

# Major League System

## Chapter 241 - 241: Rest Day (1)

Ken made his way over and took a seat, greeting everyone with a smile. He was in a good mood after seeing his progress and the additional boost that Shiro got as well.

"You're in a good mood Ken." Yusuke stated, a weird expression on his face.

The moment after he said those words, Shiro walked into the dining room with his hair still wet, a content look on his features.

It was then that Yusuke's expression turned weirder as he looked between the two.

Ken felt his eyebrow twitch in annoyance at the obvious bait.

"Hey guys! What's going on?"

Everyone at the table looked at Shiro who seemed content. They could feel he had changed significantly compared to even this morning.

Feeling the incessant stares by his teammates, Shiro began to blush.

"W-What is it? Is there something on my face?"

Both Hiroki and Yusuke looked at each other before turning to Ken.

"You guys are being suspicious. What did you two do today?"

Even Ai and Yuko turned to hear what Ken was going to say.

"We just threw some pitches in the park. I'm working on a secret weapon, though it might not be ready before Nationals is over." Ken said, eyeing the two warily.

He could tell that whatever they were thinking was nothing good.

Thankfully, the answer seemed to bring another question with it.

"Shiro, you can catch Ken's pitches now?" Yuta asked with surprise.

As the one who had to catch the monster fastballs, he knew just how hard they were to contain. Adding on the fact that Shiro couldn't even catch them properly at practice, he was shocked.

"Hehehe, Ken was very patient with me. It didn't even hurt." Shiro said, his cheeks sporting a little redness from embarrassment.

"PFFT"

Both Yusuke and Hiroki suddenly clutched their stomachs, feeling a wave of laughter threaten to overcome them. If it weren't for the intimidating look Ken was throwing their way, they might have lost it.

SLAP

Ken slapped Shiro in the middle of the back, his annoyance growing.

"Stop saying such weird things, you're giving people the wrong impression."

"Pfft"

"Hahahaha!"

Ai was the one who lost her composure first as she couldn't contain the giggles that escaped from her mouth. The fact that Shiro was speaking like a maiden who had experienced their first time made everything too much to bear.

Ai's laughter triggered both Hiroki and Yusuke who couldn't contain it any longer. They burst out laughing, much to the dismay of Ken who could only shake his head, though a small smile crept onto the corner of his lips.

Only after a few minutes did the situation finally die down. Those within the team had already tried to figure out what was happening, only to be shoed away by Ken.

"Hey what are you guys doing tomorrow? It's our final day before our next match." Yuta asked.

"Hmm? Probably just going to the stadium why's that?" Both Yusuke and Hiroki answered before looking over curiously at their Senpai.

"Well, Yuko and I wanted to go somewhere like Karaoke or something. But it's fun with more people. What do you say?"

Yusuke turned his face up in disgust, "Naw man, I suck at singing. I'll just go watch some games."

Hiroki nodded in agreement, "Maybe the two lovebirds can go with you?" he said, gesturing towards Ken and Shiro.

"Hahaha."

Ken felt like throwing a 100mph fastball directly at Hiroki in that moment, but knowing him he'd probably manage to hit it back. Instead he made a mental note to take his revenge at another time in the future.

Hiroki who was all laughs and jokes earlier suddenly felt his body shiver unconsciously.

'W-What was that?'

Ken turned to Ai who was looking at him expectantly and couldn't help but feel his face heat up a little.

"I'm free tomorrow. Did you want to come as well Ai?"

A beautiful smile blossomed on Ai's face as she readily agreed. In truth she'd been trying to find an excuse to go explore with Ken, since this was a special occasion that possibly wouldn't happen again in the future.

"I'll pass." Shiro stated, not wanting to be a third wheel to both couples.

"Oh?" Ken turned his attention to his friend, a teasing look on his expression.

"What's that Yuko? Kaori is coming along as well?"

Shiro's body suddenly stiffened and his face reddened. Instead of looking at Ken, his turned his attention to Yuko as if to verify Ken's words.

He almost looked like a puppy who had heard the words "Walk" or "Treat" in passing.

"Er yeah, Kaori will be coming too." Yuko said, though she felt a little uncomfortable with Shiro's gaze.

"Ahem. I guess it will be good to look around the city."

Shiro cleared his throat and shamelessly changed his mind, making up some excuse about sightseeing. However, Ken couldn't help but chuckle inwardly.

So it was decided. The group of Ken, Ai, Yuta, Yuko, Shiro and Kaori would be exploring the city today in order to take a bit of a breather from the intense sporting atmosphere.

Sometimes it was more beneficial to take a break than to completely retain your focus for the whole time.

Once everyone had finished with dinner, Yuko retreated and broke the news to Kaori who had just finished showering. She loved to take long showers and seemed to take longer than anyone to get ready.

Upon hearing the news that she would be 3rd wheel with Shiro, she turned up her face and almost walked straight back into her room.

If it wasn't for Yuko's incessant pleas, she might have just stayed in bed for the night and the whole day tomorrow.

"Make sure you're back before dinner tomorrow. We'll be having a strategy meeting about our next opponent." Coach Hanada said to Ken who had come to tell him about his plans for the next day.

"No problem." Ken said in English with a thumbs up.

"Haaaah." The coach couldn't help but sigh, however he was grinning.

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

## **Chapter 242 - 242: Rest Day (2)**

He couldn't help but feel sorry for Ken's father who had to put up with such a worrisome boy. It wasn't that he was immature or anything, just that he seemed to keep a lot of things to himself.

Even now Seiji couldn't guess what was going through the kid's mind at any given time. But at the same time he was glad that Ken was taking a small break from baseball, if only for a day.

The next day after breakfast, the whole group arrived out front of the residence. Ai was wearing a lovely white top and short shorts, showing off her long and jade-like legs. Adding the wide-brimmed hat upon her head, there was only one thought that came to Ken's mind.

'So pretty...'

Ken on the other hand, was sporting some trendy outfit that his mother had packed in his bag. It was a white button up shirt and some brown chino shorts that felt a little tight compared to his usual attire.

Ever since he heard Ai's opinion on his style, he'd felt slightly more obliged to listening to his mom when it came to such things. Yet it seemed to have worked.

"You like very stylish today." Ai said, a smile gracing her lips.

"T-Thanks... Your outfit suits you." Ken replied, feeling a little awkward.

It wasn't that he couldn't hold a conversation, it was that there were 2 others staring at him and making him feel uncomfortable.

The other two girls had never seen Ken where such an outfit before. With the tight shirt and pants, they could see his toned and muscular body which was usually hidden by the baggy clothes he wore.

Both Yuta and Shiro had seen Ken's physique before, so they weren't that impacted apart from the usual jealousy. However both Yuko and Kaori were pleasantly surprised and couldn't help but stare.

Only after receiving a stiff smile from Ai did they realize they'd been staring for far too long.

Shiro on the other hand was staring at the woman next to Yuko. She was wearing a white top and a brown skirt which seemed to match the tanned color of her skin.

While she wasn't as exaggerated as Yuko, her bosom was still shapely, particularly with her cute choice of clothes.

"Well, let's bring our triple date then!" Yuta said, raising a fist in the air.

"Hmm!?" Kaori's neck twisted at a weird angle as she stared at Yuta with malice. It was as if she had been transported there from a horror story, with the temperature in the atmosphere plummeting.

Shiro didn't seem to notice the situation, feeling his heart beat wildly at the word "Date."

"Ahem. Let's go."

Yuko said meekly, doing her best to stay far away from the pissed off Kaori.

Ken walked alongside Ai and couldn't help but chuckle. It was clear that Kaori did not want to be left with Shiro, but inwardly he was cheering for his friend.

'I hope some of that confidence he recovered yesterday is still with him.'

The group first began to walk around the city, eventually deciding to head to the Koshien History museum first since it was close by.

While the group was meant to be taking a break from baseball, it was still the thing that they all had in common. Since Ken was not up to date on the history, he actually found it rather intriguing.

The next stop was Susanoo Shrine.

Ken's tall figure seemed to be getting some attention within the crowd of people, making him a little uncomfortable.

While he had gotten used to the stares that his Charismatic Air skill had brought with it, the ones he experienced today seemed to be a lot worse.

"Hey isn't that the Yokohama pitcher?"

"Is it Ken?"

"Wow he's so much taller up close."

"And more handsome."

Even Ai began to get a little protective of her property, as she grabbed his arm and nestled in close to Ken. This only served to make Ken blush, creating an awkward yet satisfying moment for him.

"Guys, how about we go to Karaoke now?" Ken suggested.

If they could get a booth, they wouldn't have to worry about the general public.

It wasn't that Ken was a celebrity now, just that because Koshien was currently on, everyone was keeping up with the news about it. Since his face had been on TV, he was easily recognizable.

"Good idea." Shiro said, his eyes twinkling a little as he looked at Kaori.

Kaori couldn't help but shudder unconsciously.

With that, the group didn't stick around for long before heading back onto the streets. After around 10 minutes, they finally found the Karaoke bar they had been looking for.

It was already 11am by now so they decided to book a booth and would get some food delivered after some time.

They were ushered into one of the open booths and all sat around the table. It just so happened that the couples were all paired next to each other. Yuta and Yuko, Ai and Ken as well as the unfortunate Kaori and happy-as-larry Shiro.

"Who is going to start us off?" Yuko asked.

Ken decided to get his turn out of the way first since he was not the best, nor the worst at singing. In his mind, as long as he was average then he wouldn't stand out.

He grabbed the remote and chose one of the openings for his favorite Anime.

Eon Genesis Evangelion.

What ensued was a passionate performance that captivated the audience within the booth. Though probably not in the way that he would have liked.

'S-So inspiring...?'

'This isn't good.'

Yet whatever Ken lacked in singing ability, he made up for in enthusiasm. So while it may have not been pleasant to the ears, it had been at least entertaining.

Upon the completion of the minute and a half song, a small round of applause sounded out, putting an end to the performance.

"Who wants next?" Ken asked, his earlier enthusiasm nowhere to be found.

"Uh, I'll go." Shiro put his hand up.

'This is my time to shine...!' He thought, sending a glance at Kaori.

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

## **Chapter 243 - 243: Goal (1)**

Seeing the confident expression on Shiro's face, Yuta and Ken glanced at each other, knowing that a good show was coming. Since the guy's voice was still rather immature, neither of them thought it would translate well to singing.

The three girls held their tongue, not wanting to distract the poor fellow.

In reality, Shiro had chosen the perfect time to perform, while Ken's lackluster singing was still fresh in everyone's minds. This way, even if he was average, he'd still be better compared to Ken.

The screen flickered a few times as Shiro scrolled through the songs. He did it with such speed and ease, showing that he'd likely been to Karaoke many times in the past.

Ken's eyes widened when he saw the words on the screen.

'Unravel - TK, the popular opening theme from Tokyo Goul...'

"Tell me, oh tell me, the way it works."

Shiro's high pitched yet controlled voice sounded out from within the booth, without the accompaniment of music. Everyone's ears perked up as they felt his tone seep into their bodies.

"Who is that inside me?"

As the music slowly fluttered in, Ken felt goosebumps appear on his neck and arms.

"Here in this broken-down, broken-down world, you laugh without seeing a thing."

Shiro was like a performer on stage, perfectly captivating the audience members through his story telling. All 5 teens in the booth could only stare in amazement as the once short and clumsy guy turned into a star.

From start to finish, no one made a sound.

At the end, Shiro turned to the screen and nodded in approval.

"Looks like I tied my personal best." He said simply, before turning to the group.

His eyes lingered on Kaori's shocked expression, feeling some satisfaction creep into his bones. It was always good to impress the person that one liked, especially in a scenario like this.

"W-Whoa man, I didn't know you could sing."

Ken was the first to break the silence, applauding the guys efforts.

"Yeah that was amazing Shiro." Ai followed, giving him a sweet smile.



"Dude, did you have to go all superstar in front of my girlfriend? I might lose her at this rate." Yuta said, letting out a laugh.

"Hehe, you don't have to worry about that. He's into Kaori, not me." Yuko said, causing 2 people in the room to stiffen.

The shock on Kaori's face increased at this news. She didn't think much of Shiro beforehand, mainly because they'd never talked or seen each other apart from their gazes meeting a few times during training.

Yet the revelation that this guy was into her kind of freaked her out.

Shiro on the other hand, felt his face and neck heat up. He had never told anyone that he liked Kaori, not even Ken, so how did Yuko know?

He wanted to speak up and dismiss the claims to help with his embarrassment, yet his heart couldn't do it.

Seeing the shocked and morose expression on Kaori's face caused his self-esteem to plummet. Just as he was lowering his head, a deep voice interjected.

"Ahem. Shiro and I will go order some food while you guys choose who is next." Ken said, standing up and swooping in.

He calmly took Shiro outside of the booth and let out a small sigh of relief. The tension within the air was enough to make anyone go crazy.

"You okay man?" Ken asked, his concern evident.

"Y-Yeah I'm alright."

Although he tried his best to sound convincing, it was obvious that he was crushed.

There was a small silence that stretched out between the two, one which Ken knew he would have to fill. He had a feeling that if he didn't say anything, Shiro's self-esteem would regress once more.

After racking his brain for a little while, Ken put his arm over his friend's shoulder and patted it gently.

"Slow and steady wins the race man. Any girl would have such a reaction if you were to spring it on them so suddenly. That's why you see plenty of confessions get outright rejected."

Ken obviously had no idea what he was talking about, especially since he'd never been with a woman himself. However, like the old saying, he was faking it till he made it.

And it seemed to work!

Shiro's head raised slowly as he met Ken's gaze.

"You're right... It was just all too sudden." He said, almost as if he was convincing himself.

Instantly, his posture began to change, the confidence returning to his body.

Ken let out a sigh of relief.

'Hopefully I don't have to do this every time he gets rejected.' He thought.

The two returned to the room in the next moment, only to see 4 pairs of eyes locked onto them.

"Did you take the order already?" Yuko asked, clearly oblivious to the whole mess she'd caused.

'Crap! We said we'd be getting food.'

"Ah yeah sorry I forgot, you can only order food through the land line phone over there." Shiro said, pointing to the corner of the room. He seemed apologetic, none of his earlier depression evident.

Kaori's gaze landed on him, filled with mixed emotions. She was worried that he was going to openly pursue her in front of everyone after Yuko's remarks, however she breathed a sigh of relief after seeing him now.

However, a little intrigue crept into her mind about the mysterious character Shiro.

After the group ordered food, everyone else had their turn at singing. Out of the remaining 4, surprisingly, only Kaori had a decent singing voice. She sang a ballad from one of the popular Japanese girl groups, to which everyone bopped along to.

Yuko and Yuta did a duet which was almost as painful as Ken's performance, mainly because of their over dramatic dance moves. Yet everyone was laughing and enjoying the moment.

Ken had watched as Ai took her turn at the front of the booth, not knowing what to expect from the mysterious girl.

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

## Chapter 244 - 244: Goal (2)

Since he hadn't known her that well in his previous life, despite chasing her for the first 2 years of high school, he didn't know what to expect.

Yet even if he had one million guesses, he never would have been able to pick what she decided.

It was an old school Japanese rap song from the 90's. The way she held the microphone and rapped along so effortlessly told him that she was very familiar with the song.

Ken wasn't the only one to be shocked. The entire booth could only stare at her in disbelief as her aesthetic and song choice seemed so out of sync.

Once she was done however, everyone clapped.

Ai smiled brightly as she returned to her spot next to Ken.

"I didn't know you liked that music?" Ken commented, feeling as if he got to see another side of the girl that he was fond of.

Ai blushed a little before responding. "Well, my dad listens to it a lot. I used to perform for his friends when I was little."

Ken nodded, feeling a little odd. He hadn't met any of Tetsu's friends, but he imagined that they wouldn't be all that savory. A picture of tattooed men riding bikes seemed to come into his mind.

However he shook his head in the next moment, not knowing how spot on he was.

Not long later the food arrived and everyone began to chow down. There were plenty of laughs and discussions not involving baseball, reminding everyone that there was more to life than just the baseball club.

People had other dreams and visions of the future that didn't necessarily involve baseball.

Now that Ken had seen Shiro's love for singing, it had opened up his eyes a little.

He had been looking at everything through the lens of baseball, since his main goal was to turn professional. Despite it being his end goal, he had been driving his team along the way with the same principles.

Hiroki, Yusuke and Shiro. Did he really need to push them so hard if they didn't want to play baseball professionally?

How much had his regression changed the lives around him? Did he make their life better, or did he make it worse?

Ken's gaze moved to Shiro who was laughing and cracking jokes, incidentally making himself the butt of the joke. However, he could see that the guy was truly enjoying himself.

If Ken hadn't completed the Coup mission that the system gave him back when they faced Fujimi, what would have happened? Would Shiro be living a mediocre life or would he have been able to give up baseball and pursue his real passion, singing.

There were too many questions that he didn't know the answer to, leading to a headache beginning to form behind his eyes.

"What's everyone's goals in life?"

Ken blurted out a question, stopping the conversation abruptly. Most threw him a curious gaze, yet Ai felt a little concerned seeing his expression.

She had seen that look before whenever Ken had been carrying a burden by himself.

Seeing that he didn't receive an answer right away, he continued.

"I want to play on the biggest stage of baseball... The Majors. I know it might seem like a long way away, but I'm committed to making it happen."

He had expected some odd expressions or even some doubt, yet surprisingly everyone seemed to believe in him. Shiro and Ai specifically seemed to think that it was a forgone conclusion.

Ken turned his gaze to Yuta and asked him outright.

"What is your goal Senpai?"

Yuta looked a little uncomfortable, especially with Yuko looking at him expectantly.

"I don't think I have what it takes to go pro. I've been talking to the coach and he said I might be more suited to coaching and sports science."

Ken's eyes widened, but he nodded in the next moment. Yuta had one of the highest game intelligence, plus he was rather smart. It made sense for him to take such a route.

"I want to study marine biology. Yu-kun and I can go to the same University." Yuko said with a smile, hugging Yuta's arm.

Next up was Kaori who was sitting beside Yuko. She seemed a little depressed, likely because she hadn't finished deciding what she wanted to do just yet.

Ken interjected before the silence got awkward. Search the \* website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"You don't have to say anything if you don't want to Kaori. You're still only in your 2nd year of High School after all."

Kaori shook her head, building up her courage.

"I-I want to design video games."

"Eh?"

Everyone in the room turned their gaze to the teen as if she'd just said something outlandish. Only Shiro's eyes seemed to sparkle with inspiration.

"Wow! That's awesome. I'm sure if you work hard then your dream will come true." Shiro said, his words full of enthusiasm.

Seeing the enthusiastic Shiro, Kaori couldn't help but blush. Most people would laugh when she told them her dreams, especially since she was a woman.

Yet the boy in front of her sincerely believed she could succeed.

Inwardly, her opinion of Shiro had changed little by little since the start of the group outing.

"What do you want to do Shiro?" She asked meekly.

Hearing her call him by his name for the first time brought a wave of happiness inside of Shiro. It was a weird sensation, but it seemed to light a fire within him.

Ken listened intently. Whatever Shiro's next words were could determine how he treated him in the future.

"I... I always wanted to become a baseball player, ever since I picked up a glove in elementary school. But I was never the best, so I eventually gave up on that dream."

Ken's expression morphed slightly, but he still wore a small smile on his lips. He would need to be more conscious of his friend's wellbeing in the future.

"But all of that changed when I met Ken."

'Huh?'

Seeing the puzzled expression on his friends face, Shiro couldn't help but grin widely.

"Ever since we met on the field in middle school, my whole outlook changed. I was over the moon when I found out we both decided to go to Yokohama, because I knew that he was a special person."

Ai nodded in agreement, sneaking a glance at the shocked Ken. There was something about the teen that was blinding, drawing everyone towards him and elevating them.

"Shiro... What are y—"

Shiro cut Ken off and continued his speech.

"Ever since hanging out with Ken, I've felt like a whole new person. It's almost as if his excellence has rubbed off on me, giving me the confidence to challenge my dreams once more."

He clenched his fist and stared at it for a few moments.

"So to answer your question. I'm aiming for the pro's."

Shiro grinned widely and stuck out his fist towards Ken.

"I'll be in your care."

Ken stared at the outstretched fist for a few moments, feeling a bunch of complicated emotions. He had originally thought his regression only had negative effects on his friends, but it seemed it could also be the opposite.

"Yeah, no worries. I'll make sure you never slack off again." He said, connecting their knuckles in the next moment.

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

## Chapter 245 - 245: Stomp (1)

After a few more hours, the group returned to the residence in good spirits. Everyone was feeling relaxed after enjoying such a nice day in a new environment.

Upon arriving, they were ushered into the room to talk about their next game against Urawa Gakuin from the Saitama prefecture.

The coach went over some things to look out for during the game, stressing that the batters would be the biggest problem for this match.

"Ken, just because you pitched a perfect game doesn't mean you can let your guard down against these guys." Coach Hanada said with a serious expression.

Of course Ken would never do something so stupid as to underestimate an opponent, so he nodded in response. He would never forgive himself if he dropped the ball in the most important tournament of the year.

"The line up will remain the same. I'm expecting a high scoring game tomorrow, so we need to make sure we aim to convert runs while we're up to bat. That means bunts, sacrifice flies and some sleek base running."

The coach continued his lecture, ensuring that his players were familiar with the game plan. It was evident how fired up the coach was based on how long his speech had been going for.

\*GRRrrgRR\*

A loud rumble broke through the atmosphere, interrupting the coach mid-speech.

20 sets of eyes moved to the source of the sound, only to see Makoto with a serious expression on his face. He looked to be paying the most attention out of everyone, not even acknowledging the loud protests of his stomach.

"Captain, are you ok?" Seiji asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Perfectly fine thanks coach."

"Hmm, okay then. As I was saying, we need to be caref—"

This time, the sound was even louder.

Coach Hanada let out a sigh before deciding to wrap things up.

"Let's go have some dinner. We'll have a quick meeting before the match starts tomorrow afternoon."

With that, everyone headed over to the dining room and sat into the usual groups. Ken's usual seating partners had increased to include those who had accompanied him today.

Thankfully the place they were staying weren't concerned about moving furniture around as long as it was placed back where they found it.

After a pleasant dinner, everyone completed their nightly routine before heading to bed. Curfew had been moved to 9pm tonight since they had an important game tomorrow.

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The next day, the Yokohama team arrived at the stadium around 10am which was just as the first game of the day had finished. Ken just so happened to catch the team as they were leaving the arena.

Judging by the tear stains and overall gloominess of their mood, he could guess that they had just lost their 2nd round match.

The scene wasn't uncommon, yet it reminded him about the stakes of the tournament. 1 loss would mean they were out for good.

"Ken are you okay?"

Ai's soft voice called out to him, snapping him out of his thoughts.

"Yep I'm all good." He said, shaking out the thoughts of failure. As long as he pitched to the best of his capability, there shouldn't be any problems.

The team dropped their bags off at the designated area before heading into the stands. Daichi's team would be playing against Meitoku in the match before theirs, which meant he would only be able to watch the first hour or so.

However, Ken wasn't worried. They had made a promise to meet in the semi-finals after all.

The game got underway rather quickly, showing just how seasoned the staff members were at holding multiple games back to back.

Just as the siren sounded for the match to begin, Ken felt his phone buzz.

"Hey kiddo, good luck today. I'll be watching from the stands."



Ken smiled, seeing the words of his father on the screen. He had caught up with his dad on two occasions briefly so he felt a little bad, but he was happy that he'd be watching live.

He turned his attention back to the game, keen to see how Osaka would perform against another strong team. Yet around 30 minutes later, his mouth was agape.

Osaka Toin: 14

Meitoku: 1

One word came to Ken's mind as he witnessed what was happening on the field.

'Stifling.'

Osaka were like a python, slowly choking the life out of Meitoku bit by bit. Apart from one lucky hit given up by the Ace, the opposition had shown no signs of scoring for the entire 4 innings.

"We need to go get ready."

Coach Hanada's voice sounded out from behind everyone, grabbing their attention.

Ken nodded. Since the game looked as if it would be called via the mercy rule, their game would be moved forward.

He stood up and took a glance at his brother on the field, letting out a smile.

"I'll see you soon lil bro."

With that, he followed his teammates to the designated area so they could get changed.

Around 20 minutes later, he heard the voice announcer call an end to the game. Luckily the coach had gotten them earlier, otherwise they'd be in a mad rush to get ready.

After another 30 minutes, Ken and the squad were standing upon the field after performing the ceremonial bow.

Makoto won the toss and decided to field first per the coach's orders. His intention was to have Ken strike some fear into their lineup.

"Number 1, Pitcher, Ken."

As the announcer called his name, Ken heard the crowd begin to cheer louder than usual. It seemed that his perfect game had already made the rounds, bringing a wave of hype and excitement within the crowd.

In response to this, the Urawa batters seemed discontent.

"He just got lucky with the last team."

"Shinjuku only had weak batters, nothing like our team."

They scoffed and belittled his achievement. Teenagers often did things like this when they were jealous of the attention. After all, what kid wouldn't want a whole stadium cheering for them.

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

## **Chapter 246 - 246: Stomp (2)**

Ken however, had no reaction upon the mound. He began his warm up throws and as feeling especially good in this moment.

After around 15 throws, he indicated to the umpire that he was ready.

"Play ball!"

A loud cheer erupted as everyone got ready to witness arguably the top pitcher in high school at this moment.

Daichi finished his cooling down stretches in the locker room as his coach went over a debriefing. Even though they had stomped the opposition convincingly, no one seemed complacent.

Perhaps this was because of the man in front of them, Coach Narukami.

Despite his age, the coach's eyes were bright and intelligent, filled with passion. He demanded excellence from his players, creating a professional and harmonious atmosphere within the team.

Of course this had its drawbacks, like having to stay behind after a game or practice for debriefs. Yet everyone had gotten used to it by now.

"Daichi, you played excellent today. A big part of why no one could touch the ball was because of your leads, please keep it up."

Daichi nodded. He wasn't surprised with how the game turned out since he had been studying their opponents for the past 2 days.

However, he was starting to get a bit antsy. He knew that his big brother was on the field right now and wanted nothing more than to rush out into the stands to watch him.

"Yatsuo, that run they scored was because of your mistake. Do you understand?"

"Yes coach, the ball slipped in my grip." He replied.

"Yes I saw that. Make sure you're using the rosin bag regularly so we can avoid such situations."

"Yes coach!"

Coach Narukami prattled on for a while longer, giving insight into the game they'd just won, even detailing who their next opponent could be.

After what seemed like an eternity, they were finally able to leave the locker room. Without waiting for the others, Daichi ran up the stairs and quickly stared out over the field.

"Huh?? What happened?"

Around an hour had passed since they left the field, yet the game had already finished. He had even seen Ken's tall figure walking onto the field as their team had left after the match.

'Did they win or lose?'

Daichi panicked a little, not knowing the result. He turned to the nearest person to him, frightening the poor guy greatly.

"Excuse me! Who won the last match!???"

After finally calming down his beating heart, the middle aged man told him the news.

Urawa got crushed.

Daichi felt his body relax after hearing those words. For a small moment he had thought his brother had been knocked out of the tournament, yet their dream was still alive, perhaps even more than ever.

Only now did Daichi feel calm enough to leave the arena.

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Coach Hanada ushered his rowdy team into the residence with a smile on his face, he was about to follow them in before he was interrupted.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ

"Hmm?"

"Hello?"

"Seiji, long time no speak."

The voice was deep and firm, yet it held hints of age and wisdom.

"C-Coach Takashi, it's good to hear from you."

He was taken aback, not expecting a phone call from such a big wig at this moment.

"Please, there's no need to stand on formalities here Seiji, call me Hajime. People might think we're strangers if you keep addressing me like this." Hajime Takashi said, chuckling a little.

"Ah yes sir. How can I help you?"

Despite being given the green light, Coach Hanada was a little reluctant to address the man as such, showing how much he respected him.

"I just saw your match against Urawa. You've got some talented guys on your team."

Seiji's eyes lit up at the compliment, his hand shaking subconsciously by his side.

"W-Was there anyone in particular that stood out to you Coach?"

The line was silent for a while before Hajime finally answered.

"That clean-up hitter on 1st base looks promising, I think he might have a shot."

"Oh? Is that all?" Seiji felt his stomach tighten as he said these words. Usually he wouldn't question this man's vision, however he needed to do his best.

"Hahaha, I know who you're talking about. I can see he has potential, but he's too one dimensional as a pitcher."

Hajime didn't seem to mind the question, yet he still delivered his brutal assessment.

Coach Hanada frowned in response, this was not what he wanted. To him, this person was the most hardworking on the team and more than deserved an opportunity in this situation.

"What if I told you he hasn't shown everything he's got yet?"

"Hmm? Are you saying—"

"Yes. He's been saving it for the semi-finals, all so he can take Osaka Toin by surprise."

Seiji balled his hand into a fist, praying inwardly that his white lie would bear fruits.

"Interesting... To think that you could be so sneaky Seiji. Hahaha!" Hajime laughed deeply, clearly enjoying the insider information.

Only after a few moments did his laughter die down, leading to another silence.

"Very well, I'll keep watching him closely. After all, it's very rare for you to patron one of your players so willfully."

Seiji breathed out a sigh of relief, feeling his body relax.

"Thank you sir. Let's have a chat after Nationals finishes up." He replied gratefully.

"Best of luck out there."

BEEP BEEP BEEP

Coach Hanada removed the phone from his ear and looked at the screen for a few moments. Only now that he was off the phone did he realize just how tense he had been.

He wasn't sure if he made the right decision, throwing Ken into the spotlight like that, however it didn't feel right not to.

As long as he kept playing like he was right now, there was no reason for him not to be given such an opportunity.

"I just hope he can finish learning the curveball in time..." Seiji said, placing his phone back into his pocket.

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

## **Chapter 247 - 247: Lead-up (1)**

The birds were chirping away harmoniously, moments before the sun was about to rear its head over the horizon. Despite being in the latter parts of summer, the orange hue of the sun still brought with it the promise of heat.

The moment the clock struck 5am, music began to play from the first floor of the house, 90's hip hop with its catchy beat and frenetic lyricism.

Bouncing along to this beat was a man in his early forties who wore a blue bakers apron and a white singlet underneath, showcasing his muscular arms. If it weren't for the rolling pin in his hands and flour dusted upon his body, one might confuse him with a blacksmith.

Of course, depending on who one asked, Bakers could also be classed as forgers.

Tetsu started his day the same as any other, blasting his music and preparing the baked goods that they'd be selling for the day. Yet there was a hint of excitement in his movements that one might not usually see.

His movements were crisp, forged through countless years of kneading and baking. This time of morning was his happy time, where he got to create and perfect things that others enjoyed eating.

At 6:30am the doors opened, bringing with it the rush of what Tetsu would refer to as the old farts with nothing better to do. These people were known to gasbag about anything and everything, taking up his precious time.

After placing the last tray of baked goods out for display, Tetsu quickly left the area as he usually did, leaving his wife to deal with the horde of oldies.

Naomi didn't have a problem with this, considering her husband had a hard time biting his tongue. This setup had worked for them for years, with Naomi's warm and gentle smile up front, and Tetsu's Iron chin in the back.

"Naomi-chan, it's such an exciting day today right? I heard that our Yokohama team are playing in the semi-finals at Koshien."

An old lady who was a known gossiper spoke up while taking her picks from the displayed goods.

"Eh? Too bad they're facin' our Osaka team." An older man interjected, his Kansai accent made it clear he was from Osaka.

"What do you mean you old fart? Yokohama is gonna win today." The old lady didn't pull any punches, backing her local team with pride.

"Bah, yer just a bunch of lucky buggers who were given easy rounds to the semi-finals."

"Eh!? Whose yappin' out their ass?"

A deep voice came from out the back of the bakery, causing everyone to turn their head in shock. Naomi's expression turned blank as she hadn't expected the outburst. S

The old man who had been insulted stood his ground.

"Tetsu, don't tell me yer rootin' for the enemy now?"

Since they shared the same accent, the old man had obviously thought that Tetsu would be on his side in the matter. But it was clear that he did not know the background story.

"Tell me how they've had an easy path to the Semi's old man. If ya don't stop talkin' crap I'll send ya home with some toilet paper for yer stinkin' mouth." Tetsu walked in front of the old man with an intimidating gaze.

Yet despite getting verbally abused, the old man stood his ground.

"Shinjuku and Uruwa were both duds who hadn't been ta nationals in over 10 years. Ya can't tell me they weren't easy matches."

Tetsu nodded along, yet his gaze was fiery.

"So how do ya explain them thrashin' Sendai? That team was runner up 2 years ago and was best 4 last year."

The old man's face got a little red and was about to retort, however Tetsu didn't give him a chance.

"Our boy Ken has 54 strikeouts and 5 home runs in only 3 matches. Not ta mention the perfect game he threw, the first ever in Koshien history!"

"T-That's beside the point. Osaka have a better team overall, and Yatsuo has only given up 2 runs in 3 games!"

"Hah! 2 runs!? Ken hasn't even given up 1!"

Tetsu stood akimbo as he berated the old man, a victorious grin creeping up onto his face.

The others in the bakery did not expect such an intense argument so early in the morning, yet the old lady who was interrupted before had her fists clenched as she silently cheered Tetsu on.

"D-Damn it Tetsu. Why are ya goin' for that team anyway? Aren't ya from Osaka?"

The truth was, he really was born in Osaka, but his parents had been forced to relocate since he was a delinquent in school. Eventually they decided on Yokohama and he started High School at Zama High.

While he still ran with an unsavory crowd, they were a lot more organized and didn't get caught. Yet he wasn't about to explain all of his back story to some random old fart who just like to talk.

"None of ya damn business. Now buy yer baked stuff and get out, ya bastard."

After saying his peace, Tetsu walked back to his baking cave and went back to work. His eyes shifted to the clock in the corner and lamented seeing that it was not even 7am yet.

"Just 5 more hours..." He muttered.

Naomi was speechless as she was left with the oldies on the shop floor. However, a small grin formed on her face in the next moment.

'Looks like he's warming up to Ken in his own way.'

\*\*\*

In the Takagi household, Yuki was doing her best to stay busy in order to keep her mind off what was coming up that day. Despite this being her kids goal of meeting each other at Nationals, she knew that only one of them could win.

Whenever she thought about the conclusion of the match, her eyes would begin to tear up, filling her with emotion.

Yuki had been invited to watch the match with Naomi, but she wasn't sure if she would be able to hold in her emotions in other's presence.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ

Just as she was deep in thought, her phone vibrated.

"Hello?"

"Hi honey, how are you holding up?"

Hearing the sound of her husband's voice calmed her down significantly, eliciting a smile.

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



## Chapter 248 - 248: Lead-up (2)

"I'm better now that I've heard your voice." She admitted, taking a seat at the dining table.

"Mmm, to be honest I'm also nervous about today. I know the boys have been working hard towards this moment, but I can't help but be a little worried."

It wasn't often that Chris aired out his worries, but those barriers were always down when it came to his wife.

"Yeah... They'll be fine though, right?" Yuki stated, as if trying to convince herself.

Chris let out a small sigh, but he agreed.

"No matter what, this is the choice that they both decided on. They won't hold back against each other, we can only hope that no matter who wins, they'll both learn something."

Chris wasn't worried that his kids would fight, especially since they both adored each other as brothers. As long as they were happy and no one got injured, he would be fine.

A small silence drifted between them, yet it wasn't awkward. The two had been married for almost 20 years and knew each other almost as much as they knew themselves.

"Look after our boys okay?" Yuki said after a while, her tone full of trust.

"Haha, I'll do my best. You know how rowdy those two can be."

After a few minutes Yuki ended the call, already feeling slightly better than before. Knowing that her husband was at the arena gave her some peace of mind, lifting her spirits.

"Don't be so depressed damn it." She muttered, wiping the slowly forming tears from the corner of her eyes.

\*\*\*

"Hey, do you think Ken has been acting a bit weird lately?" Tatsuya leaned over and whispered to the Captain, his eyes locked onto the other side of the dining room.

Makoto who was nonchalantly stuffing his face with rice, lifted his gaze and took a look at their ace. He saw the serious expression upon his features and couldn't help but raise an eyebrow.

"Doesn't he always look like that." He stated with his mouth half full.

Tatsuya felt a special kind of annoyance overcome him that he only got from the captain.

"Dude, be serious for once. This is our biggest game yet, if our Ace isn't in top shape..."

Makoto placed his chopsticks down and turned his muscular frame towards Tatsuya. His expression was as serious as they came.

"I don't know about you, but I fully trust Ken. He's the pillar of the team and has never let us down. So stop worrying about stupid things and make sure you do your job and get on base today."

Tatsuya was a little taken aback. He hadn't expected such a speech from the captain, yet it made sense in a way.

Perhaps he himself was nervous, and had looked towards others as a way to escape facing his own feelings. His face flushed red briefly, thinking about how lame he must have sounded.

"Ahem. I'll get onto base today, just don't be lame and get me out on a double play like last game." Tatsuya said, throwing a verbal jab.

CRACK CRACK

"So you have chosen death..."

Makoto cracked his knuckles and stood up, showing his imposing physique and instantly intimidating the sharp tongued Tatsuya.

Feeling his impending doom coming, the fleet footed youth quickly ditched his food and ran for his life.

"Save me!"

A few of the staff members in the kitchen saw the commotion and couldn't help but laugh. Since the Yokohama team had been staying here, they had gotten used to the rowdiness of the teenage boys.

Some even looked forward to the entertainment provided by the youths.

"Ahhh there goes Tatsuya and the Captain again." Hiroki said with a wry smile.

"I wonder what he did this time?" Yusuke said with a chuckle.

Gauging the reactions of the teens, this wasn't an uncommon occurrence. However it would always end the same way. Search the \* website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"OOOOOF"

Thud

Hearing the familiar sound of Tatsuya's body crumbling to the floor after a gut punch, no one reacted, too busy attending to the food in front of them.

It was already 7am and their game started at 12 today. Since it was the Semi-finals, there was only 2 games played, one at 9am and the final game at 12pm.

Ken ignored the commotion around him and focused on his food, or at least that's what he wanted everyone to think. He had the system window open in front of him, taking one last look before the fated game.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 4 (10880/100,000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 16

TALENT ASSESSMENT: S

POTENTIAL: SS+

MAJOR POINTS: 10880

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS

-SYSTEM SHOP

-LOTTERY (Locked)

-IMAGE TRAINING

-IDENTIFY

-TRAINING PLAN

-MENTOR

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: S+

>Pitching: SS-

>Fielding: B-

>Game Intelligence: B-

>Mental: S

>Skills: 20

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. S+)

Balance and Coordination: S+

Agility: S+

Strength: S+

Stamina: S+

Surprisingly, his Agility and Strength had increased a grade thanks to his training, jumping up to the S+ grade. Everything else remained around the same, but that would probably change after the tournament with the rewards on offer.

He took the opportunity to bring up the mission window and check his progress.

MISSION: Summer National Tournament

\*Task 1: Strike out 50 players [54/50] [Completed]

\*Task 2: Hit 6 home runs [5/6] [In progress]

\*Task 3: Make the Quarter Finals of Koshien [Completed]

\*Task 4: Make the Semi Finals of Koshien [Completed]

\*Task 5: Make the Finals of Koshien [In progress]

\*Task 6: Win the National Tournament [In progress]

\*Task 7: Win player of the Tournament [In progress]

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: Throw a shutout - Platinum ticket [Claimed]

Ken nodded in satisfaction. He already had gained quite a few Major Points this time around, however his sights were eyeing the SS-Grade Elixirs.

The two SS-Grade Elixirs would be a great boon to his current grades, so he didn't want to miss out.

'I'll just have to hope this is enough to take down Daichi...' He thought, bringing up the next window.

[Curveball: 91.8% proficiency]

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

## **Chapter 249 - 249: On the Field (1)**

In a dark room, there were flickers of light from the projector which was currently showing a baseball match. In particular, the video was focused on a tall individual upon the mound with foreign features.

His face was handsome and his wild brown eyes gave him a fierce disposition.

As he stared down from the mound, one could feel the determination and fighting spirit of the individual. If that wasn't enough, the sound of the roaring fastball entered everyone's ears, adding to the sense of danger.

"As you know, we will be facing Yokohama later today. From my assessment, this guy will be the one we need to beat if we want a shot at winning the game."

Coach Narukami pointed his laser towards the figure on the board before turning his gaze to everyone in the room.

There were around 25 students, all wearing the training clothes for Osaka Toin. Since they were staying at their facility, they were in the best position to practice and keep focused while they competed in Nationals.

"Daichi, I know he's your brother, but do you know of any weaknesses that you can share with us?" Coach Narukami asked, turning his attention to a youth with wide shoulders and a baby face.

"Eh?"

"Daichi's brother? They don't even look alike."

"I thought they just had the same last name."

The room broke into whispers at the revelation that Daichi had a brother that just so happened to be one of the best high school pitchers in the country.

Apart from a few like Kouichi who already knew this, he hadn't gone around telling others.

Daichi shook his head, "No coach. To be honest, I've never caught Ken's right-armed pitches before."

"EH!?"

Another round of confusion took place.

At first they had only just found out Daichi had a brother, next was that he'd never caught his right-armed pitches before. What did such a thing even mean?

"Why did you have to specify right-armed pitches? Did he used to be a southpaw?"

Yatsuo who was nearby quickly spoke up, his interest piqued.

Daichi let out a small sigh before coming clean.

"My brother had an injured shoulder and couldn't pitch with his right arm for over a year. He still wanted to throw so he took up pitching with his left arm in the meantime."

"He switched to southpaw?"

"Who does that?"

A few of the players spoke out in shock at the seemingly impossible feat.

"But now his injury is healed." Coach Narukami interjected, pulling the conversation back in his direction.

"The fact he pitched with his left is irrelevant. Since Daichi has no insider knowledge for us, we can only use the information that is currently available to us."

The team seemed to have regained its composure, turning their attention back to the coach, waiting for him to continue.

Coach Narukami nodded in satisfaction.

"Currently, Ken's weakness is in his limited pitches. He only throws 2 kinds of balls; Fastballs and Forkballs."

"Out of the almost 500 balls he's thrown in the tournament so far, he's thrown 437 fastballs and only 63 forkballs. Not only that..."

The coach used the remote and fast-forwarded the video before stopping it.

"Take a look here."

He shined the laser pointer to the spot, a grin forming on his face. In the next moment he pressed play, beginning the video.

Daichi was the first person who let out a small gasp as he watched the tape with his full focus. A small smile appeared on his face, yet it was bittersweet.

'Sorry bro, but we'll be moving onto the finals.'

\*\*\*

The Yokohama team arrived at the arena an hour before the game. Since there was only 2 matches being played that day, the organizers had allowed a larger gap between games.

This meant that the teams would be able to arrive earlier into the locker rooms to get ready.

As they made their way into the stadium, they heard the crowd erupt into cheers, chanting a name over and over.

"KORYU!"

"KORYU!"

"KORYU!"

In the next moment, a voice echoed over the cheers, drowning them out.

"Congratulations to Koryu for winning the match and qualifying for the finals."

Ken looked around at his teammates who seemed to be nervous. No one was surprised that Koryu had won their match as they had been one of the favorites since the tournament began.

"They'll be announcing our name soon enough guys, don't you worry."

Makoto spoke up in the middle of everyone, his muscular figure as stalwart as always. His expression was so serious that Ken could almost see flames in his eyes.

"Heh, the Captain's right. Let's just focus on the game in front of us first." Yuta piped up.

For some reason he seemed to be in a really cheerful mood this morning, causing others to speculate. Even Yuko seemed different, her skin and cheeks glowing in the midday sun.

Speculations aside, the team roared out in agreement. They would not lack confidence going against any team, particularly with their potent offense and Iron defense.

"Alright guys, let's quickly get changed and get onto the field. It's time to change gears."

Coach Hanada spoke out. He was at the very front of the pack, looking like a mother duckling as he took charge of his flock and directed them where to go.

Ken could see that he was excited, anxious even.



Yet that just meant that he valued this opportunity as much or even more so than everyone here.

A few minutes later they arrived in the locker room and began to get changed. The smell of icy hot seeped into everyone's nostrils, the menthol working wonders for any blocked nasal passages.

Ken approached Yuta who was wearing a dumb smile, unlike his usual smiling Buddha expression.

"Oi, Yuta." Ken clicked his fingers in front of the guy's face, trying to get his attention.

Yuta almost jumped out of fright, however noticing that it was Ken he let out a sigh of relief, reverting back to his happy atmosphere.

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

## **Chapter 250 - 250: On the Field (2)**

"What is it?" He asked airily.

"Dude... did you reach nirvana last night or something?" Ken asked, slightly worried for his wellbeing.

"Huh? What do you even mean?"

Ken rubbed his temples, trying to control his irritation.

"Man are you going to be alright to catch my balls today?" He asked, full of concern.

Yuta nodded enthusiastically, "Yes yes, need to cup the balls."

Ken's mouth widened and he blinked a few times.

'Don't tell me this kid has hit a home run off the field?' Ken thought inwardly.

He suddenly remembered that Yuko had been blushing all morning, her skin even radiating a certain air about it.

SLAP!

A resounding slap was heard within the locker room, drawing everyone's attention to the origin. Ken felt his hand throbbing from the connection, yet he didn't care in that moment.

Perhaps it was because of jealousy, but he may have put a little more strength into his slap than he had first intended.

Yuta's face showed the intense shock that assaulted him from the unexpected slap to the face. His mind was jumbled for a moment, before anger touched his features.

Just as he was about to get up and retaliate, Ken placed his hands on either shoulder, weighing him down.

"Senpai look at me..."

Ken's voice was calm, yet deep and rather chilling. Yuta felt his body subconsciously tremble underneath the eerie feeling.

He could only do as Ken said, staring into his wild brown eyes.

"I don't care what happened last night, but you need to get your head in the game. This is our most important match of the year and we need you to be at your best."

Yuta didn't respond, yet his expression flickered when Ken mentioned the words "last night."

He sat silent for a few moments before nodding. He had been too caught up in remembering the bliss he had experienced the night before, not even realizing so until Ken's intervention.

After taking a deep breath through his nose and exhaling through his mouth, Yuta's expression hardened.

"Thank you Ken."

Ken breathed out a sigh of relief as he finally saw his catcher snap out of his mood. Yuta was a large part of why he was able to pitch as well as he did, if the guy was in fairy land, they would be in some trouble.

He took the opportunity to sit down next to Yuta and talk about another thing.

"Shiro, come here for a moment."

Ken beckoned his small friend over, who had already gotten changed.

"Eh? O-Okay."

Once they were all present, Ken told his plans for today.

Since the coach had insisted he use the curveball this match, he needed to make sure that the catchers knew all the signals and what to expect.

He brought over Shiro because he was the one who'd been catching his curveballs this whole time, whereas Yuta had not.

If the coach hadn't waited so late to tell him, he probably could have got a few practices with Yuta beforehand. Yet considering how intelligent the youth was, it likely wouldn't take him long to get used to it.

"I'll be adding the curveball to my pitches as of today." Ken stated simply.

While Shiro nodded, Yuta seemed to be taken aback.

"But didn't you say earlier that it wasn't completed yet?"

Ken had told his friends that he was working on the curveball, and that he didn't believe it was ready for games, especially on the national stage. However, that was around 3 or 4 days ago.

"It's more or less polished at the moment." He said simply, yet Yuta didn't seem too convinced.

"Isn't it too risky? We've done fine with just your fastball and forkball after all."

Ken shook his head, "The coach was the one who told me to unleash it in this game, so I'm doing so on his orders."

Both Shiro and Yuta seemed surprised. Usually the coach was the one erring on the side of caution, especially with things like this. Very rarely would he allow spontaneity, particularly in a game as crucial as the semi-finals.

"Really?"

The two replied at the same time.

"Hey if you don't believe me, ask him yourself." Ken shrugged, gesturing towards their coach who had been pacing back and forth for the last 10 minutes.

"Ah... No thanks."

Seeing how on edge the coach was, it probably wasn't the best time to second guess his tactics.

"How confident are you?" Yuta asked, seemingly already accepting the situation.

Ken paused for a moment, almost as if he was thinking.

"91.8% confident." He stated matter-of-factly.

"..."

"Hahaha! How can you say that with a serious face." Both Yuta and Shiro couldn't help but laugh at the absurd number Ken had thrown out.

"If you're confident, why not just say 100%? Haha."

Ken smiled, yet inwardly he felt wronged.

'The system says 91.8%, I was just relaying it...'

Afterwards, Yuta asked Shiro a bunch of questions regarding the curveball. Since they were both catchers, they had their own lingo, so Ken decided to finish getting ready before he was hauled out by the coach.

Around 5 minutes later, Seiji couldn't handle it anymore.

"Alright you lot, you've had enough time. We're heading onto the field." He announced, leaving the room right away.

Everyone could tell that he was eager, yet they didn't want to push his patience.

Finally, everyone walked onto the field and set their stuff down in the dugout before returning to the coach.

"Alright let's go through our warm up routines and we'll set up some quick drills before the game starts. No slacking!"

The coach seemed right at home as he ordered the team around. The Yokohama players felt like they were back at club practice, being driven like slaves in the sweltering sun.

Of course it was a lot different now, especially since there was thousands of people who were in attendance in this moment.

Around 20 minutes later on the opposite end of the field, their opponents arrived.

Ken's gaze traveled to the spot and locked gazes with someone almost by instinct.

Sparks seemed to fly across the field as the noise in the surroundings were drowned out, bringing with it a tense atmosphere.

Daichi felt a confident grin crawling onto his face as he stared at his Big brother. Their fighting spirits seemed to clash as they stared at one another, neither backing down in this electrifying moment.

Both of them were thinking the same thing.

'I wont lose'

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

## **Chapter 251 - 251: Play Ball! (1)**

The crowd seemed to grow restless as the designated hour approached. The jumbo screen located at the end of the stadium depicted the time, looming over everyone in the arena.

Both teams gathered on the field, lining up in front of each other for the ceremonial bow at the beginning of the game. Osaka Toin was wearing their white and black pinstripe uniforms, something they were known for.

Yokohama wore their pure white uniforms with a red cap, the letter Y a prominent feature on the jersey and hat.

Ken once again locked gazes with his brother who happened to be standing directly across from him. Despite the odd feeling of playing against him, there was a buzz of excitement from within him.

Daichi too looked at Ken with a glint in his eye. He had been looking forward to this moment ever since he'd left for Osaka. Although he would have rather played together with his brother, this was the next best thing.

"Yoroshiku Onegaishimasu!"

The two teams bowed to each other, eliciting an almighty cheer from the crowd. Despite the arena being packed each day, today felt much more lively.

Perhaps it was because the home team had made it so far, or maybe it was like this whenever the Semi-finals began. Yet the fact of the matter was, the cheers were almost deafening.

Makoto and Yatsuo approached the umpire to begin the coin toss. While one was muscular, the other had wide shoulders and a solid base. Yet despite this, it was obvious that he was strong.

"I think your lucky streak will be coming to an end today." Yatsuo said calmly.

His words were spoken with the utmost confidence, backed by his vast experience of playing under pressure situations.

"Hmm? Lucky you say?" Makoto raised his eyebrow before letting out a scoff.

"Heh. I won't let you guys get a single run today, prepare to be humbled." Yatsuo said, throwing the gauntlet.

Makoto felt his eye twitch unconsciously, feeling some anger arise within him. He clenched his fist briefly before relaxing, saying the only thing that came to his mind in that moment.

"We'll see who gets humbled."

While the Captains were having their exchange of words, Coach Hanada and Coach Narukami met with each other briefly.

The two completed a handshake and said some pleasantries, wishing each other luck.

Of course they each had their own inner thoughts which they kept hidden away.

In Coach Narukami's eyes, Seiji Hanada was just a rookie coach who had come into some luck with getting good players. Just seeing Ken on the Yokohama team instead of Osaka brought him a pang of jealousy.

Yet he kept it in his heart. After all, it was their own fault that Ken did not take up the scholarship offer to join Osaka.

Seiji on the other hand had deep respect for the coach in front of him. Having been the head coach for Osaka Toim for over 20 years, he had brought the team's prestige to great heights, building upon their success.

That being said, he would not pull any punches in this match. While Yokohama did not enjoy the same facilities, nor budget as Osaka, they had something that the other team did not.

His gaze turned to Ken's tall figure who was wearing a determined grin.

'We won't lose with Ken on the defense.' He said inwardly, believing it with every fiber of his being.

"Yokohama wins the toss. Please choose to either bat or field."

The umpire pointed to Makoto who had a challenging expression on his mug.

"We'll bat first."

"Ah..."

Seiji stared at the figure with disbelief.

'W-What the hell is he doing!? I told him to choose to field if we won the toss.'

Yet before he could intervene, the announcer was one step ahead of him.

"Yokohama has elected to bat first. Please stand by for the beginning of the game."

As Makoto made his way back to the dugout along with the other players, he suddenly felt a chill run down his spine. The coach was staring at his back, giving him an eerie feeling.

"Ma. Ko. To... Did you forget what I said?"

Coach Hanada was gritting his teeth, feeling his annoyance rise up from within.

"A-Ah coach I'm sorry. The other captain was saying he won't let us get a single run, I might have got caught up in the moment." Makoto said, looking a little apologetic.

He must have felt he would be backing down by choosing to field first.

Seiji Hanada let out a deep sigh. While he could remain pissed off, nothing would change the predicament. If anything, he knew about the folly's of youth quite well and couldn't exactly blame Makoto.

"Just don't let him get into your head. Stay composed, you're the Captain remember?"

Makoto nodded like a pecking chicken, "Yes Coach!"

Tatsuya was going to make a smart comment as usual, however that was before he saw the serious expression on the Captain's face. He could instantly tell that whatever he said would be ignored.

A few moment later, he made his way onto the field and could feel that something had changed. Despite this being their 4th game at Koshien this year, only now did Tatsuya feel an oppressive atmosphere.

'So this is the Semi-finals huh?' He thought, trying to calm down his beating heart.

His gaze moved to the large pitcher on the mound who was warming up his arm. The practice throws sounded sharp, making a clear pah sound when they entered the glove.

After his throws were complete, the announcer spoke.

"Batting 1st, Left outfield, Tatsuya."

"Kyaaa"

"He's so cool!"

"Look at me Tatsuya!"

Despite hearing the mostly female cheers of the crowd, he didn't lose focus. There was something about the air today that made him feel like he couldn't afford to be complacent.

While everyone was gazing at the pitcher and batter, Ken's eyes stared at one person only.

'Show me how much you've improved Daichi.'

"Play ball!"

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

## **Chapter 252 - 252: Play Ball! (2)**

The siren sounded just before the umpire called a start to the game, eliciting a roaring cheer from the crowd. If one wasn't hyper focused, it was possible they could get lost in the sheer noise from the onlookers.

Yatsuo sent a nod to Daichi before starting his wind up.

He brought both of his hands to the center of his chest and almost skipped forward with his left leg before planting it. Due to the minimal movements of the action, it made for a super fast release.



Before Tatsuya knew it, the ball was already on its way to him. It seemed to creep slowly towards the inside of the strike zone, almost baiting him to hit the ball.

'Don't mind if I do!'

He performed his swinging motion, keeping the barrel of the bat behind him until his hands drifted over the plate. As the pitch approached, his eyes widened in the next moment before sending the barrel accelerating towards the ball.

DONG

The sound of the ball hitting the middle of the bat resounded, filling the ears of all those present in the arena.

In the next moment, Tatsuya had already sped off towards 1st base.

The ball itself had been pulled towards 3rd base, drifting over the players head. Judging by the speed, it would perfectly land in the gap between the 3rd baseman and the outfield.

"Hup!"

The 3rd baseman leapt high into the air, using all of his strength to get as high as possible off the ground.

Tatsuya easily ran to 1st base, however he was looking around in confusion, trying to find where the ball went. He turned his attention to the outfield, only to see one of the fielders grinning at him.

"Out!"

"Huh?"

It was only when the 3rd baseman sent him a shrewd grin that he finally put the pieces together.

'That bastard caught that?' He thought inwardly as he made his way back to the dugout.

He had known that Osaka had a lot of great players, but he hadn't expected to get caught out in such a way.

Tatsuya was known for his preemptive style. His statistics for getting onto base in the first innings off the first ball were out of this world.

He would strike before anyone was ready, which was why he was dedicated as the first batter in the lineup.

Jun, his brother was a little more cautious, yet he had the same athletic ability and intuition as him. This was why they were one of the best opening batters of the tournament so far.

"Don't mind Tatsu, it was a lucky catch." Jun said meekly on his way to the batters box.

Tatsuya seemed a little different than his usual outspoken self. He merely grunted in reply, yet inwardly he was thinking that the play might not have been as lucky as they thought.

"Batting 2nd, Center outfield, Jun."

"It's the shy twin!"

"Ah he's so cute."

Jun received a similar welcome as he took strides towards the batters box. He too did his best to ignore the words of the crowd. Since his brother had failed to get on base, it was his job to do so.

Daichi looked at Jun's figure on the mound and sent his signals to Yatsuo. He knew that this twin was more cautious, so the same kind of bait ball would not work on him, at least on the first pitch.

Yatsuo nodded and performed his quick pitching action.

The ball left the fingertips of the large pitcher and was heading straight for the inside once more. Yet instead of going for it, Jun patiently watched the ball.

To his surprise, the ball drifted away from him the closer it got.

PAH

"Strike."

'Slider?'

Jun was taken aback. Usually breaking balls were used in conjunction with fastballs in order to take a batter by surprise. Yet this battery was using them from the beginning of the count.

He turned his attention to the catcher with a puzzled look, only to be ignored completely. The baby-faced assassin was silent as he threw the ball back to the pitcher, gearing up for the next pitch.

'I need to be careful' Jun thought, feeling wariness creep into his psyche.

The next ball came shortly after, another slider, yet this time it was more center over the plate.

"Strike."

Jun felt his anxiety peak. He was currently down in the count and was thrown off by the opponents strategy. Having been expecting fastballs, he had tried to wait for the perfect ball to dispatch with his bat, yet he wasn't given a chance.

'I'll just have to hit this next one.' He thought, gripping the bat tightly.

'Hehe, got him.' Daichi grinned before sending his signals.

Like a machine, Yatsuo pitched the ball, his large body moving like art in motion.

WHOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout!"

Jun felt his bat hit nothing but air as he held onto his follow through. The ball had been faster than he'd expected and did not break, which only meant one thing.

'F-Fastball!?'

He could say nothing as he made his way back to the dugout, having been completely defeated by the opposing battery.

Makoto stepped onto the field and instantly locked gazes with the large pitcher upon the mound.

Sparks seemed to fly between the two as the announcer introduced him.

"Batting 3rd, 3rd base, Makoto."

Makoto was laser focused as he approached the batters box. After positioning himself properly, he turned his attention to Yatsuo on the mound before gripping his bat tightly.

All those in the arena could see the silent challenge in the air between the two.

On one side was a cannon, capable of blowing through the tightest defenses.

On the other was a grand wall, intent on stopping even the greatest of sieges.

Daichi got into a crouched position and couldn't help but smirk.

'Looks like Yatsuo did his job of getting inside their Captain's head.' He thought inwardly, giving out the signals for the next pitch.

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

## Chapter 253 - 253: First Innings (1)

The first pitch came roaring towards the plate with a full head of steam. Makoto narrowed his eyes and instinctively knew where it was going to go.

It was outside the strike zone but not out of reach of his bat. While he was eager to blast it out of the park, he did his best to remain calm and refrained from swinging.

As long as he didn't swing, it should be a ball. After all, there was more benefits for him if the battery was behind in the count.

PAH

"Strike"

"Huh?" Makoto turned to look at the umpire with confusion.

He knew that he had a long reach, but there was no way that the last ball had been a strike. The umpire merely looked at him with a "I said what I said" expression plastered on his face.

The Captain resisted the urge to draw a line in the dirt, indicating where the ball had past home plate. Instead, he rolled his shoulders back and tried to relax.

Both Ken and the coach watched on with a serious expression. Ken knew how infuriating Dachi could be, at least to the opponents that they'd faced in his previous life. So to see the same thing happening to his team had him feeling a little odd.

Seiji on the other hand, had enough game sense to understand that it was the catcher giving them all of the problems.

The last pitch was most definitely a ball, yet the way the catcher framed it had deceived the umpire.

Daichi was like a maestro behind the plate, directing the game to his own tune little by little. Of course, without a juggernaut like Yatsuo on the mound his effect would be limited.

Just thinking about what kind of batter Ken and Daichi would make gave him some goosebumps.

'Maybe in the future we'll see those two on the international stage.' Coach Hanada commented inwardly, feeling his expectations soar.

He turned to Ken who still had no idea about his conversation with Coach Takashi merely a few days beforehand. No doubt that enigmatic man would be watching this game today, searching for all kinds of talent.

WHOOSH

PAH

"Strike"

Makoto felt his face heat up in irritation as the next ball sailed away from his bat. Originally he had thought they'd be trying the same trick again to get an easy strike, yet it wasn't a fastball at all.

'That damn slider...'

He grit his teeth, feeling a bout of frustration. It felt like his mind was being read all the time which was a weird sensation. He wasn't sure what was going on, but before he knew it the count was already 0-2.

He gripped the bat tightly once more and turned towards the opposing captain.

'Empty your mind. Let your muscles take over.'

Makoto took a deep breath in through his nose and out through his mouth.

His whole demeanor seemed to have changed, giving off the aura of a solid and steady mountain.

Daichi's expression flickered for a moment, yet he still got into position and called for the next pitch.

'Ahh, it's so easy to pitch when Daichi is leading.' Yatsuo thought, a sly grin creeping onto his lips.

Ever since he'd made the starting lineup, Yatsuo's job had been smooth sailing. All he needed to do was pitch as he was told, and everything would work out.

It was almost like having a cheat character in a game.

Yatsuo adjusted his grip for a two-seam fastball and quickly shot into action, throwing his whole body forward. Yet as the ball was about to leave his hand, he felt a shockwave crawl up from his wrist.

He grit his teeth and bared through the pain, still managing to send the ball to the right area.

WHOOOSH

DONG

Makoto managed to get a hold of the ball which was breaking towards him, however it was sent directly into the air and into the foul zone. He could only watch on as the ball was easily tracked down by the 3rd baseman and caught.

"3 outs! Changeover."

Yatsuo casually looked down at his wrist and began to flex his fingers a few times briefly. Not saying a word he retreated back to the dugout.

"Ah my bad, that last pitch slipped a little." He said to Daichi, a small smile on his face.

"No problem." Daichi replied, however inwardly he was a little skeptical.

Since he was the one who had been catching Yatsuo's pitches essentially all year, he could tell when something was wrong. Yet there was no point in mentioning it, especially when they'd only just started the game.

Makoto returned to his own dugout with a frown. He felt that the last ball was not going to end up where it was, yet he had already committed to hitting it.

If he was thinking straight, he probably could have dodged it or even gotten a walk from getting hit by the pitch.

"Don't mind Captain, let's focus on defense." Ken said, patting the muscular teen on the shoulder. He didn't expect to get any easy hits, particularly in the first innings when they had yet to get used to the pitcher.

It wasn't only Ken who consoled Makoto, both Yusuke and Hiroki gave him a pat on the back on their way onto the field. Now was not the time for jokes or to bring their teammates down, it would be a long game and they needed everyone to be in top shape.

Ken approached the mound and adjusted his cap. He began to roll his shoulders backwards and then forwards as he waited for Yuta to get ready.

He could feel that the atmosphere in the arena was different. It was as if an invisible pressure was descending onto him, a result of the thousands of expectant eyes watching his every action.

Yet Ken did not fold under the pressure. The constant rhythm of his heartbeat sounded within his chest, beating like a war drum on the eve of battle.

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

## **Chapter 254 - 254: First Innings (2)**

Ignoring the eyes focused on him, Ken began his warm up throws. His arm felt light yet full of power, a good sign that he was in great form.

After around 12 throws, he gave the signal to the umpire who turned to the first batter and gestured for him to get into position.

"Batting 1st, Left Outfield, Isamu"

A dark haired teen with long legs stepped up to the plate, the pinstripe uniform making them look even longer than they perhaps were.

He wore a confident smile, almost as if he could already see victory upon the horizon.

Yet to Ken, it looked like a challenge.

'I'll wipe that smirk off your face real soon buddy.'

After getting the lead from Yuta, Ken's shoulders relaxed. Yet in the next moment his body leapt into action like a well oiled machine, sending the ball whipping out from the side.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

'Strike!'

The umpire put a large emphasis on the word, stoking the crowd into a frenzy.

"There it is! The 100mph ball!"

"Ah damn I missed it."

"Man I'm so hyped."

After seeing the numbers flash up on the jumbo screen, the arena was filled with shouts of awe and appreciation. Without knowing it, Ken had gained a lot of popularity this Nationals.

Isamu in the batters box suddenly felt a cold sweat drip down his back. His earlier confident smile was nowhere to be seen as he seemed to be evaluating his life choices.

'Even when I know it's coming... Will I be able to hit that?'

Uncertainty was apparent on his face, complete opposite to how he came into the match.

Ken placed his glove out and received the ball back from Yuta and couldn't help but smirk. He wasn't sure where the guy had got his confidence from, but it sure felt great to wipe the grin off his face.

'Another.'

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

PAH

"Strike."

The next two balls were in the high 150km/h range and were missed by miles. It wasn't just the fact that they were fast, there was also movement within the pitch, making the course harder to predict every time.

"Batting 2nd, 1st Base, Takashi"

Takashi came up to the plate feeling a little anxious. He'd seen Isamu fail miserably trying to chase down the fastball, something he didn't wish to replicate.

While he could try and go for the forkballs, there was no guarantee that Ken would throw them. The numbers seemed to back it up since he only threw it around 10% of the time.



However, he could only do his best to get onto base.

Ken wound up and stepped forward, planting his foot hard before whipping the ball out once more.

Takashi grit his teeth and held out his bat for a bunt. As long as he could get onto base, then he had faith that Daichi would clean up the bases.

The ball was going so fast that it took all of his focus to position the bat properly. As for directing where it would go, he did not have that luxury.

DING

His face fell as the ball hit the top of the barrel and lofted into the air towards the mound.

Ken who had already got into position to field the bunt, stopped in his tracks and held up his glove for an easy catch.

"Out!"

The crowd cheered at the out, yet there were some who were puzzled at the situation.

"Why did that guy bunt?"

"Maybe he didn't think that he could hit those fastballs?"

"Well he didn't hit that one properly either..."

Unaware of the commentary going on within the stands, Takashi's shoulders slumped as he made his way back to his dugout.

"It was a nice try Takashi, but that fastball is too quick to bunt." Coach Narukami placed his hand upon the youth's shoulder and consoled him briefly.

While there was discussion of trying to bunt during the team meeting, only now was it clear to them that it was a bad idea. It was extremely rare to face a 100mph pitch during High School, so they couldn't necessarily practice for it.

Takashi nodded and made his way back to the bench.

"Yatsuo, I don't think he'll throw any forkballs in this innings, so try to at least make contact with the ball.

"Yes coach." Yatsuo responded affirmatively and headed out onto the field.

"Batting 3rd, Pitcher, Yatsuo"

Ken's eyes focused on the large build of the teen coming into the batters box now. Based on his body structure, Ken wasn't surprised that Yatsuo was the 3-hole.

He had a similar build to those power lifters, with a strong base and wide shoulders.

Despite this, he was not intimidated in the slightest. As long as he continued to pitch his best, Ken didn't think that he would give up a run easily.

Yuta called for a two-seam fastball on the inside, wanting to try and jam the large frame of the batter. His eyes were laser focused, showing just how confident he was in not only his leads, but also Ken's pitching.

A small grin formed on Ken's face as he adjusted his grip of the ball. Generally the two-seam fastball was a little slower than his usual four seam, but it made up for it in the movement of the ball.

Once again Ken went through his pitching motion and whipped the ball out. The pitch was so fast that it only began to move when it was already past halfway to home plate.

Yatsuo's large frame began its swinging action, his eye's focused on the ball.

WHOOOSH

DING

'Damn it!'

Yatsuo cursed inwardly as the ball flung out straight to the short top. Naoki quickly pounced upon the ball before throwing it to first, landing squarely in Hiroki's outstretched glove.

"3 outs! Changeover."

"Nice fielding Naoki~"

"Solid pitching Ken."

The team were in good spirits as they walked back to the dugout, having easily dispatched the lead off batters from Osaka.

After only 5 pitches, Ken felt like he had only just warmed up. However, he knew that the real game would be starting soon.

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

## Chapter 255 - 255: Drawing First Blood (1)

Daichi who had been next in line to bat could only smile as he returned the bat and went to change his gear. He'd seen Ken's pitches from the stands before, but seeing them close was a whole other experience.

His hands were itching to swing at his brother's pitch, but he'd have to wait until the next innings.

Hiroki was the one starting off the 2nd innings for Yokohama. Out of all their players, he was the one who had improved the most in the past 2 months.

Ever since he'd broken through his potential, his rapid growth inside of the batters box was second to none. This was evident in how he'd already garnered the attention of Coach Takashi.

"Batting 4th, 1st base, Hiroki"

Though he looked unassuming, Hiroki was the definition of sleeper build. Underneath his uniform was the figure of a granite statue, something that Michaelangelo might choose to sculpt.

Daichi glanced at Hiroki briefly, yet he didn't look worried. Of course he held some respect for his opposing clean-up batter, yet his confidence was a result of his hard work and training.

He placed his glove into position and called for a pitch.

Yatsuo nodded, his face wearing a serious expression.

WHOOSH

In the next moment, the ball came flying towards the open glove. Though it looked as if it would be straight down the middle, it quickly began to break away from Hiroki.

It wasn't a slider, and it had too much movement to be a regular fastball.

'I can hit this!' Hiroki called out inwardly, his bat already moving before his thoughts could catch up.

He chased the ball all the way to the outside, feeling the contact that he was looking for.

DONG

'Damn it.'

He knew as soon as the bat made contact that he'd made a mistake. Since it was so far away from him, the hit lacked his usual power, merely sending the ball into the infield between 1st and 2nd base.

Hiroki quickly dropped his bat and ran with all of his might towards 1st base.

"Yours Akihiko!"

Takuya at the short stop position yelled out before running over to 2nd base to cover for the defender.

The infield adjusted perfectly as Akihiko chased down the ball and easily sent the ball into his teammates outstretched glove before Hiroki could arrive.

"Out."

A cheer erupted from the easy play, the home crowd giving their team the props they deserved. While the average fan might not notice, everyone on the field certainly did.

The quick adjustments and movements of the infielders showed that they knew exactly what to do in a scenario. Oftentimes there could be mix ups, especially within the school baseball scene where mistakes in the infield could occur.

All it took was for one person to not know where to rotate, and their whole defense would crumble.

It was clear that the Osaka fielders, led by the vocal shortstop knew exactly what they were doing.

While the play itself might have been an easy one, Ken had no doubt that they would be a tough nut to crack with any ball that remained in the infield.

"That wasn't a slider was it?" Ken asked the Coach as he adjusted his helmet.

Seiji shook his head, "That was a cutter. It's essentially in between a slider and a fastball."

Ken nodded, although he felt at a little bit of a loss. All these high school pitchers had plenty of pitches to work with, yet even between his two lives he only had the fastball as well as the forkball he got as a reward from the silver lottery.

It was at this time that he truly knew how naive he was to expect to win with only those types of pitches.

Yet now was not the time for self reflection, it was now the time for first part of the clash he'd been waiting for all this time.

As he stepped onto the field, the roar of the crowd seemed to fade away into the background.

"Batting 5th, Pitcher, Ken"

He made his way over to the batters box and tapped the plate with his bat and the toes of his cleats before getting into position.

Despite not saying a word to his brother behind him, he conveyed his feelings through the thick aura of fighting spirit resonating from his tall figure.

Daichi too felt his determination ignite, wanting nothing more than to show his brother how much he'd improved.

What better way to do so than beating him fairly? Especially on the biggest stage available to them... Koshien.

Yatsuo nodded before dashing forward with his left leg and whipping the ball out from his arm. Ken soon found out that seeing it from afar and being in front of it were two different things.

With the quick pitching action, one had a smaller window to process the information. This was especially true when the pitches were creeping upwards of 150-155km/h.

Yet Ken was able to see the ball in front of him as it began to break away. He recognized it as the pitch which had baited Hiroki into hitting a grounder.

He stepped in, timing the swing, yet he didn't follow through, allowing the ball to go into Daichi's glove.

PAH

"Ball."

Ken nodded in satisfaction. He could understand why Hiroki had gone for the ball, since the pitch broke so late, it was tough to pick.

If he hadn't seen the same situation earlier, he would have been caught out the same way.

Daichi collected the ball and sent it back to Yatsuo on the mound before crouching down once more.

'As expected of Ken. He won't fall for a ball he's already seen.' He thought inwardly, yet he wasn't discouraged.

The Maestro still had plenty of tricks up his sleeve.

He called for the next ball, to which Yatsuo nodded.

Once more the ball came flying quickly, this time with a little more speed. Ken identified it as a fastball and his body got into position, ready to swing for the fences.

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

## **Chapter 256 - 256: Drawing First Blood (2)**

However, the ball began to break inside this time, revealing itself as a two-seam fastball. While it wasn't as exaggerated as the cutter, it still had more movement than he was expecting.

WHOOSH

PAH

"Strike"

Seeing his brother miss the swing, a small sense of satisfaction crept into Daichi's body. Though he held Ken in high regard, there was something about outsmarting an opponent that gave him a rush.

Ken let out a grin, feeling his heart beat faster.

Both brothers seemed to resonate with each other in that moment, their minds coming to the same conclusion.

'This is fun...'

The sense of unpredictability caused by a master catcher and the underlying threat of getting hit out of the park by a slugger. This was a clash of wit and skill between the two talented brothers.

Seiji's nerves were tight the entire time as he watched the deadly dance in the batters box. Ken's earlier swing threatened to send the ball over the fence, yet the precise

pitching and leads from the opposing team were unpredictable, almost leaving him breathless.

Seeing such a masterful display of a high stakes cat and mouse game was just too entertaining. One wrong move and the game would be over for the defending side.

Yatsuo narrowed his eyes momentarily before picking up the rosin bag beside him and coating his hand with the powder. He wasn't particularly sold on the next call, yet he nodded anyway.

He stepped forward with the same action as before and sent the ball whipping towards home plate once again. This time, the pitch was slower than the last two.

'Chance!'

Ken felt his body contract as his eyes chased down the incoming ball. He noticed that the spin was also different, yet he instantly recognized it.

"Hup"

DOONG!

Ken got his bat under the pitch and managed to hit it in the center of the barrel. At the moment of impact he felt his muscles contract further and send the ball flying, a result of his Slugger skill.

Judging by the angle of the hit and the strength he'd put into it, he had no doubt that it would sail over for a home run. However, its trajectory was not so certain in that moment.

A cheer erupted as everyone turned their attention to the course of the ball.

It flew towards the foul zone in the left outfield, as if it was aiming for the large yellow pole in particular. If it hit the pole it would be a home run, but if it went left it would be a foul.

Everybody on the field held their breath as they watched the ball sail towards its destination.

DONG

\*DING\*

The sound of metal ringing broke the silence, prompting the crowd to erupt in cheers at the masterful hit.

Without looking back, Ken dropped his bat and began his jog around the bases, reveling in the feeling of hitting a huge home run.

"ORYAAAHH!"

"Nice hit Ace!"

The Yokohama bench came alive as they began to hoot and holler triumphantly after drawing first blood against the super team of Osaka.

Yatsuo frowned as he watched the ball hit the foul post. He had originally not wanted to throw the curveball, but he decided to trust Daichi, especially considering he had the most experience against his own brother.

Yet this was not what he expected.

Daichi too seemed to be a little lost in that moment. He had looked at the data and seen that Ken struggled to hit big on low pitches.

What he'd failed to realize was that Ken had been researching curveballs like crazy over the past few days since he wanted to perfect his own. Of course there was no way that Daichi could know this.

Ken finished his lap of the bases and finally touched back onto home base, his gaze meeting his brothers.

"I'll pay you back for that one." Daichi said, although his face was turned up into a grin.

"You can try." Ken said with a laugh before heading back to his own dugout.

He gave Yusuke a high five on the way past, telling him to do his best.

Yusuke nodded. One thing about being in the batting lineup after Ken was that he often had to follow up a masterful home run. While it boosted morale, it also added pressure onto him to perform.

As Ken walked down the stairs into the dugout, he received the rain of slaps onto his helmet from his teammates. The mood was high as everyone celebrated his breakthrough.

Coach Hanada couldn't help but wear a brilliant smile. He had thought they would struggle to get a run on the board at least in the earlier innings, yet Ken's home run had overturned this.

While the game was still open to anyone, it showed that Osaka's battery was not infallible.



"Batting 6th, 2nd base, Yusuke."

Daichi quickly rubbed off the grin he had on earlier and focused. He mentally made a note not to throw a curveball against Ken again this match, since it seemed to be a ball he was familiar with for whatever reason.

He placed his glove out and called for a four-seam fastball on the inside.

However, Yatsuo shook his head, causing a frown to appear on Daichi's face. Yet he shook it off and called for another four-seam, this time on the outside.

Yatsuo shook his head once more before grabbing the front of his cap and wiggling it.

Daichi felt a burst of annoyance from this, yet he still made the signs for the ball that Yatsuo had requested and placed his glove out. Yet his expression was dark.

Yatsuo wound up and sent the ball towards the open glove.

DONG!

Yusuke was surprised when the ball appeared directly where he had wanted it, up high and slightly outside. Without complaining, he swung his bat and made good contact with the ball, sending it into the outfield.

"Nice hit Yusuke!"

"Run Run!"

Yusuke managed to make it to 2nd base from the hit before the ball returned to the infield.

Daichi called for a time out and headed towards the mound with his fist clenched, his expression dark.

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

## **Chapter 257 - 257: Removing the Shackles (1)**

As Yusuke surprisingly got onto 2nd base, the crowd and Yokohama dugout cheered. He hadn't been expecting to make contact so easily against the pitcher that even Hiroki struggled against.

However, he wasn't complaining. They were in a good spot with him on base and only 1 out so far in the 2nd innings. As long as Naoki could continue the attack, they might even be able to extend the lead.

Meanwhile, he saw the opposing catcher walking up to the mound in a bad mood.

'Ah... Are they gonna be okay?' Yusuke thought nervously.

"What the hell was that?"

Daichi stepped up to Yatsuo on the mound, ignoring the large frame of the teen and getting up close and personal. Despite his head only reaching just above the chin, he pressed forward, not backing down.

"I should be asking you the same question." Yatsuo replied, his face turned up in annoyance.

"What made you want to throw a slider to that guy?" Daichi said, pointing to Yusuke on 2nd base who was innocently minding his own business.

"Because it's one of my best pitches."

"And why didn't you throw it to where my glove was?"

"Why does it matter? It was just a lucky hit anyway..." Yatsuo retorted, his face showing signs of annoyance.

It was clear that he was pissed off after giving up a home run to Ken in the previous at-bat. This was especially the case after he had told Makoto he wouldn't let them get a single run.

At the end of the day, his ego was bruised.

"67%" Daichi said calmly.

Yatsuo turned his face up in confusion, not understanding what he was talking about.

"That's the percentage of base hits Yusuke over there has when pitching to the exact position you threw."

He continued, lowering his voice slightly. "The place where I originally called for only had a 12% on base percentage..."

Yatsuo was stunned. He had never pried into how Daichi chose his leads, only knowing that he would do some research before any games. Only now did he understand the depth that the guy in front of him would go to.

However, that didn't mean all was forgiven.

"So what about your brother's home run? Why would you call for a curveball?" He retorted.

Daichi shook his head, "Before that hit, Ken had less than 5% hit rate of balls below the strike zone. The fact that he picked the slower ball, and even the break was an anomaly in itself."

Just before Yatsuo was going to respond, Daichi placed a ball into Yatsuo's glove and stared into his eyes.

"Anything can happen in Baseball. But if you don't trust my leads, tell me now and I'll go and substitute myself out." Daichi gazed at Yatsuo his eyes firm as as he waited for his decision.

"W-What?"

Yatsuo stared at the freshman in shock for a moment.

'He is serious...'

"You two, please hurry up." The umpire's impatient voice came from behind Daichi, yet he didn't budge. He was still waiting for an answer.

Yatsuo felt the determination burning from his catcher and couldn't help but feel a little remorseful for his actions. Ignoring his leads was like telling the guy that he didn't trust him at all.

If he were to continue being stubborn and force Daichi off the field, they would be losing a huge asset both as a catcher and a hitter. He could already hear the tongue lashing he would receive from Coach Narukami if he didn't yield right now.

"Haaaah"

"Alright, my bad. I'll continue to follow your leads." Yatsuo said eventually, letting out a small sigh. It seemed that his head had cooled enough to make a rational decision in the end.

"Good." Daichi smiled softly before returning back to his spot behind home plate. He sent the umpire an apologetic look before getting into position.

"Batting 7th, Short stop, Naoki"

Naoki finally arrived at the batters box, his fringe covering his eyes as usual. Despite this, one could sense the determination in his visible facial features.

Daichi's mind raced as he thought about the research he'd done for this player. While he was a good fielder, he struggled to hit consistently, at least in the matches they'd played during nationals.

'Let's send a probing fastball on the inside.' Daichi thought, sending the signal to his pitcher.

Thankfully, Yatsuo seemed to have calmed down and gave him a nod.

In the next moment a powerful pitch came rushing towards his outstretched glove.

WHOOOSH

PAH

Naoki mistimed the swing, his bat sailing past after the ball was already in Daichi's possession. Out of habit, he looked up at the jumbo screen and saw the speed.

'154km/h'

A wry smile appeared on his face in the next moment and he turned to the coach for instruction. Coach Hanada merely smiled, before making a few signals to him.

Naoki's eyes widened, yet he nodded in return. He subconsciously looked at Yusuke who had a small lead from 2nd base, their gazes meeting briefly.

All of this was caught by Daichi who seemed to have a wild field of view, despite being in between the batter and umpire.

He called for the next pitch on the outside, just out of the strike zone.

Yatsuo was a little puzzled, but he now knew better than to second guess the young phenom.

The moment Yatsuo stepped forward, Yusuke dropped his head down and used his powerful legs to run towards 3rd base. Since he had fast legs even before his operation, they had only grown faster since he'd healed.

Naoki still sent a swing at the ball, only to miss tremendously.

"3rd Base!" Takuya yelled out, alerting everyone to the base being stolen.

Daichi's position after receiving the pitch gave him the perfect angle to use his right arm and send it flying towards 3rd base.

"Satoshi!"

The one named Satoshi on 3rd base was ready for the ball, holding his glove out in preparation.

The Yokohama's 3rd base coach looked panicked as he made the motion to slide towards the runner. Everything had happened too fast, even though he knew about the play beforehand.

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

## Chapter 258 - 258: Removing the Shackles (2)

Seeing the panicked look, Yusuke could only do as he was told, sliding towards the 3rd base plate as fast as he could.

Daichi's throw was immaculate, reaching its downward trajectory by the time it reached Satoshi's glove. All the 3rd baseman had to do was swipe at Yusuke in one fluid motion.

Tap

Satoshi showed the ball in his glove to the umpire, appealing that he had tagged the player before he got a hand to the bag.

There were a few seconds of silence as everyone looked at the umpire.

"...Out!"

A cheer erupted from the crowd and the Osaka players. Whatever momentum they had lost from the previous at-bats was instantly taken back with interest.

"Nice throw Daichi!" Satoshi called out from his base, giving a small applause in appreciation.

If the ball had been thrown even a little higher, it was possible that he wouldn't have made it in time thanks to the added movements that would have been needed to tag the runner.

Coach Hanada saw the entire play and couldn't help but smile wryly. He had backed Yusuke's legs, not expecting such a magnificent throw from the catcher.

There was no way that he could have pulled it off if the base steal was a surprise, which meant that he had to have known or at least suspected beforehand that Yokohama would try to run.

Either way, he could only accept defeat in this situation.

"Nice run Yusuke, don't mind."

The coach patted Yusuke's shoulder on his way back to the dugout. It was great base running, but even better fielding.

All of a sudden, Yokohama were now 2 outs and none on base. They were in a significantly worse position than just a single play ago.

With that last swing, Naoki was also at two strikes which meant that one more strike would end the innings.

Yatsuo wiped the sweat upon his brow before collecting the rosin bag off the ground. He had to admit that he never would have been able to make such an accurate throw from home plate to 3rd in such a situation.

His earlier tantrum seemed rather silly when seeing how talented Daichi was.

'Alright, one more out.' He thought.

Daichi returned to his position and crouched down, asking for a two-seam inside and low for the next pitch. Even if the guy didn't swing, they were still up in the count.

Yatsuo nodded and begun his wind up.

DING

Naoki managed to get his bat on ball, however it was only a grounder towards 3rd base.

Satoshi easily scooped the ball off the ground and launched it towards 1st base, beating Naoki with ease.

"3 outs! Changeover"

And just like that, the 2nd innings was over for Yokohama.

Ken put his cap on and was about to head up onto the field before he felt a tug on his arm.

He turned back to see Ai who was holding onto his uniform.

"Do your best Ken. Show your brother how hard you've been working."

Her voice was soft, yet it felt warm.

Ken couldn't help but smile at those words, she had been there for him throughout all of the tough training. She knew how hard he worked and how much this match meant to him.

Hearing those words from her only further stoked his fighting spirit.

"Yeah, it's time to go show just how much I've improved."

With that, he grabbed his glove and made his way onto the field. His heart was beating loudly in his chest, yet it wasn't out of anxiety, it was due to anticipation.

Ever since he declined the scholarship and decided on Yokohama, this match had been in his mind. Every tough training session when he felt he was about to give up, his consciousness would manifest this scenario, giving him the strength to continue.

As he approached the mound, each footstep felt lighter than the last. It was as if his shackles were being removed with every step, filling him with strength.

All those nights he spent alone in his apartment, clutching his shoulder in pain, his tears falling to the floor as he lamented his cruel fate.

Closer and closer he moved towards his destination, shedding his old wounds and displacing all of the ties he had to his previous life. All the guilt, worry, anxiety seemed to culminate, only to be discarded with each step as he approached the mound.

The moment he took his position, he felt a wave of peace overcome him.

His mind was empty, his conscience clear. He didn't care if this was all a dream, or reality in this moment. Ken closed his eyes, basking in the peaceful moment, the calm before the storm.

'This...'

'This is the real me.'

"Batting 4th, Catcher, Daichi."

A loud cheer erupted from the crowd, showing just how much of a fan favorite Daichi was to the Koshien spectators.

Like Ken, he had many home runs under his belt during this tournament, in addition to an almost immaculate catching record.

Ken took a deep breath in through his nose and exhaled through his mouth. Upon doing so his eyes snapped open, shining brightly a moment after being uncovered.

He stared down at the person who had become his brother in this lifetime, his one true friend. The baby face looked different than it was in the past, seeming more cheerful and full of life.

The two versions of Daichi overlapped, one with a sullen tone wearing a fake smile, and the other bright and innocent, radiating fighting spirit.

[Showdown activated: Target Daichi Takagi]

[Limit Break has been activated]

Mika's monotonous voice spoke up in side of Ken's mind, drawing him to the present.

The moment he heard her voice, the apathetic Daichi disappeared, revealing the bright and cheerful one who was awaiting his pitch with an excited expression.

Ken suddenly his heart soar as his body filled with strength. A wide grin subconsciously appeared on his lips as he stood in opposition to his brother.

"Let's do this."

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

## **Chapter 259 - 259: Imposing (1)**

Ken felt a tremendous strength within his body in this moment as all of his grades were increased by 2 thanks to the Limit Break ability. Although he had not willed it to activate, it couldn't have come at a better time.

His physical grades which were all S+ were now catapulted into the SS grade, increasing his body's fitness drastically.

His pitching grade which was already increased by 2 thanks to the Showdown skill, was now further elevated to the SSS grade. At this moment in time, Ken was the best version of himself both physically and mentally.

What better time was there to showcase himself than right now in front of a cheering crowd and the whole nation who were tuning in over the TV. Not to mention his father who was also in attendance that day.

A wide grin had affixed itself to his features, giving him a wild and carefree appearance as he stared down at his opponent.



Ken kicked his knee up and entered his pitching action, something he'd done tens of thousands of times in his life. However, this time everything seemed to flow naturally with minimal wasted movements.

Each move was filled to the brim with a powerful intent, showcasing the level of concentration and determination that was hidden within Ken.

Ken let out a grunt as his first ball whipped out from his fingertips, heading right for the outstretched glove of the catcher. The ball seemed to move slightly in the air before breaking inside.

WHOOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike!"

Daichi held his follow through as the familiar sensation of his bat hitting the ball failed to appear. His eyes widened in shock as he finally experienced the dreaded fastball of his fully recovered brother.

Subconsciously, his gaze moved to the jumbo screen at the back of the stadium and almost fell over from shock.

'157km/h!?'

He stared at it for a while longer before turning to Ken upon the mound who was still wearing the same grin as before. His eyes giving off a challenge, "Hit me if you can."

While most of the onlookers might not appreciate the last ball, those who had decent knowledge of baseball most definitely would. Despite being slower than Ken's fastest ball, the pitch he had thrown was a two-seam fastball.

The very idea of the two-seam fastball was to induce movement, often at the sacrifice of velocity. So the fact that Ken was almost able to reach almost 100mph with a two-seamer was remarkable.

Instead of being intimidated, Daichi felt a wave of happiness followed shortly after by a burning desire to catch his pitches.

'If we were on the same team...'

Daichi's mind raced as he thought about all the possibilities. Not long ago he thought that only having 2 pitches to work with would have restricted a lot of his tactics, yet these thoughts were burst through by Ken's earlier pitch.

Who needed variety when 1 weapon was so overwhelming.

After going through the scenario's in his mind, Daichi quickly shook his head. Now was not the time to be thinking about such things, especially since it was the Semi-finals of Nationals.

'I guess I'll have to settle on just hitting it for today.' He thought, a brilliant smile appearing on his baby face.

With that, he got back into position and gripped his bat tightly. Those who were astute would notice that he shared a similar form to Ken, though slightly modified because of the height differences.

Yet paired with his overbearing Balance and Coordination, it was just as deadly.

Those in the crowd felt that something was a little off. The game was meant to be serious, as it would determine which team would advance to the finals against Koryu.

So why were the pitcher and batter grinning like this?

"Hey wait, didn't Ken say that he had a brother in that interview?" One of the crowd members asked aloud.

Since the arena had quietened down a little thanks to the tension, it wasn't just his friend that heard the remark.

"Oh yeah, they share the same last name. Does that mean Daichi is his brother?"

As the crowd speculated around him, Chris paid it no mind. His attention was solely fixed upon his two boys who were facing each other for the very first time.

He didn't want to miss a single moment in their first clash.

Already he could tell that Ken was pitching faster and cleaner than he ever had before. Since he had no knowledge of the system, he chalked it up to rivals increasing each others abilities when playing against one another.

Chris didn't care who won, he just wanted both of his boys to do their best so they would have no regrets after the match.

He leaned forward on the edge of his seat as he waited for Ken to throw his next pitch.

Unaware of the discussions within the crowd, Ken sent a nod to Yuta and went into his pitching action. His form seemed to contain even less wasted movements than before, allowing his muscles to optimally transfer his strength to his arm.

The ball tore down the distance between the mound and the plate, spinning viciously on its way toward Yuta's open glove.

Daichi tracked down the ball and planted his left foot before twisting his body, trying to squeeze every ounce of power into his swing. The sound of the bat tearing through the air pierced one's ears.

WHOOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike!"

The umpire seemed to have been affected by the atmosphere, his calls carrying a larger emphasis than they usually would.

'161km/h'

Daichi looked at the jumbo screen once more and couldn't help but chuckle out loud.

'This is it. This is what I wanted to see.'

"O-Ohhh! 161km/h!? Is that a new record?"

"Holy crap I don't believe it."

The crowd burst into exclamations, seeing the bold orange numbers upon the board. They hadn't expected an even faster ball to be thrown by the first year high school student.

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

## **Chapter 260 - 260: Imposing (2)**

Daichi focused on his brother on the mound and felt a tremendous sense of satisfaction. Having known what Ken had to overcome with his injuries and missing out on Osaka, he truly had a lot of respect for everything he'd accomplished.

However, while one could respect their opponents, they should never roll over and admit defeat, not until the final horn sounded to indicate the end of the game.

Therefore he gripped his bat tightly once more and awaited the next pitch. He emptied his mind and stared calmly, intending to hit the next one by hook or by crook.

Yuta threw the ball back to Ken upon the mound who was still wearing a grin. He was amazed just how well his partner was pitching at this moment, it was almost as if he'd turned into a different person altogether.

'Is this what it means to exceed your limits?' Yuta thought as he crouched down into position.

He made the sign for a forkball next, wanting to get Daichi out right in this moment. The last swing had come close to the ball, despite it being the fastest ball Ken had ever pitched.

'We can't be too cautious with this guy.'

Ken nodded. He almost felt as if he was having an out of body experience at the moment. His pitches felt effortless and didn't seem to fatigue him in the slightest.

In the next moment, he lifted his knee and pressed forward, planting his foot in the dirt and whipping his arm out, sending the ball flying.

Daichi's eyes lit up, his grin growing even wider.

'Gotchya'

WHOOOOOSH

DONG!

The whole arena burst into cheers as the sound of the ball being struck true resounded throughout the stadium. They followed the ball as it sailed into the left outfield, watching on with eager eyes to see where it would land.

Daichi followed the ball with his eyes and let out a laugh, not even bothering to run. His face was still turned up in a grin as he locked gazes with Ken upon the mound.

"Nice pitching Bro." He said with a thumbs up.

Pah

"Out!"

The umpire shouted after seeing the ball sitting securely in Tatsuya's glove. He had needed to run all the way to the back fence, yet he still managed to secure the ball easily in the end.

Ken had mixed emotions as he saw his brother walk off the field and towards the dugout. His strength seemed to leave his body in the same moment, a result of the Showdown and Limit Break skills coming to an end.

Yet something seemed to be bothering him. How was Daichi able to so confidently hit his forkball when it was the first time he'd thrown it this match.

Even in other matches he rarely threw the pitch, mainly to keep his arm safe.

Back in Yokohama, there were 3 figures sitting in front of the TV at the bakery. They were Tetsu, Naomi and Yuki.

"I-Is it over yet?" Yuki asked, her face cradled in both of her hands.

Tetsu jumped up in shock as he saw Ken's pitch being smacked by Daichi into the outfield.

"N-No way!?" He watched on as the ball almost looked like it was going over the fence, only to fall into the waiting glove of the outfielder.

"Haaaah thank goodness."

Tetsu heaved a sigh of relief after seeing that Ken had not given up a home run.

Yuki felt her nerves peak as she asked the group once more if it was over.

"Tch, why are ya even here? If ya don't wanna watch then go home!" Tetsu barked.

It was clear that it wasn't Yuki's first time acting as such while they were trying to watch the game live on TV.

Tetsu suddenly felt the surroundings go cold as an oppressive atmosphere began to creep up on him. He could feel two scary eyes drilling into the back of his neck, giving him an eerie feeling.

"D-Does anyone want some snacks!?" He quickly shot up out of his chair and left the room, running upstairs before he was consumed by fear.

Naomi couldn't help but laugh out loud, seeing how her husband had retreated so easily.

"Don't mind him Yuki, he's been watching every one of Ken's matches on TV. Even I get yelled at if I bother him during game time." She consoled Yuki whose face had returned to her pouting expression.

She had battled all morning whether or not to watch the game, yet she eventually decided to come. Yuki believed that she owed it to her sons to support them, even if it was half the country away.

"W-Who wants popcorn." Tetsu asked, slipping back into the room with 2 bowls.

"Yes please~"

In another part of the country, an old man with balding gray hair stared at the TV screen, his hand stroking his goatee in contemplation.

"He's fast... I'll give him that."

The old man was interrupted by the clinking sound of a tea set which was brought into the room.

"Grandpa, would you like some tea?" The cute youthful voice asked.

"Yes please, Grandpa loves your tea Miho-Chan~" His usually deep voice seemed to rise a few octaves as he doted on his granddaughter.

She smiled sweetly and poured his tea, before turning her attention to the TV.

"Is there anyone that you've taken a fancy to Grandpa?" She asked, her eyes focusing on one particular individual.

"The kid on 1st base and the one who just hit that ball are good candidates."

Now that they had begun to talk about baseball, the old man's voice retained its former tone and deep resonance.

"What about that tall pitcher? Wasn't he the one who pitched a perfect game and can throw 100mph?" Although she was acting a little coy, her Grandpa knew that she was far more invested in baseball than she led on.

"Oh? Do you like him?" He said, once again stroking his goatee.

"I think he's got the potential to be the number 1 pitcher in Japan." She said with confidence.

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

