correlated to his muscles and overall fitness. It would be rather ironic if one could increase their fitness by simply meditating without exercise.

As these thoughts swirled around in his mind, he suddenly had an epiphany.

'If my Pitching, Fielding and Game intelligence are based on my insights... Wouldn't they improve quicker if I upgrade my Mental grade?'

DING

As if to answer his question, he heard a notification from the system followed by a familiar monotonous voice.

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

He heard Mika's voice in his mind, giving him a fright. However in the next moment he felt as if a fog had lifted from his brain, allowing him to think clearly.

As Ken turned his head to Yuta, he saw everything with such clarity.

The sweat droplet dripping down his friend's brow, the worried expression on the batters face as he gripped his bat tightly. He could even see the look of impatience that the umpire was wearing as he waited for Ken to throw the ball.

'Ah crap.'

As if suddenly realizing where he was, Ken quickly got into position and agreed to the first call he saw from Yuta. They were in an important game, now was not the time to be daydreaming.

PAH

"Strike!"

PAH

"Strikeout!"

The next two pitches were on target as they blitzed their way into Yuta's glove, promptly dispatching the 2nd batter for Shinjuku.

A couple of minutes later...

"Strikeout! 3 outs, changeover."

The Yokohama team triumphantly made their way back to the dugout after a successful defense, their mood joyful.

"Keep it up Ace."

"Man I can't believe you pitched at 160..."

Yuta was the most shocked out of everyone, since he'd been the one to catch Ken's pitches more than anyone. The craziest part was that all of the growth had happened after winning the Kanagawa tournament only a couple of weeks ago.

There was a part of him that couldn't believe it, yet his hand was still feeling numb from the pitching earlier.

The coach gave him a knowing smile as Yuta entered the dugout. It seemed he was well aware of what it was like to be on the end of one of Ken's surprises.

"Alright nice work everyone, or should I say Ken and Yuta." He said with a wry smile.

Since no one had done anything except for the aforementioned two, the others chuckled in response. It was a world of difference from when Akira pitched, since he usually pitched to contact.

Even though the match may be a little boring while they were fielding, most didn't care as long as they were able to advance.

"Naoki, you're up next."

"Yes coach!"

Before he could walk up the stairs to the field, he felt a weight on his left shoulder.

"We're counting on you Naoki."

Naoki stared through his fringe at the muscular figure who was trying to appear stoic. Instead of answering, he turned around and ignored the big fellow, not giving him the satisfaction of an answer.

A few chuckles rang out in the dugout from the usual suspects.

"Look at the crappy Captain, trying to be all cool." Tatsuya said under his breath to Hiroki, his expression the picture of amusement.

"I mean, the guy hasn't had a hit in the past 2 games. Hehehe"

This time, no one joined in on the laughter.

"OOOOOFF"

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

Chapter 224 - 224: Insight & Change (2)

Once again Tatsuya found himself curled up on the ground, struggling for air.

Instead of rushing to help their downed teammate, the bench turned their attention to the field where the delinquent had returned to the mound.

Despite being down 3-0, the teen's expression seemed... Happy.

He looked a lot more carefree than he did in the opening innings, almost as if a weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

"What's with this guy?"

"Maybe he likes playing from behind?"

"Pfffft. Hahaha!"

As speculation and laughter rang out from the innuendo, Ken narrowed his eyes at the pitcher, having a bad premonition.

'Looks like this match might not be so easy.'

Of course he hadn't expect the match to be easy in the first place, however there was something about the delinquent that made him feel wary.

In the first innings it had seemed as if he was coiled tightly, preventing him from playing the way he wanted. The scowl on the guy's face was enough to figure out he was struggling with something.

Yet now, his carefree demeanor and fluid motions was a complete transformation.

Ken felt as if something was familiar.

His mind suddenly returned to the Kanagawa Prefecture finals, where Kazuhiro had begun his metamorphosis and kept the team scoreless afterwards.

'Don't tell me I'm the reason for this...' Ken thought inwardly, feeling his stomach curl.

If every team he played had a sudden awakening, wouldn't he be better off just not playing at all?

As if to add weight to his words, Kei entered his wind up and sent the ball blitzing towards the open glove of Kenta.

PAH

Ken instinctively looked up at the Jumbo screen only for his face to morph into a wry smile a moment later.

'154km/h'

'Damn it!'

Unaware of the gloomy atmosphere he'd created, Kei retrieved the throw back from his catcher and walked back to his spot on the mound. He couldn't help but smile as he saw the look of concentration on his friend's face.

'Thank goodness he's starting to take baseball seriously.' He thought.

His gaze drifted to the opposing dugout, eventually falling on the tall yet foreign looking youth inside. Kei wasn't sure who the guy was, but he was able to do what no one had been able to over the last 5 years...

Getting Tatsuo interested in something.

'Thank you Ken... For awakening the monster.'

With his heart full of happiness, Kei went back to pitching, feeling as if the difficulty had decreased significantly. Each of his pitches felt crisp and easy to control.

Like that, he easily dispatched Naoki, Yuta and Yuki, bringing the innings promptly to a close. From that point on, it was back and forwards between the two teams.

Ken continued his strikeout streak, sending the cleanup batters including Kei back to the dugout with ease. They couldn't even touch the stitching on the balls before they were snapped up by Yuta's glove.

Kei followed up his masterclass in the 2nd innings, not allowing the lead-off hitters a chance to get onto base. Makoto had managed to make contact with the ball, only for it to fly into the waiting glove of the outfield.

"Damn it!"

Makoto had lost his calm and cool disposition, clearly not happy with failing to get on base once more. Despite having great strength and coordination, it felt as if he was missing something crucial.

Thus it was Ken's turn to clean up the tail end of the batting order in the bottom of the 3rd. He wasted no time in cutting through the chaff, only needing 9 pitches to put an end to the innings.

"Looks like this is turning into a pitchers match." Daichi said aloud to his father. However, he had a smile on his face, knowing that Yokohama were up 3 runs already.

As long as the game progressed like this, they would be the victor in the end.

Chris nodded, rubbing the bottom of his chin in thought.

"If Ken keeps on pitching like he is, I don't see anyone who can hit them. Apart from that short stop."

Daichi was a little taken aback, so he turned to his father and asked.

"Why is that? Sure you he has a talent for baseball mechanics, but is that enough to hit Ken's pitches?"

Chris was silent for a while, debating on whether or not to divulge his true feelings. However his expression turned to one of realization a moment later.

"Yeah you're right. As long as Ken keeps pitching well, there shouldn't be any issues." He said with a smile. Seeing the concerned expression on his sons face prompted him to ruffle his hair and let out a chuckle.

"Daaad..." Daichi complained a little, however he was rather happy on the inside.

Chris laughed at Daichi's reaction before turning his attention back to the field.

He had decided against voicing his real opinion. He was here as a fan of the game, to watch his son play baseball. Talking about such things was what he did at work, not when he was enjoying the game.

Therefore no matter how accurate his opinions were, he would keep them to himself for today and just believe in his son's abilities. If he as a father could not be supportive of his sons then what was his purpose?

The start of the 3rd innings began, prompting everyone to pay attention once more.

"Batting 4th, 1st Base, Hiroki."

Hiroki made his way up to the batters box with his bat in hand. In the first innings he had been forced to hit a grounder thanks to the slider he didn't judge correctly. Yet he was feeling more confident this time around.

At least, that was until he saw the pitch flying towards him.

WHOOSH

PAH

His bat sailed over the pitch, missing it by a few inches and almost causing him to slip.

Whatever confidence he had earlier seemed like a distant memory as he faced the blond haired pitcher upon the mound.

'This might be a problem.'

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

Chapter 225 - 225: Charismatic Ken (1)

Hiroki's premonition seemed to come to life as the next two balls were even harder to read than the last. Thankfully he had managed to make contact on the curve ball and foul it off.

He was starting to get a little frustrated with all of the different pitches the blond pitcher was throwing at him. If the blitzing fastball wasn't enough, he also had to contend with the curve, slider and possibly others that he hadn't seen just yet.

As his mind was trying to come up with a solution, it was cut short by the quick wind up of the pitcher on the mound.

Hiroki narrowed his eyes and made a judgment call. The direction of the pitch told him it should be in the strike zone, so he just decided to swing to contact.

DONG

'Crap'

The ball bounced along the ground a few times towards this teen at short stop. Hiroki felt a sliver of hope since the guy had made an error last time, however he ended up disappointed.

Not only did the short stop collect the ball easily, he fired a throw directly into the open glove of the player on first base.

"Out."

A solid cheer rang out from the crowd, applauding the fierce fielding of the seemingly small and agile short stop.

Kei couldn't help but grin widely, seeing that Tatsuo had been paying attention. His friends attitude was completely different after being struck out by Ken earlier, almost as if he had shed the apathy that was plaguing him.

Hiroki had no choice but to leave the field, letting out a small sigh of frustration.

"Hit a big one for us Ken." He said, walking past the tall teen on his way to the batters box.

Ken nodded, adjusting his helmet slightly.

'If Hiroki had trouble hitting those pitches, it looks like my suspicions were true.'

He frowned for a moment before getting into position. As he adjusted his stance, he asked a question to his favorite AI.

'Mika, does my Charismatic Air ability have any impact on my oppositions?'

Ken had been trying to figure out why his opponents were growing so much. First it was Carlos and Kazuhiro of Shuei High, and now it was Kei and Tatsuo who looked to be improving rapidly.

[Charismatic Air skill effects all parties in the vicinity of the user. Since you are the focal point on the mound and in the batters box, your opponents are also affected.]

(Charismatic Air: People are drawn to you and are more likely to listen to your suggestions.)

'You can't be serious...!' He complained inwardly.

No wonder his opponents seemed to be influenced by his actions so much. He had always thought that the Charismatic Air skill had a vague description. To hear that it had such an effect made it seem like a double-edged sword.

[Mika is serious]

'...Yes Mika. Thank you.'

Now that he thought of it... If he was raising the bar for all of his opponents, that meant he was potentially grooming the next generation of professional and Japan national team players.

His vision of invading the Majors with his talented countrymen didn't seem too far fetched in this moment.

Ken shook his head and got into position to receive the next ball. This wasn't something that he could think of in this moment, particularly in such a big game.

In the next moment he was facing a fastball heading inside and looking to jam him. He quickly took a step back, avoiding the pitch by a hairs breadth. A moment later he returned to the batters box, donning the same poker face.

"Ball"

"Tch."

Kenta clicked his tongue in annoyance. He was trying to give the guy some grief after being knocked out of the part in his last at-bat, yet the guy seemed unflappable.

The next ball was a sinker which seemed to drop almost directly onto home plate.

'This is it!'

DONG!

Ken managed to get a good hold of the ball as he sent it into the outfield for a double.

Loud cheers sounded from the crowd and the dugout as soon as he made contact with the ball. Standing upon 2nd base, he flashed a grin and a thumbs up to Yusuke who was making his way up to bat.

That was when he felt a pair of eyes burning into the side of his face.

He tried to ignore the sensation, yet they pierced him. It was like going out into public only to be brazenly stared at by a toddler on the train for the entire duration of the journey.

Ken felt his poker face slipping away as he continued to get annoyed. In the end, he turned towards the direction of the gaze and blurted out in English.

"Why don't you take a damn picture?"

Tatsuo's eyes widened after hearing the foreign language.

"Eh? Pitcher? No, I play short stop." His voice was immature, yet it was lacking his usual apathy. In fact, he seemed to be quite curious in that moment.

Ken resisted the urge to facepalm and tried to calm down his annoyance.

"Why do you keep staring at me?" He said eventually.

Tatsuo blinked a few times innocently before answering in a deadpan expression.

"Because I'm interested in you."

...

...

"W-What the hell!?"

Ken quickly turned away from the weird individual, feeling all sorts of embarrassment from the interaction. However, inwardly he was screaming.

'THIS DAMN CHARISMA SKILL!'

He took a lead from 2nd base which only made him get closer towards Tatsuo. Ken was on high alert, placing a single hand on his cheeks just in case the weirdo decided to give him a butt slap or something.

The moment Kei swept his leg, Ken launched himself towards 3rd base, making use of his Takeoff skill which increased his Agility grade by two, propelling him into the SS grade.

He felt the wind streak by his face as he ran with all of his might, reveling in the sudden increase in speed.

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

Chapter 226 - 226: Charismatic Ken (2)

His eyes locked onto the 3rd base coach who was clearly taken aback by the steal attempt. It didn't take long for him to survey the scene and hurriedly turn back to Ken, signaling him to slide.

With his long frame, Ken leaped forwards and slid along the ground, placing his right hand firmly on the base.

"Safe."

The tag had come a fraction later, causing him to let out a sigh of relief.

"Nice steal Ken!"

"That's our Ace."

"ORYAAAAH"

Ken heard the rabble from the crowd and dugout, specifically Makoto who seemed to always be the loudest one on the bench. He turned only to see Ai smiling back at him with a happy look on her face.

Ken almost let out a sigh of relief after seeing the beautiful girl in the dugout. After having experienced the weird advances of the opposing short stop, he couldn't help but appreciate Ai even more.

In the next moment he looked at the coach, nodding and touching the tip of his hat slightly. He then turned to Yusuke and was about to try get his attention.

However, the next ball came flying like a thunderbolt straight into the glove.

PAH

"Strike."

Ken's expression darkened. He was hoping to call for a squeeze play in order to get an additional run on the board, yet with the count at 0-2, it was too risky.

Eventually, Yusuke looked his way after getting into the batters box. Ken gave the sign to hit big so they could go for a pop fly. As long as they could convert the run, it would put them in a commanding lead.

Yusuke nodded, his expression mirroring his determination.

Once he was ready, Kei began his wind up and let it rip. The ball curved towards Yusuke who had already loaded up his swing.

DONG!

The ball sailed high in the air, filling the stadium with cheers.

The left outfielder had plenty of time to position himself under the high ball, waiting for its impending descent. Ken noticed that despite the height, the hit had lacked the distance.

Yet Ken still backed himself.

He kept his right foot on the bag and prepared himself to takeoff before sending a quick glance to the 3rd base coach next to him.

With his eyes staring down at home plate, Ken waited at full attention, biding his time until it was the correct moment.

The time seemed to stretch out, yet he still held on, placing his full trust in the 3rd base coach. After all, this was one of his jobs.

Finally, the ball landed into the glove of the outfielder.

"GO GO GO!"

The moment he received the signal, he kicked off the bag and ran like his life depended on it. His acceleration was second to none as he pumped his long legs in order to reach his maximum speed in the shortest amount of time.

He came bounding towards the catcher who seemed to be looking at something behind him intently. It was obvious that his eyes were on the ball, yet Ken had already committed to making it to home plate.

As the distance between him and home plate shortened, his eyes were focused solely on the goal in front of him. Which was probably why he couldn't react in time to the next series of events.

BOOOM

Ken felt his body take a huge impact from something hard, threatening to knock him flying. If it wasn't for his tough physique and strong core, he would have been torn apart by the blockade.

Instead, he toppled over the obstruction and tripped over that large body which he had flattened. Ken felt his body ache from the impact, yet he did his best to get back onto his feet, only to be stopped by a voice.

"Time! Obstruction. Take your base."

"W-What!?! Sir I was trying to field the ball." Kenta protested, his face filled with utter shock.

However, the umpire was having none of his shenanigans, motioning for him to drop the matter. Ken dusted himself off slightly before limping slightly to home plate, ensuring he made contact with the base.

By the time Ken made it back to the dugout, the pain he was feeling subsided by a large margin thanks to both his strong muscles and Fatigue Management skill.

The crows seemed to be a little conflicted on the call, with half thinking that it was a good call from the umpires, and the other half opposed to it.

At least that was the case until the replay was shown upon the Jumbo screen.

The replay showed Kenta slide his body in front of Ken's path before receiving the ball. It was only after he had been bowled over that the ball flew in front of home plate.

Suddenly, the side that had sympathy for Kenta suddenly turned in the opposite direction.

"That was dirty!"

"Where is your honor?"

Ken heard the crowd and couldn't help but laugh. Japan was crazy about baseball and most of them hated underhanded plays like the one they'd just witnessed.

Thankfully the umpire was observant enough to make the right call.

Once the replay had played, Kenta stopped his pouting. He obviously knew what he was doing, yet he probably hadn't expected to get cleaned up in such a fashion from the seemingly tall and lanky teen.

He had thought for sure that he'd be able to inflict some pain on the Ace and possibly open up the game for his team. Yet instead of buckling the Ace, he felt as if he'd just been run over by a freight train.

"A-Are you okay Ken?"

Ai was the first to come up to him and check on his bodies condition. Since he'd been running at close to full speed, it wouldn't be outside the realm of possibility that he'd be hurt.

"Heh, nothing but a few bruises." Ken said after a moment.

However inwardly he was grinning, 'Player of the Tournament is gonna be mine...'

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

Chapter 227 - 227: It's not over yet (1)

Daichi's face flushed with worry as he saw Ken embroiled in the collision. He only calmed down once he saw his brother walk towards the dugout relatively fine.

Even Chris frowned at the obviously dirty play from the opposing catcher. Thankfully his son was okay and was even awarded the run, bringing Yokohama further ahead on the scoreboard.

"Batting 7th, 1st base, Naoki."

Naoki came up to bat, but ended up striking out after only 3 balls, putting an end to the top of the 3rd innings.

"Are you still okay to pitch?" Coach Hanada asked Ken, though he could already tell the answer. What kid would want to sit out in the middle of a Koshien match.

"Hehe, I'm fine coach."

In actuality, he was still feeling a little ginger from the impact, but that wouldn't stop him. He placed his cap on and walked onto the field, making his way to the mound.

"Batting 1st, Short stop, Tatsuo."

Hearing the weird guy's name called up to bat made Ken flinch subconsciously.

'Damn it, not this guy again.'

Thankfully he didn't seem to be staring at him weirdly anymore, but instead looked focused and determined.

Yuta was feeling a little anxious since this guy was scary in the batters box. However, he still decided to attack right from the beginning so as not to lose any ground.

He called for an inside fastball, only to receive a nod from Ken.

As he gripped the ball in his hand, Ken felt his body heat up and fill with strength. The effects of Showdown had appeared once more, giving him an added confidence.

He began his wind up and planted his left foot and whipped the ball right towards the open glove of Yuta. His muscles protested slightly from the earlier collision, but they still did their job.

WHOOOOSH

DONG

Ken's eyes opened wide in shock as Tatsuo gracefully hit the inside ball and flung it into the air. However, a smile formed onto his face in the next moment as he turned his attention to Naoki in the infield.

"My ball"

He motioned with both hands, ensuring that no one would get in his way, his eyes focused on the ball in the air. Or at least people assumed that he was since his fringe was in the way.

Pah

"Out."

The sound of the ball slotting into the glove sounded out, followed by the umpires call.

Tatsuo had already made it to first base with his intense speed, yet he looked confused after the umpire shouted that he was out. He looked around as if to understand what had happened.

He had definitely made contact with the ball, so why did it only go so far?

"Damn it!"

Frustration burned onto his features as he stewed in his confusion. He was forced to walk back to the dugout like a lost little lamb.

Ken watched his figure retreat and could only shake his head. The kid had far too much talent, yet it was clear that his work ethic was non-existent.

"Baseball isn't that easy." He muttered to himself, feeling vindicated in that very moment.

Since he had been played around with by this person in his previous life, it was almost too good to be on the other end of the situation. It was clear that the guy lacked a lot of knowledge about the game, otherwise he wouldn't have swung like he did at the inside ball.

They had successfully jammed him, making for an easy catch in the infield.

Everyone on the Shinjuku team started to become rather despondent, all apart from one person. Like an older brother, Kei consoled Tatsuo and told him his mistake, even taking the bat and showing him where he'd hit the ball.

If anything, Kei seemed to be the happiest person at the stadium right now since he was finally able to teach Tatsuo how to play baseball.

Ken continued his streak, successfully taking out the next two batters and bringing an end to the 3rd innings.

The current score was 4-0 in favor of Yokohama.

The next few innings became a pitchers game, with no changes to the score. The two pitchers seemed to step up their game as they competed with strikeout after strikeout.

Tatsuo once again fell to the simple tricks of Yuta who had already figured out that he was a newbie. Once he'd been told by Ken that the teen had no experience playing baseball, a Buddha-like smile appeared on his expression.

Getting out once again had forced Tatsuo into a spiraling depression. This was the first time that he had been made to feel this way in his life, yet as always, Kei was there to console and teach him.

Of course since they were in the middle of a game, there was not enough time to go over more than just the basics.

Ken had managed to make it to first base in the 7th innings, however Yusuke, Naoki and Yuta were promptly struck out, leaving him stranded.

He probably could have stolen second base if he really wanted to, but the farther away he was from Tatsuo, the better state his mental health would be in. There was also the fact he was facing a lefty on the mound, who made stealing 2nd base a very risky endeavor.

Ken returned to the mound and backed up his performance. With his pitching grade now at S+, he was able to perfectly follow Yuta's leads, constantly keeping the Shinjuku team on their toes.

This continued until the top of the 9th innings with Yokohama up to bat for the last time.

The score was still 4-0 in their favor, yet Makoto stood in the batters box with a desperate expression on his face. He had already failed to get a hit after 3 at-bats, being overshadowed by the juniors on his team.

At this rate, he wouldn't know how to face them in the future.

'I'm the captain damn it... I can't let it end like this.'

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

Chapter 228 - 228: It's not over yet (2)

Judging by his expression, one might think that Yokohama were the losing team in this situation.

Tatsuya who had already had some success in this match had a snide smile on his face. Since they were up, he was hoping that the captain would make a fool of himself so he could make fun of him later.

Of course he didn't mean it with animosity, he merely liked to tease the muscular guy, even if it ended in him on the ground.

Kei was still on the mound, his earlier smile still lingering on his face. Despite it being the 9th innings, he didn't look fatigued at all.

He wound up and sent a fastball right on target, blitzing through the strike zone and into the catcher's glove.

"Strike."

Makoto grit his teeth and tightened his grip on the bat. He felt his shoulders tense up as his anxiety began to peak.

He just so happened to look in the direction of the dugout and saw Ken standing next to the Coach. They locked gazes for a moment, only for Ken to extend his arm out and give a thumbs up, with a small smile.

Makoto blinked a few times, before letting out a small chuckle.

Although there were no words, he could feel Ken's confidence flowing within him in that moment. They were ahead at the moment, so why did he feel so anxious?

'It's just some stupid pride.' He thought.

Subconsciously, his body relaxed shortly afterwards, feeling the pressure disappear from his shoulders. In that moment, he felt confident who he would hand the mantle of Captain over after he retired.

"Let's go out with a bang." He muttered, a sly grin creeping onto the corner of his lips.

Kenta saw the hulking figure of Makoto relax, as if unwinding his coiled muscles.

'Did he give up on hitting?' Kenta thought.

Yet in the next moment he felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. He slowly raised his gaze and could feel a stalwart aura emanating off the man in front of him. It was like an impenetrable wall that could never be surpassed.

Kenta felt as if no matter what pitch he called for, it wouldn't make a difference.

Eventually, he settled on the pitch that he felt Kei was most comfortable with.

'Let's go with your fastball Kei...'

Kei nodded in response to the lead. He could also feel the impenetrable aura that was surrounding the muscular teen in that moment, however he did not falter. He had been through much scarier things than this.

With his signature sweeping leg, he performed his wind up and sent a blazing fastball towards the open glove of Kenta. There was no fluctuation in the speed, despite it already being the 9th innings.

Makoto's frame seemed to increase in size as his muscles tensed up. He planted his left foot and twisted his body, using his strong core to add to the torque of his swing.

"Hup!"

DOOOOOONG!

Makoto followed through on his swing, feeling the bat still vibrating in his hands after the hit. He didn't need to watch the ball for long to know that it was right on target.

"ORYAAAAAH!"

He let out his signature yell before dropping the bat to the ground and beginning his jog around the bases.

The stadium erupted with cheers as the ball sailed into the crowd. It was the biggest home run that they'd seen, even though it was only the 4th game of the tournament.

Everyone in the Yokohama dugout was shocked, yet they whooped and cheered in the next moment.

"Woooo nice hit Captain!"

"That's our Captain!"

Only Tatsuya was left silent as he stared at the crowd where the ball had landed.

'Damn.'

Kenta had a pained look on his face as he watched the muscular teen almost skip around the bases. He had a premonition that the ball would be sent into the crowd, but there was nothing he could do at this point.

It was the 9th innings and they were facing the clean up batters next, even if he chose to walk Makoto it wouldn't have been any easier.

The rest of the Shinjuku team looked crushed. They had been holding onto some hope, yet it all seemed to have vanished at this point.

Kei could feel the atmosphere plummet on the field, feeling as if the last nail in the coffin has been hammered in. He could only smile wryly, feeling the build up of fatigue begin to rear its head.

Tatsuo looked around and could see his teammates beginning to get emotional, causing him to frown. He balled his hands into fists and felt a wave of frustration.

'Why are they acting like this? The game isn't even over...'

He had never felt like this in his life, the feeling of losing, the feeling of his teammates giving up. These were all new experiences, yet they were not pleasant.

'I don't like it...'

"It's not over."

"IT'S NOT OVER!"

Tatsuo screamed, his immature voice ringing out over the field. All of his teammates turned towards him in shock, not expecting such a reaction from him.

"Tatsu..."

Kei turned towards his friend and couldn't help but feel a lump in his throat. Tears threatened to fall down as he felt his eyes begin to sting.

Yet everyone looked at Tatsuo with a little resentment. How could the guy who didn't even join them in training know what it was like for them to lose on such a stage?

Why should they listen to this guy who seemed to be having a tantrum.

"He's right! We still get a chance to bat after this."

Kei stepped forward, casting his tall shadow on Tatsuo's small figure.

"Raise your heads. We didn't come this far just to give up now did we!?" Despite his words, his teammates could see the signs of emotion on their Ace's face.

Tears pooled on the corner of his eyes as he made his impassioned speech. This was someone that had trained with them every day and sweated the same, if not more than them throughout the entire summer.

"H-He's right! We still have a chance!"

"The game isn't finished yet!"

Soon enough, the players rallied together and picked up their spirits. Shouts came from all over the field as they turned their attention back to the game with vigor.

"Kei..."

Tatsuo's eyes were open in shock as he stared at the back of his friend.

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

Chapter 229 - 229: Battle of Wills (1)

"Batting 4th, 1st Base, Hiroki."

As Hiroki made his way into the batters box, he noticed a shift in the Shinjuku players. When Makoto had hit the home run, they seemed dejected and on their last legs, yet now they were completely different.

Not only did they look invigorated, there was also a kind of savagery behind their eyes.

The tall delinquent upon the mound looked especially intimidating as he took his position. The soft smile that was on his face during the past 7 innings was nowhere to be seen, now replaced with grim determination.

Hiroki couldn't help but feel tense in that atmosphere, yet his expression hardened in the next moment.

Shinjuku weren't the only team that had gone through hell to be here right now. Just remembering the devilish training overseen by their very own Training Demon was enough to make a grown man cry.

Yet they survived it, coming out the other side of the gauntlet having improved drastically.

'I won't leave them any room to come back.' Hiroki thought, tightening the grip on his bat.

The baseball match had turned into more than just a game to decide who was better. It had turned into a clash of wills with neither side willing to yield or compromise.

"Hup!"

The first pitch was like lightening as it streaked its way through the air towards the strike zone. It was comparable to the first pitches he'd thrown in the game despite the fact they were in the 9th innings already.

"Hmph."

Hiroki let out a harrumph as he saw the ball blitz towards him.

'I've seen this pitch too many times to let it go.'

DONG!

The ball sailed into the air, well outside the foul zone on the right side of the field. Despite hitting it late, the ball still carried past the foul post.

"Foul."

"Tch, I swung a little late." Hiroki murmured.

Kenta felt a cold sweat form on his back from the pressure. If Kei hadn't kept his speed up, that ball would have been hit for another home run, essentially putting an end to their rally.

"Nice pitch Kei! Keep it up."

"Strike him out!"

The rest of the Shinjuku team called out words of encouragement. They didn't care that the ball had almost been hit for a homer, putting their confidence in their Ace.

Kei received the ball from Kenta and went for another fastball, this time on the inside.

WHOOOSH

DONG

This time Hiroki struck true, sending a line drive straight back to Kei on the mound.

Kei's eyes widened as he saw the ball coming directly for his face. Time seemed to slow down as the ball approached, yet he found it difficult to move, as if the clash was inevitable.

THUD

Everyone saw the tall figure fall to the ground emphatically, causing screams and shouts of terror from the crowd.

Even the Yokohama dugout cringed in worry at the sight before them.

"K-KEI!"

Tatsuo called out in shock and horror before quickly running towards his friend on the mound. He was filled with anxiety as he arrived, not knowing what to expect.

However, he soon breathed out a sigh of relief as Kei sat up on his own. He looked around, as if he was searching for someone in particular.

Then with a grin, he showed the ball which was nestled in his glove to the umpire who had come to check on him.

The umpire's eyes widened in surprise, clearly not expecting the sudden situation.

"O-Out!"

"W-WHOA!"

The crowd erupted into cheers at the sudden turn of events. For a moment they had thought there was a severe injury, yet it turned out the pitcher had managed to catch the ball.

Hiroki couldn't do much but make his way back to the dugout. Of course he was relieved that the pitcher wasn't hurt, but he was still a little disappointed he couldn't get onto base.

Tatsuo still seemed shaken despite seeing that his friend was okay. His nerves were shot at the near miss.

It was only when Kei stood up and placed his large hand atop his head that he finally calmed down.

"Let's keep going." He said with a grin.

Tatsuo was silent, but he still nodded before wiping his eyes with his arm. He then turned around to go back to his position, his face filled with determination.

"We can do this... As long as we have Kei."

His words were drowned out by the announcement of the next batter.

"Batting 5th, Pitcher, Ken."

Everyone's attention moved towards the opposing Ace and clean up batter. He had been responsible for 4 of the 5 runs for Yokohama and thus was their biggest threat.

Ken could feel all eyes upon him as he got into position in the batters box. He narrowed his eyes towards Kei on the mound who had his head lowered and was staring at the ground.

"Is your pitcher okay?" He asked Kenta, sounding a little concerned.

Kenta scowled, "He's fine. You should be worried about yourself."

Ken could only shake his head. Since they were embroiled in such a match, he couldn't blame the catcher for his words.

It was then that Kei raised his head, staring directly at Ken.

His eyes seemed to be sparkling in the shade of his cap, invoking a feeling of unrest within him. Ken gripped his bat tightly, preparing himself for the onslaught which was on its way.

Kei performed his sweeping motion and planted his foot, sending the ball towards the strike zone.

Ken's eyes widened in shock as he saw the ball coming towards him. His face was full of confusion.

'S-So slow...'

The ball didn't make it halfway to home plate before it landed on the ground and rolled towards him.

"B-Balk."

However, Ken didn't register the umpires words as he was too busy staring at the sight in front of him.

"KEI!"

The tall delinquent had fallen onto the field and was not moving. The entire infield rushed over to check on him, but not before Tatsuo arrived. His eyes were full of tears as he tried to shake him awake.

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

Chapter 230 - 230: Battle of Wills (2)

In the next moment, some paramedics ran out onto the pitch in order to check on him.

The whole stadium seemed to be holding its breath as it watched and waited for the teen to get medical attention.

Soon enough a stretcher was brought out and took the tall youth away. However, he lifted his thumb meekly in the air as if to tell everyone that he was okay.

This was met with a round of applause as they congratulated the youth for his hard work throughout the long and entertaining match.

Yet despite knowing that their teammate was okay, the Shinjuku squad did not look relieved at all. It was as if their heart and soul had left their bodies, leaving them standing around blankly.

Tatsuo seemed to be the most affected out of the bunch. He stared at the figure of his friend being carried away in the stretcher, his emotions in turmoil.

"Replacing Kei as pitcher, Nanami."

The voice resounded throughout the stadium, introducing the new pitcher for Shinjuku. He approached the mound meekly, not expecting to be brought out at all this match.

With their Ace gone, Shinjuku was in shambles.

Ken waited patiently by the side while Nanami began to warm up his arm. He felt sorry for the delinquent pitcher, but there was nothing that could be done. Although he had gotten the glove up to his head, the force of the ball still likely gave him a concussion.

As long as he rested up, he would be fine.

Around 2 minutes later, the new pitcher was ready. The umpire called out for play to resume and Ken made his way back to the batters box.

The first pitch came and Ken instantly knew that there was quite a skill gap between this pitcher and the last.

DOOOOONG

Ken pulled no punches as he wound up and struck the ball with force. It would be disrespectful if he were to take pity on an opponent, especially one that had been giving it their all.

The ball sailed into the stands, etching another home run for Yokohama.

Although it was not as far as Makoto's, it still elicited a round of cheers from the stadium and dugout. He made his way around the bases casually and noticed his stalker with his head lowered.

He found it a little ironic that the teen who had made him despair in his previous life was now the one feeling the same. However, he was not a sore winner, so he continued on his way.

Upon arriving back at the dugout, he received a warm welcome. It was his second home run of the game and likely the one that put the nail in the coffin.

"Nice work Ace!"

"Way to cap off a game."

The only person who appeared calm was Coach Hanada who still had his eyes on the field. He nodded at Ken and gave him a little smile.

Once everything settled down, Ken took a seat and removed his cap. His job still wasn't over yet, so he wanted to rest up a little.

"Ah, is this right?" Kaori called out, an open notebook in front of her.

"What is it?" Ai asked, feeling her curiosity bloom.

She peaked over her shoulder and tried to find out the anomaly, however her eyes opened in the next moment.

Before Kaori could voice her opinions, Ai placed her finger on the other manager's lips, telling her to be quiet. She didn't want to announce this information to anyone, just in case.

The game continued with Yusuke able to get a single. Unfortunately, Naoki hit a grounder to the pitcher which ended up in a double play.

"3 outs, changeover!"

Thus it was time for the team to close out the bottom of the 9th innings. The current score was 6-0 in Yokohama's favor and they would be starting from the top of the batting order.

"Ken."

As Ken walked onto the field, he heard a feminine voice call his name, causing him to turn around. He saw Ai who seemed to be blushing a little.

"Do your best."

"Ah... Thanks."

Ken felt that it was a bit odd for such a thing to be said, however he still thanked her and made his way towards the mound. They were up by 6 runs, why would he need to do his best to finish the game?

Yet he quickly shrugged it off, especially after seeing who was up to bat.

"Batting first, Short stop, Tatsuo."

The guy looked to be downtrodden as he stood in the batters box. It was clear that he had given up, casting a sorry shadow on home plate.

"Tch."

Ken got annoyed just looking at the guy, yet he didn't hesitate to throw his best pitch. Armed with his Showdown skill, the ball approached the 100mph speed as it entered cleanly into the catchers glove.

PAH

The harsh noise seemed to wake up the youth who was out of sorts in the batters box. He raised his gaze only to see Ken's glare from atop the mound.

'Huh?'

'Why does he look so... mad.'

Tatsuo stared in confusion, not understanding what was happening. How could someone who was about to win the game look so pissed off?

'Is he mad at me? But why?'

"Don't give up."

"Eh?"

Tatsuo turned around and looked at the smiling catcher behind him.

"He's telling you to not give up until the game is over." Yuta said, standing up and throwing the ball back to Ken.

"Look at where you are man, this is Koshien. Just think how many people never get the chance to stand where you're standing right now." He said, gesturing to the packed arena and pristine field they were in.

Tatsuo looked at his surroundings, feeling his dull heart begin to beat loudly once more.

A memory seemed to force its way to the forefront of his mind, replaying in his head.

["Man, I can't wait to go to Koshien. There'll be thousands of people watching us play against the best teams in the country." Kei's voice sounded, his anticipation evident.

"Is it really that exciting?"

"Hehe, it's like the best feeling in the world."]

"Kei..."

'If only I would have gone to training...'

Tatsuo gritted his teeth and felt shame and anger threaten to overcome him.

In the midst of all his internal anguish, he moved his gaze to Ken upon the mound and felt his fighting spirit ignite. His once dull green eyes were now aflame, showing his intention to battle to the death.

Ken felt the intense stare and couldn't help but grin wildly.

"Oho, now that's a good expression."

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

Chapter 231 - 231: Astonishing Debut (1)

Ken felt his body grow even hotter as he felt the primal gaze from the teen in the batters box. There was something noble about a duel between pitcher and batter that could not be replicated anywhere else.

He knew that the guy in front of him had otherworldly talent, but talent was not enough to win games. Even with Ken's system, he still had to work his backside off in order to get better over time.

So while he was never born with great talent, in his mind the system made up for that difference.

Yuta called for a pitch inside, wanting to either force a jam or at least a foul. However Ken shook his head, he wanted to beat this genius in the most overwhelming fashion.

Right down the middle.

Ken felt his heart beat in anticipation as he gripped the ball in his glove close to his chest. In the next moment he brought his left knee up and stepped forward, shifting his weight with ease.

THUD

The sound of his foot planting elicited a sound which was easily audible over the packed stadium. As his arm whipped around, the force of his body caused his cap to fly off his head, exposing his dark brown hair.

WHOOOSH

Tatsuo gritted his teeth, his eager eyes locked onto the ball. Instinctively he could tell that this ball was faster than the others he'd faced, yet he didn't yield.

If he backed down now, then Kei's sacrifice earlier would have been for nothing.

"Hup!"

He let out a sound which was almost like a growl before swinging his bat with all of his might. It was only in this moment that he realized what kind of game baseball was, finally understanding why people were so passionate about it.

As his eyes tracked the fastball, he couldn't help but reveal a smile while words appeared in his mind that he'd never said before in his life.

'This is fun.'

DING

The bat managed to hit the top of the ball, sending it directly towards Naoki at short stop. It bounced along the ground before easily being collected by the guy with the fringe.

Yet Tatsuo didn't spare him a glance. He ran with all of his might towards first base, his smile growing even wider.

PAH

"Out!"

Despite his best efforts, he did not make it in time.

With his lungs burning, Tatsuo looked up into the sky and felt his eyes moisten.

'I'm sorry Kei...' He said inwardly.

Yet the teen was still wearing a smile. It had only been for a fleeting moment, but he had felt it. He was definitely having fun.

"2 more outs!"

"Nice work Naoki!"

Ken watched the figure of Tatsuo heading back to the dugout. He wasn't sure, but he felt as if the kid seemed much brighter than before, as if he'd gone through a significant change.

Ai in the dugout seemed to breathe a sigh of relief, pressing on her chest in order to calm down her beating heart. Despite being up so many runs, she was still so anxious for some reason.

"Batting 2nd, Left outfield, Chihara"

Unfortunately for Shinjuku, the next batter did not share the same fighting spirit as Tatsuo. He already looked as if he was going to burst into tears in the batters box.

"Strike."

PAH

"Strike."

PAH

"Strikeout"

The whole stadium seemed to grow tense as the next batter approached. Yet the Yokohama team seemed oblivious at this moment.

To them it was just one more out until they made it to the next round.

"Do you think he can do it dad?" Daichi asked, already at the edge of his seat.

Chris nodded, "We have to believe." However, inwardly he was feeling some anxiety.

Unaware of his family's situation, Ken cracked his neck slightly and faced his next victim.

'Just one more out then we're into the next round.'

PAH

"Strike."

PAH

"Strike two!"

PAH

"Strikeout! Game set."

DING

In the next moment, the entire stadium erupted. Their cheers were on another level compared to the rest of the match, showing just how impressed they were.

Ken felt his body relax after being tense for so long. However he didn't have time to relax as his teammates swarmed him, ruffling his head so thoroughly that he lost his cap.

"Nice Ace!"

"We won! We won!"

The team carried on for a little while longer before making their way back to the dugout where they were met with the coach and 3 managers.

"Congratulations Ken." Coach Hanada placed his hand out for a handshake.

"Eh?"

Ken was a little confused, however he still took the man's hand and shook it.

It wasn't just him that was confused. Tatsuya spoke up like a whiny child in the next moment.

"Hey Coach, aren't you going to congratulate us too? It's a team win after all."

The coach frowned, resisting the urge to facepalm. He looked incredulously at the immature teen and shook his head instead.

"Do you not know what Ken just achieved?"

Tatsuya looked around, only to see confused faces on everyone, including Ken.

"Oh wait!" Makoto shouted, his face morphing into one of adulation.

"Ken didn't let that Tatsuo kid onto base at all. That means we get Ramen for dinner!"

A look of understanding appeared on the team's face before they broke out into a chant.

"YEAH! RA MEN"

"RA MEN"

"RA MEN"

Coach Hanada blinked a few times before letting out a sigh. It seemed that he needed to teach his players to pay more attention to the games. Although it was true that players shouldn't only chase singular accolades, this one was a big deal.

"No that's not it... Ken didn't let ANYONE onto base." He said, breaking the team out of their chant.

"Just look at the Jumbo screen."

Everyone at the same time turned towards the Jumbo screen at the back of the field, only to see Ken's name being showcased on the board.

At the same time, an announcement came over the speakers.

"Yokohama has defeated Shinjuku with a score of 6-0. Congratulations to Ken Takagi for his remarkable performance, having thrown a perfect game."

"Eh?"

"EH!? Perfect game??"

All of his teammates suddenly turned to him with wild expressions. How could the person who had made the achievement not even know what he had done?

Ken felt his vision waver as he was suddenly picked up by Makoto and Hiroki.

"Oi, what are you—"

"Heave ho"

"Heave ho"

He was suddenly tossed into the air a few times, now that his teammates had discovered what kind of feat he'd accomplished, they were all in an even better mood.

In the stands there were two figures who felt a rush of emotion as they saw Ken lifted into the air. His brother Daichi and his father Chris were both embracing each other, full of pride.

"He did it!"

"Mmm. Not only did he throw 160km/h he also threw a perfect game... It doesn't feel real." Chris said, feeling his emotion burst outward.

This was one of the proudest moments of his life, despite it only being an early match at Koshien.

A/N: Want a mass release? Check the authors notes!

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

Chapter 232 - 232: Astonishing Debut (2)

Back on the field, the coach finally managed to calm everyone down since the organizers would need to prepare everything for the next match.

They all walked back onto the field to perform the ceremonial bow.

"Thank you for the game!"

Ken's eyes were on the tall delinquent who seemed to have recovered from his concussion. Despite being the Ace of the team, he looked at peace compared to the other players who were in tears.

Tatsuo seemed to be in a mixture of emotions, however Ken merely smiled.

Only those who didn't care about baseball would be able to remain straight faced. It was clear that this match had a significant impact on the teen.

Kei locked gazes with Ken after the bow. He sent a nod of appreciation towards his opponent which Ken reciprocated.

"Alright let's hurry to the locker room." Coach Hanada said, ushering everyone off the field. If they were to delay the next game, it could mess up the schedule since there were still 3 games left to play today.

As they all filed off the field, the coach called out for Ken to stay behind.

Ken turned, only to see a few unfamiliar faces who were standing next to the coach. Seeing the microphones, voice recorders and notepads in their hands, it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out they were a part of the media.

"Ken, can we have a few questions?" One of them asked, his excitement palpable.

However, before he could answer the fellow, a lady dressed in a tight yet professional dress with a suit jacket around her shoulders interrupted.

"Sorry everyone, we'll be taking the first interview." She smiled, showing her sparkling white teeth.

Although there was some dissent, no one voiced their complaints aloud.

"Hi there Ken, I'm Miya Fukuda from NHK. It's a pleasure to meet you." She bowed, slightly exposing her luxurious cleavage that was hidden well within her dress.

Ken felt his body react instantly, flushing his cheeks.

[High blood pressure detected, suggest user removes themselves from the area.]

Instead of lashing out at Mika like he usually would, his mind raced. NHK was the National TV channel that was broadcasting Koshien to the rest of the country. He would be mortified if he made a fool of himself on live TV.

'Mika, use poker face! ... Please'

[Understood.]

"I-I'm Ken, likewise." He said eventually, bowing in response.

The woman in front of him could only be described as stunning. She looked to be in her mid to late twenties with soft and beautiful features, not to mention curves in all the right places.

There was probably not a heterosexual man in Japan that could truthfully say that she was not their type.

"Great. We'll be going live in 30 seconds, I'll be asking a few questions, so please just answer to the best of your abilities."

Miya was bubbly yet somehow kept her professional demeanor. Inwardly, Ken believed she could have become an idol if journalism had not worked out for her. With her looks and personality, it would rouse single men from their lairs in droves.

Ken was feeling nervous, yet thanks to his poker face skill, no one would have noticed. Were it not for him fidgeting, it would be the perfect disguise.

"We're going live in, 5... 4... 3..." The guy behind the camera counted down, gesturing with hand signals when it got to the final two seconds.

Once she'd been counted in, Miya's presence shined as she talked to the camera, increasing her already bubbly persona.

"We're here with Yokohama's Ace Ken Takagi who has become the first pitcher in Koshien's over 100 year history to pitch a perfect game. This in itself is quite an accomplishment, but adding on the fact that this is his debut match as a freshman, makes it even more so."

Her words were said fluidly and interestingly, so much so that even Ken was shocked. Firstly he hadn't realized that he pitched a perfect game, and secondly he had no idea that it was the first in Koshien history.

Yet before his mind could comprehend, a question was fired his way.

"Ken, how are you feeling after such a monumental game?" She asked, placing the microphone in front of his face.

He didn't answer right away, likely out of nervousness. Since this was the first time being on TV and he had no experience, it merely increased the levels of anxiety.

Just as he thought he might never get the courage to answer, he heard a monotonous voice in his head.

[Enacting focus protocol.]

The moment he heard those words, his anxiety dissipated just like magic. His mind which had been over thinking everything seemed to be working just fine.

Before the silence got too uncomfortable, Ken managed to answer.

"I feel great thank you Miya. While I'm happy for the honor of being the first pitcher to throw a perfect game at Koshien, I'm more excited that we were able to win in the first round and advance to the next stage."

The confident tone and his poker face showing outwardly, made those who listened to him feel at ease. There was no arrogance, he seemed like a well mannered teenage boy.

"Yes that's fantastic. Would you say that a big reason you were able to throw a perfect game was because of your 160km/h fastball?"

Ken shook his head almost instinctively, "Without great leads from my catcher Yuta, it wouldn't matter how fast I could pitch. Also our teams fielding was a great contribution towards the perfect game."

A large smile formed on Miya's face as he heard Ken's words.

'He's a natural at this.' She commented inwardly.

"That's very modest of you Ken. Tell me, why did you choose to attend Yokohama High instead of one of the prestigious baseball schools in the country?" This was probably one of the burning questions on a lot of people's minds, even his own teammates.

Ken didn't miss a beat as he responded calmly.

"The head coach is someone that I admire greatly, without him there is no way that our team could have reached the level we are now. It was my decision to go to Yokohama."

Miya raised her brow, her journalistic instinct telling her that there was a juicy scoop hidden beneath those words.

"When you say that it was your decision to go to Yokohama, does that mean you had other offers?"

Ken couldn't help but smile inwardly at the question. Now that he thought about it, there was a certain individual who had told him to give up pitching in order to obtain a scholarship.

However, he decided to keep it civil. He would be facing Daichi in the Semi-final's as long as both teams could continue winning.

"No comment."

Despite inwardly feeling a little annoyed, Miya showed no signs of it, donning her trademark spotless smile.

"Is there anyone that you're looking forward to playing against in this year's Koshien?"

This time, Ken forcefully removed his poker face skill and let out a grin. This was something that he and Daichi had vowed to make happen in the future.

"I want to play against Osaka Toin in the Semi-finals, against my brother Daichi."

Miya's eyes shined brightly before adding some fuel to the fire.

"Is there anything you want to say to Osaka or your brother right now?"

For once, Ken got a little carried away and stared directly into the open lense of the camera, pausing for dramatic effect.

"Don't lose."

Miya was a little taken aback at first, but her professionalism quickly took over.

"Well you heard it here folks. I am Miya Furuka and this was my guest Ken Takagi, please stay tuned for the next game which is set to start in 30 minutes time."

A/N: Want a mass release? Check Authors Note for more info! 20/30/50 chaps on offer.

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

Chapter 233 - 233: Fame Spreading (1)

Coach Hanada had already asked a few of the locals on their way out of the arena for some Ramen recommendations since he hadn't expected Ken to actually succeed.

Not only did he keep Tatsuo off base, he prevented anyone from getting a single hit.

After saying a silent prayer to his bank account, he led the group of hungry teenagers from the arena to the closest Ramen joint. Thankfully it was only 450 meters down the road.

"Did you see my big homer? It was like DOKANG!"

Makoto's loud voice broke through the sound of traffic as he placed his large muscular arm around Tatsuya's shoulder. There was a mocking look on his face as he waited for the teen's response.

"I-I guess it was alright." Tatsuya muttered under he breath.

He knew that he had this coming from the moment he'd seen the impressive hit on the field, and now was the time where he would receive his just desserts.

The others in the group were still buzzing from their win, recounting moments in the game with great enthusiasm.

Ken was walking along with the usual crowd of Hiroki and Yusuke as they chatted about their next opponent. Since there were 49 teams, 15 had a bye in the very first round which meant they already knew who they were up against next.

"Uruwa Gakuen is our next opponent from Saitama prefecture. They used to be a strong team in the past, but I heard it's their first Koshien in almost 10 years." Hiroki said thoughtfully.

It wasn't uncommon for schools to go through periods of not qualifying for Nationals, especially in the prefectures with a lot of competition. Since only one team could qualify from each prefecture, apart from Tokyo and Hokkaido which were allotted 2.

Ken listened half-heartedly. It still felt surreal that he had pitched a perfect game in his first appearance on the national stage.

Since he wasn't paying attention, he saw Shiro out of the corner of his eye. His expression seemed to be filled with mixed emotions, yet Ken felt as if he could decipher it.

He had worn the same expression when he was left on the bench last year at Seiko. Only able to watch as his team won their matches without his help, it really left him feeling stifled.

Since this was the biggest stage for high school baseball, he could only imagine how much worse his friend was feeling.

'What can I do to help cheer him up?' Ken thought inwardly.

He needed to be careful giving out advice since Shiro might take it the wrong way. It would be different if he was also on the bench, but that was not the case.

"Alright we're here guys." Coach Hanada stopped out front of a medium sized building.

Since they'd left just as the final match had started, there was no line to get in.

The staff didn't seem too concerned as the nearly 20 people walked in, meaning they were probably used to hosting a large amount of customers.

The group took up nearly half of the seating area by the time they all sat down.

"Boss, we'll get 20 special's please." Coach Hanada called out, his voice breaking as he said the number.

A wave of dark laughter spread across the room as the players found their coach's plight hilarious. At the same time, they were all appreciative of how the man treated them, despite the harsh training regimen's he put everyone through.

"I'll have an extra egg with mine!" Makoto said aloud.

"Oh me too."

"Can I get some extra pork?"

Coach Hanada's face flushed red before he burst out in desperation.

"No extras! This wasn't part of our deal."

"Hey Coach, Ken getting a perfect game wasn't part of the deal either." Tatsuya said, a gloating expression creeping onto his face.

Before he could respond, words of agreement filled the room, apart from Ken who was staring at Tatsuya blankly.

'Trust this guy to take advantage of the situation.' He commented inwardly, shaking his head incredulously.

Coach Hanada felt his face redden as his players turned against him. His mind was torn between his poor bank account and what kind of punishment to give the team after Nationals had finished.

"Perfect game? Are you lot the Yokohama High baseball team!?"

The boss who was in the kitchen stuck his head out, his face full of fanaticism. Being so close to Koshien stadium, it was understandable that the owner would be a follower of baseball.

"Yes sir! You must have heard of our team right?" Makoto said, sticking out his chest with pride.

"Of course. Who would forget the name Ken Takagi and his team Yokohama High." The boss said back with a grin.

Makoto's face instantly fell as he heard the guy's voice.

"Hahaha! They only know Ken and not the Captain"

Tatsuya who was feeling gloomy earlier thanks to Makoto's showboating attitude, suddenly felt his mood turn for the better.

"OOOOF~"

Like clockwork, the handsome teen was assaulted by an uppercut to the stomach, sending him tumbling ungracefully to the floor in a heap.

"Can we grab a photo and have your Ace sign something for us? I'll give everyone some extra toppings for free in exchange." The boss asked the coach.

"We have a deal." Seiji threw his hand forward in one swift motion the moment her heard the word 'free'.

"Eh?"

Ken was left confused as an older lady grabbed his arm and ushered him out of his chair. In the next moment he was posing next to the boss and the old lady with a blank expression on his face.

"Oi Ken, give us a smile." The coach said, holding the camera while feeling his wallet give a sigh of relief.

The sound of an alarm pierced through the dark room, rousing a man from his light slumber. He made a few attempts lunging at the alarm, however they all failed, prompting him to open his bleary eyes and locate the damn thing.

Once the alarm had been taken care of, the figure let out a big sigh filled with lingering tiredness.

A/N: See authors note for ongoing Golden Ticket event

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

Chapter 234 - 234: Fame Spreading (2)

Like a zombie, Naoki plucked himself off the bed and walked straight towards the kitchen to make a coffee. The large bags under his eyes and stubble on his chin were evidence that he was lacking sleep.

Only after drawing the curtains and drinking his coffee did he start to feel like a human.

"Maybe I'm getting too old for this." He murmured, staring at the remnants inside of his coffee cup.

Every year in summer, he was forced to travel around the country for weeks on end, scouting talent for Osaka Toin. While the pay was good thanks to the exceptional budget the school allocated to the baseball program, he was beginning to get worn out.

After letting out a stretch, he moved towards his jacket which was hanging on one of the chairs. He pat the pockets down and retrieved a packet of cigarettes, tapping the bottom to force one out.

"Ah..."

Noticing that he was all out, he inwardly cursed his past self for being lazy. Smoking was a bad habit, but it was something he'd been doing since college.

He quickly left the house and went to the local store down the road, picking up a newspaper while he was there.

Despite only just waking up, it was almost 11am, showing just how out of whack his sleeping schedule was.

After arriving home he went straight to his balcony and lit up one of his smokes, letting out a contented sigh as the heat filled his throat and lungs.

Out of habit, he glanced at the newspaper before turning it over and revealing the sports section. Having been a staff member in the pro circuit for the better part of 10 years, he still liked to keep up with the news.

Yet upon seeing the large article and picture upon the face of the paper, his eyes widened in shock.

"Freshman throws first Perfect Game in Koshien history?"

His gaze was drawn to the photo above the article, causing him to narrow his eyes slightly. The slightly foreign features upon the teens face and crisp eyes felt familiar to him, yet he couldn't place it.

Naoki decided to read the article in order to find the person's name.

"An astonishing debut for freshman Ken Takagi who pitched as fast as 160km/h (100mph) in his first game at Koshien. Not only did he pitch a perfect game, he also hit 2 home runs to lead his young Yokohama team to victory."

"Ken Takagi..."

Naoki placed his hand on his chin in thought, rubbing his stubble.

"Why does it sound familiar?"

BUZZ BUZZ

Naoki was snapped out of his thought process by the sound of his phone ringing. He took a quick glance, noticing that it was the coach.

"Morning Coach." Naoki replied, still sounding half-asleep.

"Did you see the news?" The coach responded, not even returning the greeting.

"Mmm, it looks like that Yokohama team has a nice pitcher." His tone was rather nonchalant since he knew that their team was still competing in the tournament.

He didn't want the coach to think he was worried, especially since he was the one who scouted most of the talent within the current team over the past 3 years.

"..."

An awkward silence stretched out over the phone, causing Naoki to fidget uncomfortably.

"I-Is that all you wanted to talk about sir?" He asked, cautiously changing his address of the coach.

"Haaaah, do you really not recognize the kid?" The coach sighed before asking. There was a tinge of disappointment in his tone.

"Recognize? Umm, he seems a little familiar but I see a lot of youths playing thanks to my job." Despite saying so, Naoki stared into the picture as hard as he could, trying to jog his memory.

"Ken... Takagi."

"Takagi?"

Naoki's entire body felt as if he'd received a shock in that moment as the crucial information returned to his brain. Once he thought about Daichi and the previous entanglements surrounding his scholarship, everything came back at once.

"B-But how? That kid could barely throw 135km/h when he tried out?"

There was no way that one person could improve so much in under a year.

"That was when he was pitching with his left arm." The coach said simply.

"What!? He wasn't pitching southpaw?? Does that mean his injury is healed?"

Naoki felt his whole world turn upside down at the revelation, to the point where he almost couldn't believe his ears. Yet the truth was right in front of him, staring him in the face.

"I can only assume so."

"Haaaah. I thought we might regret what happened, but I didn't think it would be so soon, nor so exaggerated." The coach sighed once more, lamenting in the missed opportunity.

They had the chance to secure the two brothers, one a genius catcher and the other a phenomenal pitcher. Just thinking of the domination of the two freshman battery brought a rush of anticipation.

Naoki felt his heart sink. It wasn't often that he made mistakes, but this one had blown up in his face big time.

Koshien had been played since 1915, over 100 years. Yet in all that time, Ken was the only pitcher to ever throw a perfect game during the tournament. If that didn't speak volumes about his skill and potential, then nothing would.

"I-I don't know what to say." Naoki admitted. He was already worn down from the constant late nights and travel, yet it seemed to be even worse this summer.

"It's okay, there's nothing we can do at this point. We have a great team that you've helped put together, I have no doubts in your abilities."

Naoki paused and nodded after a while.

"Thank you coach. I also trust yours" He said, the gratitude evident in his tone.

After finishing up his phone call, Naoki sat back in his chair and went to take a puff of his cigarette. Since he'd neglected it so long, the thing was already finished, prompting him to place it in the ash tray.

"Maybe I should quit?" He said.

Yet it wasn't evident what he was referring to.

A/N: See authors note for ongoing Golden Ticket event

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

Chapter 235 - 235: New Skill and Ability (1)

After the team had gorged themselves on ramen, they finally arrived back at the residence as the sun was setting. It seemed as if their adrenaline from the win had all dried up, resulting in a distinct lack of energy on anyone's faces.

Despite winning easily on paper, most of them were worn out since their nerves had been on edge while being stared at by thousands of people in a packed stadium.

As they were all still teenagers, it wasn't weird that they would be more affected than others when it came to the current situation.

There weren't many sports that had as much attention on high schoolers, at least in Japan.

Most of the players headed straight for the showers and prepared for bed with a full belly, looking forward to the sweet embrace of sleep. Ken was amongst them, feeling the mental fatigue of the game beginning to effect him.

There was also something weighing on his mind since he threw the final pitch of the innings. He had no doubt that he'd heard a system notification, yet there was no time to check on it just yet.

He felt like an addict, being forced to wait to access the system until others weren't around.

As he jumped into the shower, he couldn't help but open the system window and take a peak.

MISSION: Summer National Tournament

*Task 1: Strike out 50 players [27/50]

*Task 2: Hit 6 home runs [2/6]

*Task 3: Make the Quarter Finals of Koshien

*Task 4: Make the Semi Finals of Koshien

*Task 5: Make the Finals of Koshien

*Task 6: Win the National Tournament

*Task 7: Win player of the Tournament

REWARDS:

>Task 1 rewards - 3000 Major points

>Task 2 rewards - 3000 Major points

>Task 3 rewards - 7000 Major points

>Task 4 rewards - 7,000 Major points + Gold Lottery ticket

>Task 5 rewards - 10,000 Major points + Gold Lottery ticket

>Task 6 rewards - 15,000 Major points + SS-Grade Physicality Elixir

>Task 7 rewards - 15,000 Major points + SS-Grade Mental Elixir

Hidden Task: ??? - 1 x Platinum ticket

DING

[Congratulations, user has completed Hidden Task: Throw a Shutout]

[Received: 1 x Platinum Ticket]

[Detected that user has exceeded task, providing additional rewards]

[Calculating...]

[Received: 1 x Skill Selection Ticket]

Ken's eyes widened at the wall of text that appeared in front of him, feeling his tired body begin to heat up in anticipation. There was nothing like receiving rewards from the system, especially when they were unexpected.

He had never seen either the Skill selection ticket, nor the Platinum ticket before and didn't hesitate to check the description.

Platinum Ticket: Gives the user an ability.

Skill Selection Ticket: Select from a list of skills

While the description for the Skill selection ticket was simple, the Platinum Ticket still seemed to be shrouded in mystery. Yet Ken still felt a high level of excitement. He had never been able to select his own skill before.

Since everything was selected at random via spinning the silver and gold wheels, he had been forced to take whatever he could get. Yet now he had the opportunity to take luck out of the equation, selecting what he needed most.

Ken quickly finished up in the shower and got ready for bed. By the time he arrived in the room, half the team was already heading to bed.

However it was only around an hour later that it was dark enough to use the system. He wouldn't want people seeing him poke at the air in front of him.

Without wasting anymore time, he went to the inventory and used the Skill Selection Ticket.

[Skill Selection Ticket used]

Please select 1 skill from the below:

Eagle Eye: Allows user to see the path of incoming pitches, improving pitch recognition and decision-making in the batters box

Perfect Throw: Increases fielding by 2 when attempting to throw out a runner

Stealth Baserunner: Increases Agility by 1 when stealing a base. User is less likely to be spotted by the fielders

Leadership Presence: Increases team coordination and cohesion while user is on the field

Pitching Variety: Grants the user increased proficiency when learning new pitches

Ken's eyes widened as he went over the skills that appeared on the system window. He could see benefits to all of them, yet there were a few clear winners that would be far more useful to him right now.

He immediately ruled out the Perfect Throw and Stealth Baserunner skills. He was a pitcher and a clean up batter, his goal was always to either strikeout the batter, or hit a home run.

In his entire high school career so far, he'd only been on base 2 times.

Which led to his next line of thought. Eagle Eye would allow him to pick pitches far easier and therefore hit more home runs, it was a perfect skill for his current situation.

However, thinking from a longevity standpoint it didn't make sense. While he was a two-way player right now, most professional organizations would allow a player to only focus on one.

Ken still thought of himself as a pitcher first and foremost, therefore he reluctantly discarded this skill.

This left two remaining skills, Leadership Presence and Pitching Variety.

While he had unconsciously become a leading figure in his teammates eyes, it was never his intention to do so. He still wasn't too keen on taking on such a responsibility, especially when he needed to focus on getting better.

Pitching Variety however, looked to be the best pick of the bunch by a large margin. He currently only had his killer fastball and the forkball which he didn't use that often since it strained his arm when used too much.

With his 100mph fastball as his primary weapon, adding in some change ups and breaking balls would be deadly to his arsenal. This was especially the case since the level of his competition would only increase with time.

Not to mention the long term benefits the skill would bring him in the future when he eventually went pro.

'There's no better choice.' Ken told himself, reaching up and selecting the skill.

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

Chapter 236 - 236: New Skill and Ability (2)

[User has selected skill: Pitching Variety]

DING

[Congratulations, user has reached SS- Grade Pitching]

'Eh?'

Ken felt his jaw almost detach from his face as he read the notification in front of him. He almost couldn't believe it.

'W-What kind of luck did I stumble upon?'

He had been stuck at the A- pitching grade for majority of the year, yet in the span of a few weeks he had now climbed up all the way to SS-, a total of 6 grades.

This paired with his Limit Break and Showdown skills could have him rocket into the SSS grade during a match, something he would have never thought possible.

Of course that would only be temporary, yet that didn't matter.

Ken felt his mind flood with dopamine, bringing a satisfied smile to his face.

'There truly is no better rewards than the unexpected ones.' He mused inwardly.

'Ah'

He had a sudden realization that he had forgotten something. Ken still had another reward that was waiting for him.

After returning to his inventory, he gazed upon the Platinum Ticket description once more. It detailed that he would receive an ability, yet it did not provide any additional detail.

He had expected it to be linked to another wheel, just like the Gold and Silver lottery tickets, however it seemed that wasn't the case.

Yet there was no point in him just staring at it, so he decided to use it now.

[User has selected Platinum Ticket]

[Congratulations, user has received the ability: Mentor]

'Huh? Mentor?' Since it was not described, Ken had no choice but to return to his system window and try to find out more.

That's when he saw it, a new option sitting directly under his Training Plan function.

With an intrigued expression, he opened the menu.

WELCOME TO THE MENTOR MENU:

USER CAN SELECT 1 MENTOR AND HAS THE ABILITY TO LEARN THEIR SKILLS AT THE COST OF MAJOR POINTS. USER MUST INCREASE PROFICIENCY TO 100% BEFORE BEING ABLE TO SELECT ANOTHER SKILL.

LIST OF AVAILABLE MENTORS:

James Anderson (Pitcher, Yokohama Warriors)

Yuji Yamamoto (Catcher, Yokohama Warriors)

'Hmm? I can learn skills from professionals!?'

Ken felt incredulous. Just what kind of overpowered ability had he gained?

The fact that the only two players he'd been given an option to take as a mentor were from the Warriors, likely meant that he had to meet the individual and interact with them to some degree.

He could easily deduce this since there were many other pitchers and catchers within the bullpen when he visited, yet only these two appeared.

'Let's see what it does.' Ken mused, selecting James Anderson as his mentor.

James Anderson (Mentor)

#Available Skills:

>Pitches:

Curveball (Max): 2000 Major Points

Splitter (Max): 2500 Major Points

Slider (Max): 3000 Major Points

Slurve (Max): 4000 Major Points

Eephus (Max): 5000 Major Points

>Miscellaneous:

Intimidating Gaze: Reduces runners confidence at stealing bases (1000 Major points)

Pickoff Pioneer: Increases effectiveness of pickoffs (1500 Major points)

Curse Thrower (Inactive): Increases vocabulary when verbalizing one's complaints. (Has been sealed by user since moving to Japan.) (N/A)

Ken blinked a few times, particularly when seeing the final skill. Now that he thought about it, he remembered James was prone to outbursts on the field when he played in the Majors.

It wouldn't have mattered if the skill wasn't greyed out, there was no way he would try to learn such a skill in the first place. How would he even increase the proficiency in the future? Would he need to curse every player on the field?

Ken felt his face heat up just at the thought of something so ludicrous.

He turned his mind back to the matter at hand. He had a total of 5 pitches and 3 miscellaneous skills to choose from.

Yet Ken automatically disregarded the miscellaneous skills for now. It wasn't a hard decision to make, especially since he'd just received the Variety Pitcher skill which made learning new pitches easier.

He eyed the Curveball, Slider and the Slurve.

'Those would be a good addition to my arsenal. I already have a forkball which is similar to the splitter, so it would be between these 3.'

While the Eephus pitch could be effective when thrown well, it also opened up the possibility of being squarely hit out of the park. Therefore Ken thought it was too risky to pursue, especially in the middle of Nationals.

Since he could only choose 1 skill at a time, he eventually decided upon the Curveball.

[User has selected Curveball]

[Imprinting basic knowledge of the skill into users brain. Standby]

Instantly, Ken felt his vision begin to darken as he lost consciousness.

In the next moment he appeared in an empty stadium he had visited over 100 times, almost every night since he had received the Image Training function.

'Koshien...'

Like usual, the seats were empty, yet he was not alone this time.

Atop the mound was the tall figure of James Anderson, grinning at him as he stood in the batters box. Ken blinked a few times, almost not believing his eyes.

Without a word, he saw James perform his powerful wind up before letting his pitch go. The intensity from the movements kept Ken in awe, yet when the ball was released it was far slower than he had expected.

Even though he subconsciously knew that it was a curveball, he still couldn't help but swing early, his bat sailing over the pitch as it broke.

"H-Holy crap."

Ken could only stare in wonder at the journeyman on the mound.

Yet before he could do anything else, the scenery before him changed. He was no longer in the batters box, but upon the mound.

He tried to move but was unable to. Before he could panic, his gaze moved to the grip upon the ball. The ball was wedged between the middle finger and ring finger, with the thumb at the bottom of the baseball.

'W-What's happening?'

He couldn't control his body at all, and it was moving on its own.

[User is being shown Curveball from Mentor James Anderson's perspective]

Mika's voice entered his mind which allowed him to calm down a little. It was such a weird experience that he had almost lost his cool.

Since he now knew what was happening, he did his best to calm down and focus.

In the next moment, he felt his body go through the wind up before sending the ball out towards home plate.

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

Chapter 237 - 237: Mentee (1)

Ken woke up the next morning at 5am, feeling fresh. Thanks to his fatigue management skill, his body recovered much faster than before, as long as he had enough rest.

His mind quickly moved to what had happened last night within the Image Training.

After experiencing the curveball first hand, he had received a proficiency gauge.

[Curveball: 66.7% proficiency]

Ken was quite impressed that he had been given such a high proficiency to begin with, however it was likely due to his new skill that this was the case.

Amidst his good mood, he spotted Shiro who seemed to have had a better sleep last night. He remembered his friends expression yesterday and couldn't help but feel a little guilty.

He wanted to help his friend, but at the same time didn't want to upset him incidentally.

'Maybe I can ask him to catch for me? I need to practice my curveball otherwise I can't use it in games.' Ken thought to himself.

He mulled it over a little before nodding. While it wouldn't allow Shiro to play games right away, it would at least make him feel like he's being of use.

With that, he approached Shiro and tried to wake him up.

The short guy tossed and turned a little, resulting in some drool escaping from his mouth. Ken tried to ignore it and shoved his chest, only for his arm to be grabbed.

"S-Stop it Kaori-chan. I'm shy..."

Ken blinked a few times, feeling horror creep into his body as the guy caressed his arm.

'W-What the hell!?'

He tried to pull his arm away from the pervert, yet Shiro was holding on for dear life. He began to pucker his lips and raise his head in Ken's direction when suddenly...

THUD

Shiro flew across the room, colliding with one of the walls on the opposite side. He was upside down with his bum in the air, yet he still seemed half asleep.

The noise was enough to rouse some of the lighter sleepers, however Ken stealthily moved to where Shiro was and picked him up with one arm before leaving the room.

'This idiot... Here I was worrying about his mental state, and he's dreaming about a girl...'

Finally awake, Shiro looked at Ken with confusion as he was being carried like a kitten by the scruff of his shirt. He saw the annoyed expression on Ken's face and felt even more confused.

"K-Ken, what are you doing?" he asked meekly.

"We're training today."

Since they weren't playing again until the 5th day, there was some downtime. While most of the players would be going to watch the other games, Ken had other plans.

Shiro felt his body shudder unconsciously, yet he didn't have the guts to dispute Ken. It was only when he realized that he was still in his pyjama's that he spoke up.

"Are we going to train in our PJ's today?"

"Ah..."

Ken stood still in the next moment, realizing that he had yet to get changed as well. Shiro's antics had made him want to leave the room right away so he wouldn't wake anyone up.

He dropped Shiro to the floor in the next moment and cleared his throat, telling him to get changed. Ken also followed along and got changed into his running gear.

Around an hour later, the two returned to the residence. While Ken had a healthy sheen of sweat on his body, Shiro looked as if he'd been dunked into a lake on his way back.

Seeing him like this, Ken felt sudden vindication for the early antics he had to suffer through.

"Why are you. Doing this. To me" Shiro said between sucking in large gasps of air.

Inwardly he was feeling rather annoyed in this moment. It felt like Ken had been picking on him for quite some time, yet he never knew the reason why.

"Doing what? Taking you to train with me?" Ken replied, sensing some of the discontent within his tone.

"You know what I mean. Why do you push me around so much? Does it make you feel better about yourself?"

Shiro snapped at Ken after a few moments of silence. He was feeling rather depressed yesterday, questioning his usefulness to the team since he'd yet to play a single minute this season.

He thought that he would be happy just supporting the team from the background, as long as they continued to win. Yet it was quickly becoming clear that this wasn't the case.

Ken could feel that Shiro was serious, yet he smiled and turned to the short guy before placing his hand on his shoulder.

"Shiro my friend. Why would I go through so much effort to push you around if I didn't think you could handle it? We're going to be a battery next year, so I need you in good shape okay?"

Shiro blinked a few times, looking at Ken as if he just had a revelation.

'That's right... Yuta will be gone next year which means I'll be the starting catcher.'

He was so caught up in this season that he failed to see the bigger picture. While it didn't immediately show, jealousy had begun to worm its way into his head.

There was no way that his friend would torture him just for the fun of it, at least not the Ken he knew.

Now that he thought of it, he treated all of his teammates the same way through the special training they had done. No matter who it was, they would all go through hell in order to improve.

Just as he was starting to feel regret from his earlier words, Ken gripped his shoulder tighter.

"Let's forget about your earlier words. I need your help."

Shiro felt grateful as he looked at his friend's gaze.

"O-Okay, let's do it!"

DING

USER HAS MET THE CONDITIONS TO TAKE TEAMMATE SHIRO MASUDA AS A MENTEE

ACCEPT?

[Y/N]

'Huh? Take Shiro as a mentee? What does that mean.'

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

Chapter 238 - 238: Mentee (2)

Yet Mika was silent to his question.

"Let's have a shower and some breakfast before we get some practice in." Ken said before turning away, hiding his thoughtful expression.

In the shower, Ken stared at the system text and contemplated what to do. If he was honest, he didn't believe that he was cut out to be a mentor at this stage of his life.

It was similar to how he felt about being a leader. Perhaps it was because of his lacking self esteem, but Ken didn't feel like he was good enough to take such a position.

But at the same time, the system would generally not suggest such a thing unless it held benefits.

Since Mika would not give him any information, there was only one way to find out.

DING

USER HAS TAKEN TEAMMATE SHIRO MASUDA AS HIS MENTEE

[Please select a skill to impart]

Slugger: Increase strength by 4 grades when the ball is struck with the middle of the bat

Bunt: Ability to bunt even the fastest of balls with optimal precision and strength.

Charismatic Air: People are drawn to you and are more likely to listen to your suggestions.

Forkball: Ability to throw the Forkball consistently and accurately with the correct form.

Fatigue Management: Reduces fatigue and boosts recovery for extremities

'Eh? What is this?'

Unexpectedly, Ken was given the option to impart a skill to Shiro. This was not something that he expected at all, yet it was perfect.

Unfortunately it seemed that he only got to choose 1 of 5 skills instead of his whole skill set. A couple of the skills would also be useless to Shiro, not to mention the Charismatic Air which he would never wish for anyone to have.

After staring at the list, it seemed to be between Slugger and Fatigue Management. While Shiro was a decent batter, he would probably only be placed 7th or 8th in the lineup, right next to Yuta.

'Fatigue Management seems to be the most useful skill, especially if he'll be training like crazy.'

[User has selected Fatigue Management Skill]

[Imparting...]

"ARHGHHHH!"

THUD

A squeal came out from the shower a few doors down, startling Ken greatly. He quickly grabbed his towel and wrapped it around himself before rushing towards the shower.

He peaked underneath the door only to see Shiro's bare bum staring back at him as he laid face down in the shower.

"Crap!"

Ken quickly kicked the door in and collected his naked friend from the floor before turning the shower off.

"Shiro! Snap out of it!"

SLAP

SLAP

"Hnngh" Shiro groaned as his face was slapped repeatedly while he was in Ken's arms.

"I-I'm sorry..."

In his half unconscious state, Shiro apologized.

Ken suddenly felt guilty. It was obvious that him imparting the skill to Shiro had knocked him unconscious. Add to the fact he was already in the shower, made for such an awkward scenario.

He let out a long sigh and was trying to figure out ways to rouse the small guy.

"Kaori-chan~ forgive meeee"

Shiro puckered his lips once more and leaned forward, going in for what looked like a make up kiss in his dreams.

Ken's expression fell as he almost threw him to the ground in disgust before turning the cold water on in the shower.

"A-ARGHHH it's cold!"

Shiro was violently woken up by the freezing cold water that splashed on his body and couldn't help but look around in confusion.

Ken had already left the area, feeling all of his guilt disappear along with it.

He quickly got changed and headed to the dining room for a buffet breakfast. After piling bacon, eggs and toast onto his plate, he went and sat down with a few of his teammates.

"You didn't wake me up this morning Ken." Hiroki said, sounding pitiful.

"What am I, your wife? Wake yourself up." He replied with a grin before digging into his food.

"Tch. Stingy."

Yusuke couldn't help but laugh out loud, obviously in a good mood. It was then that he saw Shiro walk into the room with a slightly confused expression on his face.

"What's up with Shiro? I didn't see him when I woke up." Yusuke commented, gesturing in the boy's direction.

"Yeah we went for a run this morning. He must have passed out in the shower from exhaustion."

Ken was already laying down the foundation for his alibi in case Shiro said something weird.

"Ehhh? You woke up Shiro but not me?" Hiroki whined once more, eliciting a scowl from Ken.

"H-Hey guys." Shiro said, taking a seat next to Yusuke.

"What's up with you man? You look lost."

"Um, I remember taking a shower after our run this morning. But then I suddenly woke up under cold water..." He explained, looking to Ken for some confirmation.

"Hahaha! Did you check to make sure no one stole your kidney?" Yusuke interjected, chortling in response.

Both Ken and Hiroki chuckled, especially after seeing the panicked look on Shiro's face afterwards.

"You were probably just exhausted from your run with Ken this morning. I went yesterday and even I struggled to keep up." Hiroki added before stuffing his face with another rasher of bacon.

"Go get some food, we still need to train today." Said Ken.

"Train? You aren't coming to watch the games today?"

Both Yusuke and Hiroki were a little shocked. Generally, players would want to scope out the competition and even if they didn't, most players were a fan of baseball in general.

Going to the biggest stage for High School baseball and watching top tier teams was an honor in itself.

Ken shook his head, "Our next game isn't until 2 days from now. I want to refine some of my pitches which is why I asked Shiro to help."

"Ah, makes sense."

"Yeah I heard Yuta is being dragged around Osaka by Yuko for the next couple of days."

At the mention of Yuko, Ken couldn't help but think about Ai. He had neglected her for most of this trip so he felt a bit bad. Perhaps he would take her around the town tomorrow to make up for it.

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

Chapter 239 - 239: Improvement (1)

Once breakfast was finished, both Shiro and Ken said their goodbyes before going to locate the coach. Since they planned on leaving to go train today, they needed to notify the correct party.

"Hmm? You want to go train?" Seiji Hanada was cradling his coffee and wearing casual clothes, something the players rarely got to see.

Ken and Shiro both nodded.

"I'm working on increasing my pitching arsenal." Ken admitted.

The coach sat up abruptly, those words getting his attention. Judging by the expectant expression on his face, he was quite happy Ken had brought it up.

"Have you decided on a pitch yet?"

Although he asked that, Ken could tell that he wanted to suggest something. Unfortunately for the coach, he had already selected the curveball.

"Yes Coach. I've decided to learn the curveball since my Dad already taught me some pointers." Ken responded, telling a little white lie.

If the coach was to insist he pick a different pitch, he would not really be able to refuse. Thus he would lose the advantage of the 66.7% proficiency given to him by the system.

Fortunately, the coach's face lit up at the mention of the curveball.

"It seems your Dad and I are on the same wavelength." He said with a slight smile.

"Your fastball is your biggest weapon, however it is not as good as it could be. If you could pair it with a slower ball, the batters would have a nightmare facing you. I was also going to suggest the curveball since your pitching action will be almost identical."

Coach Hanada's excitement seemed to reach a fever pitch as he explained the possibilities. Ken could even see his hand shaking, a telltale sign of his enthusiasm.

"Yes, that was Dad's thoughts as well." Once again, Ken lied through his teeth yet thanks to his Poker Face skill and the coach's agreement, he did not notice.

"Alright well there's a few parks close by that you could use to practice. You can take some equipment, just make sure that you take breaks and don't injure yourself."

Ken heaved a sigh of relief after being given the stamp of approval. He quickly left the area and dragged Shiro along with him.

"Y-You're trying out a new pitch?" Shiro asked, his voice faltering a little.

The last time he had helped Ken with his pitching was back at the Intersquad match at the start of the year. He remembered being pummeled by the ball in the middle of the stomach since he had no control.

"Yeah, I need your help to refine it." Ken said, putting his long arm over Shiro's shoulder.

Shiro couldn't help but gulp.

'I need to bring extra padding...!' He thought, panicking inwardly.

The two grabbed their things and headed out the door to one of the parks that the coach had mentioned earlier. The streets were abuzz as everyone made their way to Koshien stadium for day 3 of the nationals.

After skillfully dodging some oncoming foot traffic for a few minutes, they finally found their destination. It was a kids park, however there was a wall for them to use as a makeshift cage so the ball wouldn't go flying onto the street.

As long as he could measure the 60 foot distance from him to Shiro, then it would work perfectly fine.

Ken placed his bag roughly where he thought the mound would be, before putting his cleats on and going through his warm up routine. Shiro didn't waste time, placing his chest guard and protective gear on.

A smile formed on Ken's face as he looked around him. There was a hint of nostalgia in his expression as he remembered all the times he used to practice his pitching in the park similar to this one back at home.

His father would play catch with him in the afternoons, teaching him about the game that they both loved.

'I wonder if I would also do the same with my son.' He thought inwardly, getting caught up in the moment.

His face turned bright red a moment later as he thought who would be the mother of his child. Ai's face appeared almost instantly in the recesses of his mind, surprising him for a moment.

Ken quickly shook his head, deciding to bury it for now.

He turned his attention to Shiro who was standing in front of the wall and couldn't help but look at him in shock.

The teen was wearing additional padding on his arms and legs, as well as something that looked like a pillow stuffed underneath his chest protector, making him look ridiculous.

Ken fought back the sudden urge to throw the ball at him before he was ready.

"Shiro... Could you take this seriously for a moment?" He asked, trying his best to remain polite.

"Don't worry Ken! I'm good to go." He replied, sending a thumbs up.

"..."

Ken silently walked towards his friend with barely restrained annoyance.

"Ah n-no wait, Ken!"

THUD

A few moments later, Ken returned back to the marked mound and began to roll his shoulders while he waited for his friend.

Shiro who had just been manhandled, adjusted his chest protector which was now missing the pillow he had stuffed into it earlier.

"You ready?" Ken called, ignoring the pouting expression on Shiro's features.

"Y-Yes."

"Alright, lets go a few warm ups for now." He said nonchalantly.

After around 12 throws he felt good enough to get into it.

"Mind if I throw some fastballs first?"

Shiro gave the thumbs up, mainly because he didn't want Ken to hear how nervous he was in that moment. Even when he was watching from the dugout, he could feel how crazy Ken's pitching was.

Yet in the next moment he hardened his resolve. He remembered what Ken had said, that they would become a battery next year, which meant he couldn't continue to act scared in such a situation.

Ken performed his wind up and sent the ball flying towards the open glove.

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

- Chapter 240 - 240: Improvement (2)

Chapter 240 - 240: Improvement (2)

Shiro grit his teeth and kept his eye on the ball. He'd been a catcher ever since elementary school, so his form was already good, he just needed the confidence to succeed.

PAH

"Oh that wasn't that bad..." Shiro muttered, surprised that nothing had gone wrong.

"Alright, next one will be a little faster." Ken stated.

He could tell that Shiro was nervous about catching for him, which was something that he couldn't allow to stick. Therefore he decided to slowly get the teen used to his top speeds by increasing the speed by increments.

After receiving the ball, Ken shifted his body and began his wind up.

PAH

Once again Shiro caught the ball easily, surprising even himself.

Ken continued to pitch his fastballs until they approached his max speed.

"Okay, next one is coming at full speed. Try and follow the ball."

'I can do this...' Shiro said inwardly, getting into his position. Now that he had faced Ken's pitches, he was starting to feel more confident in his abilities.

At the start of the season he struggled to see anything around 150km/h yet he had improved by leaps and bounds.

WHOOOSH

Ken's fastball ripped its way through the air, spinning quickly from the force.

Shiro's eyes widened as he did his best to follow the ball. Unlike all of the other pitches, this one wasn't controlled perfectly and would require him to actually move his glove.

PAH

The sound was like music to their ears as it filled the park with a bang.

"I-I did it!" Shiro quickly jumped to his feet, an elated expression on his features.

Ken felt a smile reach the corner of his lips. He hadn't seen his friend this happy for quite some time, despite him usually being one of the most energetic out of the bunch. Unless it was during training of course.

"I actually saw the ball and moved my glove to catch it since your control was so bad."

Ken's face stiffened in the next moment, hearing Shiro talk about his pitching. But he decided to drop it this one time since the kid was so happy.

"Alright nice work. I'll throw a few more of them, try leading me." He said, calling for the ball.

The two continued with around 40 fastballs all up, most of which were in the high 150km/h range. Out of all the balls, Shiro only mishandled 6 of them, all of which were in the first half.

Ken was amazed that Shiro could learn to catch them so quickly. Especially since according to the system, his pitching could be equated to a mid-tier college player.

"Now it's time for the main event. I'll be practicing my curveball."

Shiro nodded. He had come here with the intent of helping Ken, yet so far it had just been him receiving the help.

Inwardly he was grateful, so he decided to do his best.

Ken fixed his posture and looked at his grip, ensuring to hold it like he was shown the previous night.

Since he had done it in the Image Training, it had not yet translated outside of his mental realm. Even as he held the ball in his hands, it still felt awkward and foreign.

He closed his eyes, trying to remember the feeling that the system had shown him.

In the next moment he brought his knee up and stepped out, just like he did for every pitch. While the form and throwing action looked the same, the ball came out around 20% slower.

The ball flew through the air with top spin, yet it could not reach its destination, dropping a couple of meters in front of the makeshift home plate.

Ken frowned in the next moment, trying to get over the awkwardness.

"We might be here for a while Shiro." Ken said, a little apologetically.

"No worries! We'll stay as long as you need."

Later that day, Ken and Shiro dragged their weary bodies back to the residence. Ken had thrown close to 200 balls and was forced to pick up some Ice on the way for his shoulder.

Despite them both having the fatigue management skill, Ken did not want to take any risks. The two returned and moved straight towards the showers before Ken opened the system.

[Curveball: 77.1% proficiency]

He stared at the number for a while, trying to do some calculations in his head. Out of the 100+ curveballs he threw, there were only around 50 that would be passable at nationals.

Of course, that was against the best schools in Japan. If this was the prefecture tournament, the number would be around 70-80.

All in all, he was happy with the 9% increase for a single days work. While he may not be able to successfully reach 100% before nationals was over, he may still be able to pitch it every now and then.

Just as he was thinking about the possibilities, he heard the system notification appear.

DING

[Mentee Shiro Masuda has broken through to S-Grade Fielding]

[Shiro has received Skill: Hawk Eye]

[Hawk Eye: Gives user greater vision while in the catchers position]

'Hmm?'

Ken was caught off guard by the sudden notification. Not only had his training increased Shiro's catching grade, he'd also received a skill because of it.

'I wonder if he would have received the skill if he wasn't my mentee' He thought inwardly.

He waited for a few moments, yet did not hear a peep from Mika at all. Which meant she either couldn't tell him, or didn't want to.

However he didn't care too much. He was happy that he was able to cheer up his friend while also being given the chance to practice a new kind of pitch for his arsenal.

Once he showered and got ready, he went to the dining room just in time for dinner. He saw Hiroki, Yusuke, Yuta, Yuko and even Ai sitting at the same table not far away.

As they saw him enter, Yusuke waved vigorously.

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