

Major League System

Chapter 261 - 261: Penalty (1)

After getting Daichi out, Ken was affected by the penalty of his Limit Break skill, something that he had yet to experience up till now.

His body felt like he'd just completed a 10km run. It was an odd sensation to be standing still and suddenly feel fatigue hit his muscles all at once.

However, since the time limit was only 5 minutes he was not too worried. There were just 2 more batters that he needed to get through before he could return to the dugout and recover.

Yuta who was behind the plate narrowed his eyes. Ken seemed to be breathing heavily and looked a little lethargic, causing some concern to appear on his face.

'He's tired already? That can't be right.' Yuta thought inwardly.

The Ken he knew could pitch all day if he was allowed to.

Just as he was about to call a timeout and check on him, Ken sent a thumbs up to his catcher, letting him know that he was all good.

'Damn, that guy is really observant.' Ken cursed inwardly, trying not to let out a chuckle.

Yuta could only nod and head back to his position. If Ken said that he was okay, then there was nothing that he could do right now. However, inwardly he vowed to speak to the coach if things got out of hand during the match.

Of course he didn't think that they could win if Ken wasn't on the mound, however the health of his friend was worth more than just a single baseball match... At least to him anyway.

"Batting 5th, 3rd base, Satoshi"

It didn't take long for Ken to compose himself, getting used to the backlash of his skill. Even with the penalty, his pitching grade was still S+ which was perfectly fine for these next two batters.

After receiving the call from Yuta, Ken performed his wind up and sent the ball out.

It was a four-seam fastball, headed straight for the bottom of the strike zone.

Since his muscles were protesting, it lacked the sharp speed that it usually had, clocking in at only around 145km/h.

Satoshi didn't hesitate to pull the trigger. He had been expecting a faster ball, so his timing was a little off, but he managed to make contact with the ball, sending it along the ground towards the Captain.

Since he'd swung so early, the ball almost went foul. Yet Makoto was not going to leave anything to chance.

His muscles bulged as he bent down to scoop the ball up and sent a pinpoint throw right towards the outstretched glove of Hiroki on 1st base.

"Out!"

There was no question in the call since Satoshi was nowhere near the base by the time Hiroki had received the ball. Judging by his expression he wasn't happy with how he'd hit the ball.

'Why the hell was that one so slow? Did he try throw a changeup?'

Satoshi's mind raced as he walked back to the dugout. He didn't understand why the ball was almost 15km/h slower compared to the pitches Daichi had received at the previous at-bat.

Ken on the other hand let out a sigh of relief. It was only after he'd thrown the ball that he realized just how bad the penalty was. While it only said it would decrease all of his grades by 1, it failed to mention the stress on his body.

His muscles felt as if they were heavy, every movement taking additional effort. He made a mental note to seal the ability until the end of an innings. That way he'd have time to recover on the bench afterwards.

Unfortunately, he didn't even know the prerequisites for the skill to activate, nor could he control it on his own.

Either way, he only needed 1 more out before the 2nd innings came to a close.

"Batting 6th, Short stop, Takuya"

The vocal Takuya made his way up to the batters box, his shaved head and clear eyes gave him a unique look. Almost like one of those monks one would see when they visited a monastery.

With his smaller height and eager look, he seemed a little out of place in a baseball uniform.

"Let's do this!"

He shouted from the batters box, giving both Yuta and the umpire a fright. The two shared a look between them afterwards, as if to ask what the hell was wrong with that guy.

Yuta returned his attention to Ken on the mound. The last pitch felt off and definitely wasn't his best. They had been lucky that the guy had swung too early, otherwise it could have been a big hit.

'We need to get ahead in the count.' He thought, calling for a forkball.

Ken nodded, although he felt a little apprehensive about it. The one he threw against Daichi was almost sent for a home run after all.

With that, Ken lifted his knee and stepped out, performing his pitching action and sending the ball out.

'There it is!'

Takuya gripped his bat tightly and loaded up, this was the pitch he'd been waiting for.

WHOOOSH

DING

"Damn it!"

Takuya cursed out loud and threw his bat, running towards 1st base with all of his might.

He had only managed to nick the top of the ball, sending it straight back to Ken on the mound.

Ken ran forward a few steps and scooped up the ball in one fluid motion, sending the ball straight to 1st base for an easy out.

"Out."

"3 outs, changeover."

Ken breathed out a sigh of relief, glad that he had survived the crucial part of the innings. Now he wanted nothing more than to sit on the bench and recover for the next few minutes.

"Nice fielding!"

The Yokohama team made their way back to the dugout after completing the innings. The score was 1-0 in their favor, yet no one was feeling complacent in this moment.

The only person to score over Yatsuo was Ken.

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

Chapter 262 - 262: Penalty (2)

Makoto felt considerable pressure on his shoulders to succeed. Since he was the Captain, he felt it was his duty to lead their team to the win. He couldn't do so if he continued to let the pitcher walk all over him.

He seemed like a dragon on his way off the field as he blew smoke from his nose.

"Ken, are you feeling fatigued?" Coach Hanada stopped Ken before he walked into the dugout, his expression carrying some worry.

"I'm fine coach, sorry for worrying you." He said with a small smile.

It wasn't like he could tell the coach about his penalty from using the Limit Break skill.

Coach Hanada seemed to be a little skeptical, but he could tell that Ken didn't want to talk about it in this moment.

"If I see you struggling again on the mound, I won't hesitate to sub you out." He stated, sending Ken a glance.

Ken's eyes widened in shock, yet he still nodded.

"Y-Yes coach."

As he made his way into the dugout, he felt some drops of cold sweat run down his back.

'Mika, is there any way that I can prevent Limit Break from happening again this match?'

[Limit Break can only be used once per match. User does not need to worry about it activating again]

Ken let out a sigh of relief. As long as he wasn't affected by the penalty, he should be able to pitch as normal.

'Thanks Mika.'

Despite not hearing a reply, he felt that his AI friend enjoyed being thanked.

"Batting 8th, Catcher, Yuta"

Ken turned his attention back to the match, with Yuta now batting. Ever since he and Yusuke had been added to the roster, Yuta had been moved from 6th to 8th in the batting line up.

This just showed the strength of their batters in this team. They had been feeling a little stifled lately, but in the Urawa and Sendai matches, they had performed really well.

Unfortunately though, with the strength of Yatsuo and leads of Daichi, there would not be many opportunities for them to score in this match.

"Strikeout!"

Yuta returned to the dugout with a wry smile on his face. Despite doing his best, every pitch just seemed to go where he didn't want to hit, showing just how much research the opposing catcher had done on him.

"Haaaaah, your brother is a real monster." Yuta remarked, plonking himself down next to Ken.

Ken couldn't help but smile at those words. Despite being opponents today, he seemed to be happy that someone was complimenting Daichi.

"Yeah, he's really annoying to play against." Ken remarked.

"Man, didn't you steal a home run from him? How can you say that." Yuta said, some annoyance in his tone.

"Well, he decided to throw a curveball. Something I've been researching non-stop for the past 4 days."

Yuta stared blankly for a moment before letting out a chuckle.

"Well that was just his bad luck then."

Ken nodded, "Yeah, I doubt he'll call for another curveball against me."

"Strikeout!"

The two heard the umpire shout, only a minute or so after Yuta had returned to the bench.

"Ah man, looks like we won't get much of a rest." Yuta commented, already grabbing his catching gear in order to get changed in time.

As Yuta said those words, Ken felt all of his fatigue rush out of his body in a tidal wave. The heavy muscles and pressure on his bones disappeared in an instant, filling him with fresh strength.

"It's alright, I'm plenty rested now." He said with a grin, stretching in satisfaction.

Yuta turned his head, "So no more meatballs?"

"..."

"I'll give you a damn meatball." Ken said, sending a small jab to his Senpai's stomach.

Thankfully for Yuta, he had fastened his chest protector in time, mitigating the damage considerably.

"Hehe."

"Strikeout! Changeover."

The umpires words drifted into their ears, prompting them to get up and head out of the dugout.

In the stands, Chris was watching on as Ken headed back to the mound. His face was filled with some worry after seeing how his son had pitched in the last innings.

It was as if he'd used up all of his energy against Daichi, going all out. Because the next two batters he pitched to had a significant drop in quality.

While it may have all worked out fine, it was likely only because they had been expecting faster balls from Ken. Which meant that if he continued to send sub par pitches their way, he would eventually get punished.

'Come on buddy, it's only the 3rd innings.' He said in his heart, unconsciously fidgeting in his nervousness.

"Batting 7th, 2nd Base, Akihiko"

After hearing the announcers voice, Chris focused on Ken. He was worried that something was wrong with his boy, but currently felt helpless to do anything.

PAH

"Strike!"

'Huh?'

Chris's eyes widened as he saw the fastball fly into the glove of the catcher. He couldn't help but turn his attention to the jumbo screen, letting out a big sigh of relief after seeing the numbers.

'157km/h'

A smile crept onto his lips in the next moment.

"I guess I was worried for nothing."

Yuta received the fastball and nodded. This was the kind of pitching he wanted to see from Ken, not the sluggish type before.

"Nice pitch!" He yelled, sending the ball back to his pitcher.

Akihiko in the batters box was wearing a confused expression. He turned his attention to Coach Narukami, as if asking what now?

The coach himself seemed puzzled. From what his players told him earlier, Ken's pitching had slowed down after pitching to Daichi in the 2nd innings.

Yet not even 5 minutes later, the kid had reverted back to his domineering speed.

He subconsciously turned to Daichi on the bench, but the kid was too busy grinning from ear to ear as he stared at his brother with sparkling eyes.

Coach Narukami could only let out a sigh, and give the signal to hit the ball when he could.

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

Chapter 263 - 263: Game goes on (1)

Without the penalty plaguing him any longer, Ken had returned to his previous form. He managed to clean up the tail end of Osaka's batting line up with ease, putting an end to the bottom of the 3rd innings.

Once again it was Yokohama's turn to bat, starting from Jun who had yet to have any impact on the game. Unfortunately for him, he was struck out in succession after being played with by Daichi.

A frustrated expression formed on his face as he was once again forced to retreat back to the dugout. He had never been this flustered before against a battery, it almost felt as if his mind was being read by the catcher.

"Batting 3rd, 3rd Base, Makoto"

Makoto approached the batters box with a determined expression. After Ken had hit a home run, he no longer received a ridiculing look from the opposing Captain, yet he still felt inferior.

'I'll get us another run on the board.' He thought inwardly, gripping his bat tightly.

Yatsuo stared down the muscular teen and felt his heart begin to beat louder in his chest. The aura that the opposing captain gave off was something else, it made him second guess himself in that moment.

However, he saw Daichi's baby face hidden behind the catchers mask and felt all of his worries disappear. Their first year genius was enough to break through the mountain that stood before him.

He nodded briefly after receiving the lead, breaking into his pitching action a moment later.

Yatsuo's fast pitching motion was a big part of why he was so effective as a pitcher. When used in tandem with his high velocity pitches and variety, it gave the batter much less time to pick his pitches.

Not only this, it hindered the runners from stealing the next base, especially when they had Daichi's killer arm and reflexes to contend with.

Even Yusuke with his breakneck speed was not able to steal 3rd base in the 1st innings.

The ball cut through the air, moving towards the inside of the strike zone. Due to Makoto's large frame and position, he was not ready for such an inside ball.

Even if he swung from his current position, he would likely get jammed and send an easy one into the air.

Therefore he did the only thing he could, back up from the box.

PAH

"Ball"

"Nice vision Captain!"

A voice yelled out from the dugout, it was surprisingly Tatsuya, the one most likely to talk crap. Makoto was too focused to notice however, his attention squarely on Yatsuo.

"That stuff won't work on me." Makoto mumbled.

Daichi overheard his words and couldn't help but smile. He had thought that the big guy was so eager to hit that he might be baited into taking a bad swing, yet he was wrong this time.

'How about this one then?'

Yatsuo threw the next ball, this time a fastball. With the way it was carrying, it looked like it would sail over the strike zone, yet in the last moment it dropped, leaving Makoto blinking in confusion.

"Strike."

'Damn it.'

He was starting to get a little frustrated with the tactics of the opposition, however it's not like they had to let him hit a ball. In fact, it was in their best interest to strike him out of course.

'This next one is getting walloped.' He thought.

Daichi grinned before calling for the next pitch.

Yatsuo threw it once more, this time a cutter which broke late towards the outside.

Makoto didn't have time to properly adjust his swing, so he decided to sacrifice a little bit of power by extending his arms to chase it. As long as he got enough of the ball it should sail past the infield for at least a single.

DONG

The ball floated straight down the throat of the 1st base fielder who caught the ball for an easy out. He didn't even have to move his feet to catch the ball, causing Makoto's face to darken.

"Out."

He held onto the bat tightly, trying to gain his composure. Only after a few moments was he calm enough to head back to the dugout.

He walked past the coach with his head lowered, frustration evident in his features.

"Keep up the same energy. You'll get a hit soon." Coach Hanada said, his tone confident.

Makoto paused briefly, before heading down the set of stairs.

"Batting 4th, 1st base, Hiroki"

"Come on Hiroki! Hit a big one."

"Let's go!"

Cheers from the bench and the crowd intermixed after Hiroki stepped up to the plate. He also had a large conversion rate at Nationals, becoming one of the best batters in the tournament so far.

This was his 2nd at-bat in this match and he was determined to get a hit this time.

Daichi was a bit wary of Hiroki, but they currently had 2 outs. As long as they could keep him from hitting big, it wouldn't be a big loss if he got onto base.

With that mindset, Daichi sent the signal, calling for a curveball.

Yatsuo nodded and changed his grip stealthily inside of his glove. In the next moment he stepped forward and delivered the pitch, yet he grimaced as the ball left his hand.

Daichi watched the ball fly forwards, noticing the top spin on the ball. He tried to judge the speed and trajectory before setting his swing.

WHOOOSH

DONG

He managed to get underneath the dropping ball and sent it to the outfield, between the center and right fielders. Hiroki dropped his bat and quickly ran towards first base, rounding it and arriving onto 2nd before the ball could be thrown in.

"Nice hit Hiroki!"

Both the crowd and Yokohama dugout cried out with cheers at the crafty hit into the outfield. Ken couldn't help but pump his fist slightly, happy that they'd managed to get a runner on base.

Daichi frowned, the ball that Yatsuo pitched was not the one he'd asked for. The curveball was not like his usual, it was lacking the speed and movement it was meant to have.

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

Chapter 264 - 264: Game goes on (2)

"Batting 5th, Pitcher, Ken"

Before Daichi could think further on the matter, his brother stepped into the batters box, confidence radiating from his figure.

Yatsuo received the ball from the outfield and placed it in his glove. He rested his right hand in it as well, making it look like he was adjusting his grip.

However, his focus was on his wrist which was sending a prickly, pins and needles type pain to his fingers. He managed to keep his expression even, yet inwardly he was worried.

'I can't stop now... I need to win this game and then the finals.'

His mind was resolute. No matter what kind of pain he had to endure, he wanted to finish up his 3rd year of High School baseball without regrets.

If he could win at Nationals, then he had an even better chance of joining the professional league either after High School or during university.

Yatsuo turned his attention back to Daichi and saw the concerned expression on his baby face, making him feel a little guilty.

'You wouldn't understand Daichi... you're still young and so talented.' He thought inwardly.

He tipped his hat towards him, notifying Daichi that he was ready for the next call.

Daichi could only nod in response. He needed to trust his counterpart, just as he had asked Yatsuo to trust him. Without mutual trust and understanding, there was no way that they could be a proper battery.

He glanced at Ken who was raring to go. His body position was further over the plate, almost baiting Daichi to throw an inside ball.

He shook his head, there was no need to do such a thing with 2 outs.

Yatsuo saw the lead and nodded before breaking into his pitching action. This time there was no sharp pain from his wrist as he threw a perfect slider which broke down and away from the batter.

Ken's eyes lit up as he swung for the fences.

DONG

'Crap.'

While he managed to get a good strike on the ball, he could tell that it wasn't in the center. The ball flew up in the air and hovered over 2nd base for quite some time.

"Akihiko that's yours!"

Takuya yelled out, directing the fielder on 2nd base.

"Alright alright!" He called, standing beneath the ball and watching it closely.

Pah

"Out! Changeover."

"Ah damn. I thought it was a cutter." He mumbled, yet Ken didn't seem too upset.

"Ya got me there bro." Ken said with a grin.

"Of course. I've still gotta pay you back for that home run." Daichi retorted, flashing a smile.

Ken shook his head, "Won't be happening."

"We'll see about that."

Though the two were lighthearted, there was a real fighting spirit behind their words. They truly wanted to duke it out, showing each other just how much they had improved.

Ken replaced his helmet and bat with his cap and glove and headed back onto the field to start the bottom of the 4th innings. He would need to face the top of the batting order for the second time now.

Yet he felt like he wouldn't lose.

"Batting 1st, Left Outfield, Isamu"

As Ken stood atop the mound, the beautiful voice rang out over the arena, introducing the next batter. It was the guy with the long legs who had been wearing a confident grin in the 1st innings.

However, it seemed as if his grin was nowhere to be seen at the moment. Having seen Ken's pitches firsthand, he was now lacking his earlier confidence.

Yet that wasn't to say that he had given up hope. There was still a lot of determination in his features.

Unfortunately for him, that didn't last long.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike"

PAH

"Strike"

PAH

"Strikeout!"

He was sent packing as fast as the last time, being forced to head back to the dugout with no results to show.

Since it was their 2nd time facing Ken, the Osaka team had some kind of hope to make some progress on the score sheet, yet it seemed like it wouldn't be easy.

"Batting 2nd, 1st base, Takashi"

Like his counterpart, Takashi was left swinging like a fool as the devastating fastballs blew past him and into Yuta's open glove.

PAH

"Strikeout!"

Suddenly, Osaka found themselves at 2 outs already in the innings, with their clean up batters coming up next.

It was always sad for a clean up batter to come out to a field with no runners on base. Even if they landed a big hit, it might not even be rewarded.

Yatsuo stepped up, his earlier frustration no longer evident on his features. He was burning for a big hit, the more runs they had on the board the safer he would feel pitching against their line up.

Yuta called for an outside forkball, hoping to either force a bad hit or get an easy strike.

Ken nodded and went into his wind up. His left elbow jutting out slightly before he stepped forward and delivered the pitch.

Yatsuo's eyes lit up after seeing this, his grip on the bat tightening.

DONG

His bat managed to get underneath the ball and sent it into the outfield between first and the right fielder.

He ran onto 1st base with a smile on his face, finally happy to get a hit in. As long as Daichi could get a hold of the ball, there was a good chance they could score in this innings despite there being 2 outs.

Ken frowned once more, his intuition telling him that something was not right. It was on the tip of his tongue but he couldn't quite pick it out at this moment.

Before he could think, he heard the voice ring out over the stadium once more.

"Batting 4th, Catcher, Daichi"

"Kyaaa"

"He's so handsome, even if he looks a little young."

"I didn't know you were like that..."

Ken ignored the screams of the crowd, there was no time to think anymore as the main boss had arrived.

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

Chapter 265 - 265: Figured out (1)

"2 outs! Keep it up Kenny!"

Yusuke called out from 2nd base, trying to cheer up the tall guy on the mound who seemed to be brooding.

Ken flinched hearing the nickname that only his parents called him. His expression darkened as he sent a stiff smile towards his good friend Yusuke.

'Do you want to die?'

His eyes seemed to convey his thoughts as the perpetrator quickly shut his mouth in fright.

Daichi who was now in the batters box couldn't help but laugh out loud hearing Ken called his nickname on the field. He wouldn't even let his own brother call him that, so he knew exactly how much Ken hated it being used by others.

If they weren't in a game right now, Daichi would have probably teased him some more. However, there were more interesting things to come now.

Ken finally straightened his posture and looked down at Daichi. His wide shoulders and broad chest showed just how much effort he'd put into getting in shape over the past 8 or so months since he had left home.

Before he knew it, Daichi had already matured swiftly.

The time for their next duel had arrived. He felt the effects of Showdown creep into his muscles, giving off a hot sensation as strength filled his body.

A hushed tone fell over the field as the two brothers stared at each other from their respective positions. It was as if the whole stadium was holding it's breath, waiting for the first clash to take place.

They were like two warriors of opposing camps, each with their own ideals who had come to settle the score like men, one on one.

Daichi with his broad shoulders stood like a stalwart and prideful hunter, patiently lying in wait for his prey to reach his grasp. His gaze was calm and unflappable, as if he'd seen everything, yet a playful smile reached the corner of his lips.

Ken on the other hand was like a tall giant, his figure elevated further by the mound. His expression was filled with a fierce determination, intending on facing the hunter head on, leaving nothing to question in the exchange.

It was a clash of ideals, a battle of wills.

Who would come out on top in this round?

The giant raised its leg and coiled its body before taking an insurmountable step forward and cocking his shoulder back. In the next moment, he whipped his arm around and threw the ball with all his might.

The ball blitzed through the air with tremendous force, causing those in the stadium to marvel at its sheer speed.

Daichi's eyes never left the ball, using his excellent coordination and instinct in order to time his swing.

'Now!'

His eyes widened as the ball began to break towards him, ruining the timing and placement he'd picked.

DONG

The ball was hit and sailed above both the umpire and Yuta on its way to a foul.

"Foul"

Yuta retrieved a ball from the umpire and threw it back to Ken upon the mound. He had felt breathless for a moment as the two stared each other down for the first ball. It was almost as if they were in a different timeline.

Ken caught the ball and stepped back to his position on the mound. In reality he was in awe that Daichi could hit his pitches, despite his pitching grade currently being SS+ thanks to Showdown.

According to Mika, SS+ would be enough to do well in college, at least by the system's measurements. The fact that he could attack them just spoke to how talented he was.

In reality, Ken had not wanted to use his skills from the system against Daichi since it almost felt like cheating. However, in the end he thought it would be too disrespectful to not use everything in his arsenal against his brother.

Especially since they'd been waiting for this moment for so long.

Yet it didn't take long for Ken to understand he'd made the right choice. Even when he had used Limit Break against him in the 2nd innings, the pitch had almost been sent into the stands for a home run.

It just showed that he would have been a fool to hold back against such a person.

His eyes focused on Yuta who had just called for a four-seam ball outside and low. He nodded in response, before getting into his stance.

"Hup!"

Ken stepped forward and sent the ball flying out to the directed spot.

WHOOOSH

DING

This time, Daichi hit the ball to the right of the field, bouncing along the ground and into the foul zone.

"Foul"

'Again.'

DING

"Foul"

DING

"Foul"

Yuta was feeling a little exasperated as every ball that he called for seemed to get fouled off with ease. Of course he knew that it probably wasn't as easy as Daichi made it seem, but he was starting to lose confidence.

He stared at Ken for a moment and made a signal for the very first time.

Ken's eyes widened as he saw the sign for a curveball. He hesitated for a moment before shaking his head, it was too early to release his secret weapon.

It wasn't that he lacked confidence in the throw, just that he knew how good Daichi was. As long as he saw the ball once, Daichi would be able to identify it again easily.

A good example already was this game. He had only thrown 3 pitches to Daichi in the 2nd innings, yet he was already able to foul off all of his balls in the 4th innings.

Yuta seemed lost in that moment.

'If he doesn't want to throw the curveball now, then we can only throw the forkball to mix it up.' He thought, feeling a little deflated.

He made the sign and placed his glove low.

'Even if he picks the pitch, we should be able to make him hit a grounder if it's low.' Yuta commented inwardly.

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

Chapter 266 - 266: Figured out (2)

Ken nodded, yet he felt a pang of worry after he made the decision.

'No point doubting myself now.' He thought, getting into his stance.

Ken sent a cursory glance to Yatsuo who was chilling on 1st base, as if to let him know that he still knew he was there.

He performed his wind up, inadvertently jutting his left elbow out slightly before letting the throw go.

Daichi's face blossomed into a wild grin as he saw the ball he'd been waiting for arrive. Yet his face changed a little when he saw the course which would end up too low for a big hit.

However, he quickly made the decision and went for it, rolling his wrists and ensuring that the bat would meet the ball at the scheduled time.

DONG!

Surprisingly, the ball had a lot of carry for one which had been hit from such a low angle. It shot at a 45 degree angle over Naoki's head and into the outfield between left and center.

Jun always played further back than his brother, mainly to give support to the other outfielder Yuki who lacked speed. Even before he could shout, he saw Tatsuya dash in, his eyes glued to the ball.

Yatsuo had already taken off and had just about reached 2nd base by the time the ball began to drop onto the field.

"Tatsuya! Home!" Naoki yelled out, sending the speedster some directions while he tracked down the ball.

In a fantastic athletic display, Tatsuya managed to scoop the ball off the ground in the middle of running and was just about to throw it to home.

"Hold!"

Thankfully the call came out in time as Yatsuo had taken up his position on 3rd base, looking a little out of breath.

Due to his large frame, sprinting around the bases was a bigger effort than he would like to admit. Of course, batting before Daichi would usually equal a free jog around the bases, yet apparently not against this team.

Thankfully for Yokohama, Daichi's hit had not resulted in a run for Osaka.

Ken stood upon the mound and couldn't help but look at the two runners on base, deep in thought. His mind replayed all of his pitches that were hit in the past 4 innings, trying to understand what had gone wrong.

'Wait... Were they all forkballs that were hit?' He asked himself, his eyes widening at the revelation.

[Correct. It seems that user performs a certain action when throwing the forkball]

Mika's monotonous tone crept into his mind at the right time, confirming his suspicions.

'Do you know what it is that I'm doing Mika?' Ken probed further.

If he could understand what was giving it away, he could use the tell to his advantage in the match.

[Users left elbow juts out when pitching the forkball. Showing example, please stand by]

In the next moment, Ken's vision changed to an outside perspective. He saw two versions of himself side by side going through his pitching action frame by frame.

On the left was his fastball, his form was tight and compact as he lifted his left knee and placed both arms tight to his chest. Yet on the right side was his forkball which differed by a slight margin.

With the two frames side by side, he was able to notice that his elbow was indeed jutting out, yet it was only slightly. He felt a little odd that his tell was such a small and seemingly insignificant thing.

'Thank you Mika, that was a big help.'

He made sure to thank his AI friend for her help, lest she get cranky with him again in the future.

His vision returned back to normal afterwards, drawing him back into his consciousness.

Ken turned to look at Daichi on second base and couldn't help but shake his head and laugh softly. To think that his brother had been so astute to notice such a small detail in his pitching action.

Perhaps it was because his pitching arsenal was so small that they were able to notice such a thing.

Thus, Ken was now graced with the knowledge which Osaka held. As long as he kept his cards close to his chest, he could probably turn their own strategy against them.

"Hehe, you crafty buggers." Ken mumbled as he turned his attention to the new batter who'd just appeared.

"Batting 5th, 3rd base, Satoshi"

Ken took a deep breath, feeling the effects of the Showdown skill leave his body. Thankfully it wasn't paired with the penalty of Limit break like last time, meaning he would not have to suffer in this next at-bat.

It was currently 2 outs with 2 runners on base, meaning all he had to do was strike out this next guy to put an end to the 4th innings. Despite being hit twice, he could still preserve the score at 1-0 in their favor.

He turned his attention to Yuta who gave the next lead.

Ken grinned before performing his wind up and whipping the ball out towards the open glove of his catcher.

The ball flew through the air, drifting towards the right handed batter with decent speed.

Satoshi was flustered and swung and missed by a mile, almost falling over in the process.

The last time he faced Ken in the 2nd innings, the balls were at least 10% slower which was why the speed had caught him off guard this time.

"Strike"

The 3rd year adjusted himself and got back into position for the next ball. His eyes focused on a certain spot while Ken performed his wind up.

Now that he knew about his tell, Ken felt what Osaka was doing was even more blatant. The fact that they were aiming for a certain pitch and watching the left side of his body so obviously should have been clearer to him earlier.

Yet none of that mattered now since he had found out their secret.

"Strike!"

"Strikeout! Changeover."

Ken sent Daichi a glance and a grin before heading back to the dugout with his team.

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

Chapter 267 - 267: Masterful Play (1)

The game seemed to have reached a fever pitch after Ken put an end to the 4th innings. The crowd was enamored as the two teams battled back and forth. While it wasn't a high scoring game, the outstanding pitchers brought loads of excitement.

Both Ken and Yatsuo were flawless throughout the next 2 innings, not letting a single player onto base. Of course a large part of their success could be attributed to the calls and leads of their respective catchers.

Soon enough it was the top of the 7th innings with the score still sitting at 1-0 in favor of Yokohama. There were many who had counted out their team even before the match had started, yet these people were silent now.

Back in Yokohama, Tetsu was at the edge of his seat as his eyes were glued to the TV. He had learned to block out Yuki's nervous blabbering in the background since the last time he said something he had almost died.

"I didn't know your other son was also talented at baseball Yuki." Naomi's sweet voice broke through the silence.

Yuki couldn't help but smile, "Yes, he and Ken trained together all of last year before Daichi went to Osaka. I wish he was still home, but he looks like he's having fun."

Her attention turned to the TV where she could see his figure behind home plate.

She didn't know a lot about baseball, though she tried because of her husband. Yuki knew enough that she could hold a conversation about it, but never an in depth one.

"He's pretty good, but Ken is playing better." Tetsu commented matter-of-factly.

At some point in the last few weeks, Tetsu's attitude towards Ken had flipped completely. It was to the point that even he himself had not noticed such a shift.

Yuki wore a look of shock as she heard the grouch compliment Ken. From what she knew, Tetsu was the biggest opposition to the carefully crafted matchmaking that her and Naomi had been planning out for the longest time.

She turned to Naomi with a questioning look, only to receive a shrug in response. Even she did not know what sparked the changes within her husband, and she hadn't had the heart to ask him all this time.

Naomi tried to broach the subject, seeing as the time had presented itself.

"Honey, what's changed lately? How come you like Ken now?"

"Shhhh! Yokohama are battin' and Ken's comin' up soon."

He ignored the question, even waving off his own wife as the announcer called up the next batter.

"Batting 3rd, 3rd base, Makoto"

Naomi could only roll her eyes, a small chuckle escaping her lips at her husband's attitude. For a moment she thought of poking the bear, but she thought better of it while they had a guest over.

Back on the field, the beginning of the 7th innings was upon them.

Makoto made his way into the batters box, his muscular frame bursting with eagerness to make a contribution this game. While the score was at 1-0 in their favor, it did not leave him with enough confidence leading into the latter innings.

This time he would make sure to get a hit, no matter what.

With Hiroki and Ken coming up in the lineup, he could add more pressure by at least getting onto base.

Yatsuo stood upon the mound and took a deep breath in through his nose before exhaling through his mouth. His fingers were feeling a little numb and tingly, yet he had managed to keep his composure through the last two innings.

'Just a little bit more.' He chanted inwardly, just like a mantra.

Daichi had a serious expression on his face. With the clean up batters coming up soon, they needed to make sure that there were no more runs added onto the board.

The problem was, this was the 3rd time the Yokohama batters were facing Yatsuo. Generally this was where the most runs could begin to leak as they got accustomed to his pitches.

However, it just meant that he had an important job to do.

Outsmart the batters.

Daichi took in a deep breath and made the signal. He wanted to get ahead in the count and put some pressure early on.

Yatsuo nodded, checking on his grip before turning his attention forward once more.

Using his quick pitching motion, he sent the ball flying to the inside.

"Ah!"

The moment it left his hand, he knew that he'd messed up.

The ball which was supposed to be a four-seam to the inside, veered off target and landed directly onto the lead arm of Makoto.

The dull thud of the leather ball hitting the dense muscles of Makoto's arm echoed on the field, causing everyone in the arena to suck in a cold breath of air.

"Hit by pitch. Take your base."

The umpire made the call, his eyes focusing on Makoto who had yet to move. Just as he was about to check on him, the muscular guy harrumphed in annoyance before placing his bat on the ground and advancing to 1st base.

"Man... He took that pitch like a beast." Tatsuya exclaimed, cringing internally.

"N-Nice work Captain!"

A few more calls came out from the dugout, yet they also felt a little weak after witnessing the pitch.

Daichi felt a little flustered at the moment, since the pitch had been so wild. He hadn't expected Yatsuo to lose control over the ball, let alone hit the opposing player.

His eyes moved to the coach, as if to ask him what to do next.

Coach Narukami's eyes narrowed before he called for a timeout from one of the umpires.

Seeing this, Yatsuo panicked. He did not want to get taken out of the game, not just yet.

Both Daichi and Coach Narukami walked up to the mound and approached Yatsuo. Daichi had a look of concern, while the coach had his usual calm mask on.

"What happened there Yatsuo?" He asked, raising an eyebrow.

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

Chapter 268 - 268: Masterful Play (2)

"T-The ball slipped. It must have been because I was sweating so much." The big guy answered before picking up the rosin bag and juggling it.

The coach looked at Daichi briefly before returning his gaze.

"Be careful. If you send another one of those I'll be forced to take you out of the game."

"Yes Coach!"

"Tell me if it happens again." Coach Narukami told Daichi as the two walked back to their respective positions.

"Kouichi, go and warm up."

"Y-Yes Coach!"

Kouichi's eyes lit up, not expecting to play in such a situation. However, with all of his tough training throughout the year, he was ready to step up.

"Batting 4th, 1st base, Hiroki"

The announcer called out the next batter turning everyone's attention back to the field of play. With the free walk to 1st base, they now had to deal with the clean up batters of Yokohama.

'This isn't ideal.' Daichi said inwardly.

If he couldn't trust the pitches to go where he wanted, then there was little to no point in trying to lead Yatsuo. If it was up to him, Daichi would have brought Kouichi in now despite the difference in abilities.

At least he knew that Kouichi would pitch where he asked.

Daichi shook his head, he could only go with the coach's decision.

He moved the glove to the middle of the strike zone and called for a cutter. He wanted to test a few things before deciding whether or not Yatsuo could still pitch like he needed him to.

The ball came flying towards home plate before veering away from Hiroki's bat.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike"

Daichi almost breathed out a sigh of relief. The pitch was crisp and still held the proper speed, despite the earlier mishap. He began to think that it was likely only a slip as Yatsuo had mentioned before.

'Good, I can work with this.' He thought, calling for the next pitch.

PAH

"Strike"

DING

"Foul"

DING

"Foul"

Hiroki frowned. He was having a tough time reaching the balls at the right moment. They all had a tricky course, or were in places that he was not comfortable in hitting.

Since they had a runner on base and no outs, he would be kicking himself if he missed an opportunity this late into the game. The worst case scenario would be if he hit a grounder which resulted in a double play, so he was trying to play around that.

However, with the annoying catcher behind him making things difficult, it was easier said than done.

Yet just when he thought he would be in for a tough haul, a curveball came roaring into his striking zone.

'This one!'

Hiroki planted his foot and twisted his body, getting the bat underneath the ball and pulling through with all of his might.

DONG!

The bat made contact, causing the crowd to erupt with cheers. Hiroki threw his bat down and ran with all his might, following the trajectory of the ball.

He breathed a sigh of relief as it stopped just short of the right outfielder and was sent back to 2nd base.

Makoto stood proudly upon 3rd base and shouted his praises.

"ORYAAAHH, Nice work Hiroki!"

This was the best position he'd gotten since the game started, and he was in the perfect spot to score. Especially when he saw who was on their way to the batters box now.

"Batting 5th, Pitcher, Ken"

He stretched his muscles briefly before stepping into the batters box. Doing his usual tapping of home plate and his cleats with his bat.

Instead of acknowledging Daichi, he turned to the coach who sent some signals his way.

Ken's eyes widened for a moment before he let out a soft smile.

In the next moment he turned his attention to the mound and leaned forward, crowding home plate.

Daichi frowned, feeling confused.

'Why is he crowding the plate? Even if he gets hit by a pitch, it will only load the bases.'

From his understanding, the play didn't make sense, yet it was still happening in front of him. His thoughts moved to how Yatsuo had hit Makoto earlier and didn't want to repeat the same thing, but Ken was not giving him much of a choice.

'Let's just try a cutter then.' He thought, sending the signal to Yatsuo.

The big guy nodded and quickly sent the ball flying towards the strike zone.

The moment the ball left his hands, Makoto began his run from 3rd base towards home, shocking the Osaka players on the field.

Even more shocking was that Ken adjusted his posture backwards and held out his bat horizontally, intending to bunt.

"B-Bunt!?"

The play had taken Osaka off guard completely, who were scrambling to adjust.

Ken gracefully sent a push bunt towards first base, his strength and accuracy used to perfection, placing it equal distance from the pitcher and 1st base.

"AKIHIKO, FIRST!"

Takuya seemed to be the first player to react as he directed Akihiko the 2nd baseman to cover first base. Takashi was already chasing down the bunt which was coming to a stop half way towards 1st base.

His eyes glanced at Daichi who was pointing to first. It seemed that he had already judged Makoto would convert the run.

In a great maneuver, Takashi managed to scoop the ball up and twist his body before sending the ball back to Takuya who had arrived in time.

Pah

"Out"

Ken ran past first base a fraction of a second later, yet despite getting called out he had a wide grin on his face.

"ORYAAAAH!"

Makoto bellowed in celebration after stepping onto home plate and completing the run for Yokohama.

Due to Ken's masterful bunt, they had secured another run to their total, bringing the game to a 2-0 score.

Daichi was at a loss for words at the moment. He hadn't expected Ken to bunt at all, let alone on the very first pitch to catch them off guard.

'Touche' bro.' He thought, staring at the back of the tall retreating figure.

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

Chapter 269 - 269: Obstacle (1)

"In the crucial 7th innings, Yokohama capitalize on their lead with a masterful bunt from their Ace Ken Takagi to send the Captain home."

The smooth and excited tone of Kageyama came out of the TV, giving a summary of what had just happened. Usually a commentator for professional games, he was invited to commentate since the Quarter Finals.

His counterpart was none other than Miya Furuka, her bubbly personality shining through.

"Wow, who would have thought that Yokohama had such a thing up their sleeves." She commented in awe.

"Yes it truly was amazing. One would think that they'd have Ken swing for the fences, especially since he is currently leading the home run tally this year at 6 home runs total." Kageyama added, his voice full of enthusiasm.

"I'd say that he is the standout of this years competition. A two-way player that we've never seen before who is capable of throwing a perfect game as well as hitting the big home runs."

"You're right Miya, I daresay he's the front runner for player of the tournament if he continues this kind of display."

The two continued to speak through the TV, broadcasting to over a million people across Japan who were tuning in. Although these people could not make it to the arena, the commentators did a good job of keeping things interesting.

With Kageyama's in depth baseball knowledge, and Miya's bubbly personality, the two were a perfect duo for the job.

"Holy crap, that bunt was perfect..." Tetsu mumbled.

He had just earlier been jumping for joy as Yokohama sailed across home plate and added another run to their score.

It was only when the live action replay showed on his screen that he could fully appreciate Ken's play. The bunt perfectly sent the ball to the zone where 1st base had to field it.

Yet if it wasn't for Makoto's do or die sprint from 3rd base, it could have ended badly for Yokohama.

Yuki wasn't too sure what was happening, but she heard the commentators talking about her son and couldn't help but feel full of pride. There was nothing more gratifying to hear people compliment one's child.

Chris who was in the arena watching the play live couldn't help but let out a sigh of relief. He had thought the play was truly risky. Yokohama probably could have got a run in the way of a sacrifice fly ball.

Yet now that he thought about it, it was the fact that the bunt was so unexpected that it had worked so well.

His eyes focused on Seiji, his old colleague who was the coach for Yokohama and couldn't help but grin.

'Looks like he's the mastermind.' Chris thought.

After the cheering died down, Coach Narukami was wearing a frown. As the game got later and later, he felt a constricting feeling overtaking his body, like Yokohama were slowly choking the life out of them.

Ken's masterful pitching and these small plays were wearing them down.

However, there was not much that Osaka could have done differently in that play. Takuya had made the right call and everyone rotated to where they should have been.

Even Daichi made the right decision to tell Takashi to throw to 1st base and secure at least 1 out.

The older man let out a sigh. He could only hope they managed to stem the bleeding in this innings and make a push for some additional runs.

Out of all the teams they'd played, he never thought Yokohama would give them the biggest trouble so far.

He turned his attention to Seiji Hanada and couldn't help but feel his opinion of him change slightly, to one which held more respect.

"Batting 6th, 2nd base, Yusuke"

Yusuke arrived into the batters box and couldn't help but smile wryly.

'Even when Ken doesn't hit a home run, he still steals the show.' He thought inwardly.

Since he always had to follow up Ken in the batting line up, he often had these kind of thoughts. If anything he was usually a lead off batter thanks to his fast legs, yet he couldn't exactly match up to the Aoyama twins just yet.

Yusuke sensed something behind him, a fierce aura which felt threatening.

He anxiously moved his gaze only to see the catcher with a determined expression plastered on his face. It was as if the last run had turned on a competitive switch inside of his brain.

'It's not over yet...'

As Daichi locked in, the next 3 pitches were fast and their courses unpredictable, easily blowing by Yusuke and sending him back to the dugout.

Coach Hanada could feel the shift in Osaka's attitude. While they were still playing as usual, there was an underlying desperation underneath their movements, giving him a little anxiety.

As Naoki went up to bat, he called Ken over.

"I think you'll need to throw your curveball when Osaka bat next." He said solemnly.

Ken was silent for a moment before agreeing.

"I'll throw it, but only once, and only against Daichi." He stated, his tone firm and full of confidence.

"Hmm?" Seiji was confused. It was already the 7th innings, but he had yet to throw it even once.

Instead of explaining, he asked the coach a simple question.

"Do you trust me?"

Ken looked directly into the gaze of Coach Hanada, his face showing confidence not befitting his young age.

Seeing such a look, the coach could only let out an exasperated sigh, muttering something about the youth surpassing the elderly.

By the time the two had finished with their chat, the umpire called out.

"3 outs, changeover."

"Alright, do what you can to keep us in the lead. As long as you get through this innings, we should be able to hold onto the game." Seiji responded, patting Ken on the shoulder softly.

Ken flashed him a grin, "Don't worry coach, we're going to win this match and then the finals."

"Hehe, okay. Hurry up and get out there." Seiji made a shooing motion, telling Ken to make haste.

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

Chapter 270 - 270: Obstacle (2)

At the bottom of the 7th, Osaka were starting with their 3rd batter. Both he and Daichi had gotten onto base in the 4th, though they weren't able to convert it into any runs.

Ken approached the mound and got into position, a grin forming on his face.

'Let's see how you go picking my pitches now?' He thought smugly.

Since Osaka had found out a way to pick his pitches through his pitching action, Ken had almost been caught out in this match. Were it not for the sheer speed of his pitches, he would have been picked apart.

Yet now that he knew what those pesky guys had been doing, he'd be able to use it to his advantage.

"Batting 3rd, Pitcher, Yatsuo"

Yatsuo stepped into the batters box, his large frame taking up a lot of the space provided. He wore a serious expression that screamed he wanted to hit the ball.

Yuta could see this and called for a pitch on the outside of the strike zone. Ken nodded and adjusted his cap. Now was the time for his patience to pay off.

Ken lifted his left knee and slightly stuck out his left elbow before stepping forward and whipping his arm out.

The moment Yatsuo saw this, his eyes widened and an imperceptible grin formed on his features.

'Here it is!'

The ball flew towards the outside, yet slowly began to creep towards the right handed batter. By the time Yatsuo realized that it wasn't a forkball, it was too late.

DING

The ball flew high into the air yet the distance was miserable.

"Mine!"

Yuta called out, taking his catchers mask off and taking a few steps forward, positioning himself directly under the ball.

Pah

"Out!"

The umpire called the out, leaving the astonished Yatsuo to stare blankly at Ken upon the mound. As if to keep the secret, Ken activated his Poker Face skill, yet underneath he was wearing a gloating expression.

'Serves you right.' He thought, his eyes dancing in amusement.

Yatsuo could only walk back to the dugout, passing Daichi who was on his way up to the batters box.

"I thought he was throwing a forkball since his elbow jutted out." He said weakly.

He wasn't sure whether it was on purpose or not, but the fact of the matter was, he was out.

"I'll keep that in mind." Daichi said.

His earlier happy-go-lucky attitude was nowhere to be seen. Since their team was currently 2-0 down, this might be the final opportunity they had to get some runs on the board.

"Batting 4th, Catcher, Daichi."

Daichi stepped into the batters box, his attention never leaving Ken upon the mound. He stared at him like a predator who had been backed into a corner, poised to strike the moment it saw an opening.

Yet Ken was not intimidated.

He had seen this expression on Daichi's face before, on the TV while he was playing professionally. This was the same face he made when hitting the walk-off home run that night when he had messed up his medication and taken his own life.

It was time to put an end to this match.

He felt the effects of Showdown course through his body, filling his muscles up with strength. It was a wonderful sensation that quite frankly felt almost addictive.

Yet his thoughts were on one thing only. Getting his brother out.

Ken performed his wind up and sent the ball whipping out with incredible speed, it's target away and outside where Yuta's glove was waiting.

DING

"Foul"

The ball rocketed into the right side of the field, outside of 1st base. The amount of power behind it was a reminder of just how deadly Daichi was with the bat.

Everyone in the crowd began to get restless, particularly when the speed of the pitch was displayed on the jumbo screen.

"161km/h? Hasn't this guy pitched 7 innings already?"

"This guy's stamina is crazy."

Chris was at the edge of his seat as he watched the duel between his sons. He didn't want to miss a single moment of this fight, it would be a great story to tell to his grandkids one day.

'Huh? Grandkids?' He shook his head. Why was he thinking about such a thing right now?

Back on the field, it seemed as if sparks were flying between the two brothers. One intent on slowly constricting the other into submission, and the other trying to blast their way through with a metal bat.

DING

"Foul"

DING

"Foul"

The crowd watched on as the two continued to duel back and forth, neither side looking like they would give up.

Each time Daichi fouled the ball, it would go farther and farther, threatening to make its way over the fence for a home run. It seemed that he could see the pitches, but the timing was slightly off.

Yet after each swing, it seemed to be getting better.

Seeing this, Ken felt his intuition tremble for a moment. He knew that he couldn't keep up this kind of attack, not if he wanted to strike Daichi out.

Despite this being their 3rd match up, he had not yet struck his brother out. While some would argue that getting him out was the same result, those people were definitely not pitchers.

'I'm going to strike him out...'

Ken thought, his eyes narrowing as the determination began to fill his body.

He had two tricks up his sleeve, one being slightly less risky.

'Let's try that first.'

Ken said, shuffling the rosin bag in his hand.

In the next moment he readied himself and performed his wind up, consciously jutting his left elbow slightly as he whipped the ball out.

Daichi's eyes lit up and he was about to go for broke, using all of the strength his body was able to output. However, in the next moment his eyes changed, realizing that it wasn't the pitch he was looking for.

In a masterful display of strength and dexterity, he managed to change the trajectory of the bat mid-swing, thrusting it upwards into the ball.

DING

The bat collided with the ball, thrusting it up into the air and straight over both Yuta and the umpire's head and onto the ground behind them.

"F-Foul."

The umpire called out, never having seen such a baseball swing in his life.

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

Chapter 271 - 271: Fake out (1)

"What was that swing?"

"How did he make contact with the ball at that angle?"

The crowd murmured in shock and awe at the display Daichi had just shown them.

Daichi himself let out a relieved sigh before turning his attention to Ken upon the mound.

'He must have found out, otherwise how could he have baited me.' He thought, a small smile forming on his face.

Yet despite him thwarting Ken's counterplay, there was no sign of frustration on his brother's face. It was almost as if he expected him to foul the ball off.

'Just what is he planning?'

Daichi could only speculate as he returned back to his position. He could only be vigilant and not hope to get caught off guard because of this new development.

If anything, his job had gotten a lot harder since he couldn't exactly pick which pitch was being thrown. He could only rely on his instincts in this situation, something that he'd been honing ever since he first picked up a baseball bat.

Yuta who was behind Daichi at the time of the hit was currently in a confused state. Since Ken had not told him about the situation with his pitching form, he had absolutely no idea why Daichi swung like he did.

In his mind it just came out of the blue.

He looked to Ken and was unsure of what to call for next. However, he could see a small grin forming on the guys face, giving him a weird sensation.

'Is it time for that pitch?' He asked inwardly, feeling a sense of anxiety.

Yuta crouched back down and gave the signal, waiting to see Ken's response.

Upon receiving a nod, he felt his body shudder in anticipation. He had been waiting for this moment since being told about the pitch in the locker room before the game.

With Shiro's assistance, he was able to get a decent grasp of how much the ball would break and where. As long as he could catch it, then they would have gotten over their biggest hurdle of the match.

However, this was a risky maneuver since he'd never caught this pitch before from Ken, nor had he seen the guy throw it. It was essentially a big gamble.

After mentally pumping himself up, Yuta placed the glove forward and narrowed his eyes.

'Let's see what you've got.'

'Mika, what's my curveball proficiency at again?' Ken asked in his mind while adjusting his grip inside of his glove.

[Users curveball proficiency is at 91.8%]

"It'll have to do" Ken muttered, getting into position.

The atmosphere on the field was stifling as the two brothers stared down the lane at each other. Ken's tall frame looked as if he could continue pitching all day, whereas Daichi seemed poised to strike at the best opportunity.

Those who were witnessing this match didn't realize it at the time, but this match would stay in their mind for a long time to come.

Without a word, Ken lifted his knee and coiled his body. His raised leg stepped forward and planted heavily in the dirt beneath him before whipping the ball out of his hand.

Ken watched the ball fly towards the plate, seemingly in slow motion.

It started slightly higher than his other pitches, yet still managed to carry the correct distance.

Daichi had noticed Ken hadn't jutted his elbow out in this pitch, yet he didn't pay it too much heed since he knew that their information was now compromised.

Instead he looked at the arcing ball that was coming towards him.

'Heh so it was a forkball after all.' He thought, a grin appearing on his features.

Seeing this, Daichi aimed his bat lower, intending to send the ball into the stands and finally get a run on the board for his team.

From his planted left foot to the deliberate twisting of his body and follow through of his arms, Daichi drummed up every bit of power available to him in order to hit the ball.

As long as he made contact, he was certain that it would be a home run.

The sound of the bat bulldozing through the air created a sharp noise which was harsh on the ear drums. It felt as if a tropical monsoon had arrived, bringing with it gale force winds.

WHOOOOOOSH

PAH

Daichi's eyes widened in shock as his bat sailed over the supposed forkball, striking against nothing but air. His gaze was on the horizon, following the path in which the ball was supposed to take after he smashed it.

There was silence for a few seconds as everyone tried to process what had happened.

"Strikeout!"

"W-WHOA"

"ORYAAAAH!"

The crowd and the Yokohama bench went wild after finally seeing an end to the duel between the two brothers. They were in a stalemate for so long that a lot of people hadn't realized they'd been holding their breath for a while now.

"C-Curveball!?"

Coach Narukami felt his eyes about to pop out of his socket as he saw ball seemingly float into the outstretched glove of the opposing catcher.

Chris too held a similar expression as he watched the aftermath of the play.

"When did he learn a curveball?"

Clearly he was unaware of the fact Ken used him as an excuse to convince the coach to let him learn the curveball.

It wasn't just him, there were others who had been paying close attention to Ken throughout the match.

"See! I told you he he had more pitches Grandpa!"

The usually soft and proper tone of the teen had changed, turning into one of excitement and vindication as she addressed her grandfather.

"Hmm, I guess you were right Miho." Hajime Takashi stated, his face filled with surprise as he stroked his goatee thoughtfully.

Meanwhile, back in Yokohama:

"AHA! I knew he would strike him out!" Tetsu jumped off his chair and pointed at the TV, clearly engrossed in the match.

Yuki who had kept a pillow cushion over her face the entire time felt her heart ache. She had not wanted to see her two sons battle against each other, mainly because there could only be one winner.

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

- Chapter 272 - 272: Fake Out (2)

Chapter 272 - 272: Fake Out (2)

However, hearing Tetsu yell such words about her son, even if it was in favor of the other, really annoyed her.

Her eyes narrowed and she threw the cushion in one swift motion, nailing him in the back of the head with precision and knocking him to the ground.

"AH"

Thud

In the next moment he got up to his feet and glared at the woman with a red face, only to see Yuki and Naomi in laughing fits.

"Hahahaha! Nice shot Yuki."

The two high fived, reveling in the hilarity that just took place.

Tetsu could only sulk quietly afterwards, feeling like a kid who had been bullied by the other kids at school.

'I just wanted to watch the damn game' He complained inwardly, crying silently.

Back on the field, Daichi had finally recovered after a few moments. He felt a wave of disappointment, yet he was happy for his brother.

He knew how much the guy had to overcome, starting from his injury. He also knew how hard he worked to get where he was, even bringing up his teammates around him.

Unknowingly, tears began to pool up in the corner of his eyes as he felt a feeling of jealousy well up from within him.

He wanted to play with his brother.

Why couldn't he have been the one catching Ken's pitches right now?

Yet as his thoughts moved there, Ken approached him and placed his large hand on his shoulder.

"Nice fight bro, you had me scared for a while there."

There was no gloating in his tone, nor any malicious undertones. Daichi could only nod, not yet having a chance to balance out his emotions. Just as he was about to turn around without saying anything, he heard his brother's voice.

"The game isn't over yet. If I see you giving up I'll beat the crap out of you."

Daichi paused for a moment, feeling the lump in his throat slowly disappear. A moment later a smile appeared on his face and he turned around to face Ken.

"Haha, I wouldn't dream of it."

After that he returned to the dugout, saying a few words to the next batter before letting him go.

"Ken figured out his forkball was compromised. He even found out what was giving it away." Daichi said to his coach.

Coach Narukami was feeling frustrated, yet hidden beneath was exasperation. Not only for turning away such a talent, but also for the fact Ken had hidden his curveball for a whole 7 innings.

In the end, he nodded and patted Daichi on the back.

"You played well under the circumstances."

It sounded like a compliment, and it was. The coach couldn't have expected anything more from Daichi, who had been a star player for him even in his first year of high school.

"Alright you lot."

He turned to face everyone in the dugout, his expression serious.

The players turned their attention to their coach. Some of the younger players looked a little demotivated, however the older one's still had faith.

"First off, I'll start by tell you that you've done well so far against a tough opponent."

Coach Narukami moved his gaze over all of his players, feeling a sense of pride. Sure they hadn't been able to get any runs, but they had been close a few times, yet were stopped by a single player.

"That being said, you shouldn't be satisfied just yet..."

He clenched his fists, feeling his old knuckles crack under the pressure.

"The game is not over. No matter how far behind we are, as long as the game is still underway, we have a chance." He said, his tone brokering no discussion.

"It's only 2 runs." Yatsuo piped up, his face turned up in determination.

"He's right. I need you all to do your best to get onto base, no matter what it takes. As long as we can do that, we have a chance to make a comeback."

"Strike"

While the coach was holding his pep talk, the game had resumed, yet he paid it no mind. He needed to make sure that his team was motivated, otherwise they had no chance in the next two innings.

"I need you all to promise me that you won't give up. Not until the final siren rings."

Everyone in the dugout looked amongst each other, ensuring that they were all on the same page before nodding towards the coach.

"Alright let's bring it in." Yatsuo took charge, holding his large hand out into the middle of the players.

Even Coach Narukami joined in, placing his hand amongst the players.

"OSAKA!"

"FIGHT!"

The Osaka players felt as if a spark had been lit underneath them, their blood boiling from their morale spiking. Unfortunately it took a little bit of a hit when the umpire yelled out something.

"Strikeout! 3 outs, changeover"

Daichi wore a wry smile as Satoshi made his way back to the dugout. However, everyone seemingly ignored their defeated compatriot and went to put on their fielding gear.

Coach Hanada wore a proud smile on his face as he welcomed everyone back to the dugout after successfully taking out the clean up batters of Osaka. His eyes focused on Ken in particular as he approached.

"That was a nice curveball. You used it at the proper time too." He commented, sticking his fist out for a fist bump.

Ken obliged, his body feeling a rush of dopamine.

"I wasn't sure how it was going to go, but it turned out well." He admitted.

It was currently the top of the 8th innings and the quiet Yuki was up to bat. They had gotten through the hard part of the game, having already faced the dangerous batters 3 times.

As long as Ken could deal with the next 6 batters, he wouldn't have to face Yatsuo or Daichi in the 9th innings. Since they were the two who had scored hits off him, it was in their best interest to keep them out of the batters box.

'We just need to hold on and then it's the finals...' Ken thought, his gaze moving to the crowd and trying to locate his father.

'If I win the finals, then dad won't have to work overseas anymore.' He thought, his mind filled with hope.

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

Chapter 273 - 273: Final Innings (1)

The Osaka team returned to the field full of enthusiasm after receiving a morale boosting pep talk from the coach. It wasn't often that their team was in such a position, yet the suffocating pitching style from Ken had forced them into a corner.

He really had shown today that he was a force to be reckoned with in High School baseball. All the doubters who had called his run in Koshien a fluke beforehand could now only bite their tongue.

Of course there were plenty of people who had jumped on the bandwagon, some even praising him as one of Japan's rising stars who would take the world by storm in the future.

Yet Ken did not care. He looked out at the field in anticipation, wanting nothing more than to win this game and get into the finals.

All for one purpose.

"Strike!"

Yatsuo seemed to have leveled up since the last innings, throwing a 155km/h fastball right into Daichi's outstretched glove. His usual stoic and somewhat scary expression had morphed.

His emotions came to the forefront as he fought with all of his might to keep Yokohama scoreless in this innings. If they were to leak any more runs, then their comeback chances would fizzle out even before they could grow.

"Strikeout!"

**

"Strikeout!"

**

"Strikeout! 3 outs, changeover"

The arena watched on in awe as Yatsuo only threw 9 pitches to take down 3 of Yokohama's batters. Yuki, Tatsuya and Jun all wore the same expression as they were left to wildly swing at the sharp pitches.

Of course it wasn't just the mighty pitching of Yatsuo, Daichi's leads were the thing that was truly giving them a headache. Imagine someone finding out your biggest flaw, and pitching it directly to it over and over.

While the three were frustrated, there was not much that they could do. However, their consolation prize was that they were leading by 2 runs.

Ken and the team returned to the field. They only needed to get 6 more outs against Osaka to secure their ticket to the finals against Koryu High.

One could say that victory was in arms reach.

Ai felt her body tense up as she watched what was happening on the field. She had been cheering so much that her voice had begun to go hoarse along with the other managers.

She'd tried to stay under the radar and not distract Ken at all throughout the game. The only time she'd spoken up was just before he went out to face his brother in the 2nd innings.

It was as if she was compelled to, seeing the mix of emotions that had appeared on Ken's face. Yet once he stepped onto the mound, he saw a smile so pure that she'd been taken aback.

Even now she could remember that peaceful smile on his face at that time. It made her feel a lot of things.

'Is that the expression you make when you achieve your goals?' she wondered.

Once Ai saw that, it was as if a door which was once closed in her mind suddenly opened, revealing the answer she'd been hiding from this whole time.

While it may have been what she was looking for, she still couldn't help but feel bitter.

Unaware of the thoughts of Ai, Ken had resumed his pitching form. He had not grown impatient, instead he was even more deadly, like a python who was tightening its grip on its prey.

"Strikeout!"

**

"Strikeout!"

**

"Strikeout!"

"3 outs, changeover!"

The final out was Tsutomo, the 8th batter. As long as Ken could get the next 3 batters out in succession, he would be able to snuff out any and all chances for Osaka to make a comeback.

Out of their full batting line up, only Yatsuo and Daichi had been fortunate enough to get a hit off him.

Thus, the top of the 9th innings started with Yokohama up to bat.

The crowd was filled with anticipation as they entered the final innings. Despite the low scoring game, no one was dissatisfied in this moment.

Rather than a High School game, this felt more like an NPB game.

"Batting 3rd, 3rd base, Makoto"

"Let's go Captain!"

"Get us some more runs!"

Makoto stepped into the batters box with a glint in his eyes. Although he'd managed to get a hit and even secure a run in his last at-bat, he still wasn't satisfied.

This was his final shot to make an impact and seal the deal for Yokohama's victory.

However, there were two large obstacles in his way.

Yatsuo and Daichi seemed more in sync than ever before as their gazes met.

They couldn't afford to give Yokohama any leniency otherwise the game would be over. Therefore, Daichi pulled out all the stops, his eyes narrowing as he called for the next ball.

Yatsuo nodded before performing his quick pitching action and sending the ball flying forwards.

The ball was fast, yet it didn't lack movement as it began to break away from the right handed Makoto.

WHOOOOSH

The muscular figure didn't hesitate to pull the trigger, twisting his body and wringing his muscles for all the strength they had.

PAH

"Strike"

The crowd cheered at the blazing cutter that beat the muscular batter. Despite being a breaking ball, it still hit 143km/h as shown on the jumbo screen.

Even Makoto had to appreciate the lethality of the pitch.

'I can still hit it though.' He thought inwardly.

He got back into position and gripped the bat tightly. He just needed some patience, otherwise he would squander the opportunity.

Daichi called for the next ball, this time a two-seam down low.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike"

'Crap.'

Makoto was starting to get a little flustered, having been baited into swinging once again. If he had have left the pitch, it probably would have been a ball.

Yet there was no point in beating himself up over it, especially since he still had another shot to get onto base. At this point he didn't care about anything but giving his team another opportunity to score.

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

Chapter 274 - 274: Final Innings (2)

Seeing Makoto's intent to hit the ball, Daichi made a bold call.

'Hmm?'

Yatsuo stared down at Daichi with a look of concern, however it soon morphed into determination as he nodded.

He had been avoiding throwing the curveball since his fingers still felt a bit numb. There was also the fact that Daichi's brother had hit him for a home run the last time he threw it.

But he also trusted his catcher.

'Here goes nothing.' He said inwardly, positioning his grip properly.

He massaged his wrist briefly, trying to bring back some feeling into his fingers. Since it was covered by the glove, no one noticed what he was doing since they would think he was adjusting them.

In one swift motion, Yatsuo completed his throwing action and floated the ball towards the plate.

'ARGH'

It was then that he felt it, like a bolt of electricity directly striking his wrist, it caused his fingers to seize up. Thankfully this had occurred after the ball had already left his hands, so the pitch was still on target.

Seeing the slower ball, Makoto's eyes lit up.

WHOOOOSH

Pah

"Ah..."

"Strikeout!"

The crowd cheered loudly at the sudden curveball and strikeout that they'd just witnessed. Yatsuo who was upon the mound wore a poker face, yet there was cold sweat pouring down his back.

Lot's of things were going through his mind at that moment, yet the thing screaming the loudest was his will to fight.

'I can't give up now!' He shouted inwardly.

Perhaps it was selfish, but he had already come so far. He wanted to lead his team to victory, paving the way for the finals.

He only needed to get two more people out and then they could counterattack.

'I don't care if I don't play in the finals... I just want to win this game, with my team. For the last time.'

Yatsuo felt as if he would only be living with regret if he gave up now. Since he was in his 3rd year, he would be forced to retire after this tournament and focus on entrance exams for University.

'Just a few more pitches... ' He stared down at his glove which hid his wrist, saying a silent prayer for it to hold out.

Daichi saw the odd reaction from Yatsuo after his pitch and felt a sense of foreboding. He could tell there was something wrong, but at the same time he was torn.

His gaze moved to Kouichi who was already warmed up in the bullpen, waiting for the directive from the coach.

'If Kouichi comes in the game, I'm not sure we can hold off their clean-up batters...'

Thus Daichi began to have a mental battle. He wanted to win the match, but he didn't want to put Yatsuo at risk.

"Batting 4th, 1st base, Hiroki"

The time was drawing near when he had to make a decision. Would he prioritize his chance of winning over the health of his pitcher?

Suddenly, his thoughts turned to Ken.

'What would I do if it was Ken on the mound instead?'

As soon as the thought entered his brain, he already knew what he had to do.

Just as he was about to call out to the umpire, he heard another slightly panicked voice call out from the mound.

"T-Timeout."

Yatsuo called out to the umpire who allowed it.

He then gestured for Daichi to come over.

The two talked upon the mound for a little bit, the contents of their discussion not known by anyone. Daichi's face turned concerned after a while, yet the pleading of Yatsuo seemed to convince him in the end.

Not long later, Daichi returned to his position behind home plate, having come up with a solution.

[I will give you a chance. One more off ball and I'll get coach to sub Kouichi in.]

Remembering his words to Yatsuo just before, Daichi let out a small sigh. He still felt a little unsure of his decision, but they were his Captain's wishes overall.

Thankfully, the guy didn't make excuses at all. He even said that he would go to the doctors after this match and even pull out of the finals if that was what was required.

'I hope I'm making the right decision.' Daichi thought inwardly.

Still feeling a little anxious, he made the call for a four-seam fastball down low.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike"

'Good good.' Daichi nodded, returning the ball back to his pitcher.

He had opted for a rather easy pitch since he was worried that something might happen. However, seeing how accurate Yatsuo was now, he felt a lot of his unease die down.

'Let's keep it up.'

WHOOOSH

DING

"Foul"

Yatsuo received the ball back once more. Thankfully he hadn't experienced any pain besides some numbness in his fingers for the last two pitches.

'As long as I'm pitching fastballs it should be fine.' He thought inwardly.

It seemed like it was tougher to hold on properly when he had a different grip on the ball. So he decided to only throw fastballs and would decline if Daichi asked for any other type of pitch.

However, Daichi didn't ask for another pitch. This time he wanted a two-seam fastball above the strike zone.

Yatsuo nodded, putting all of his focus into his next pitch.

"Hup!"

He stepped forward, his whole body like a spring that had been set free. He whipped the ball out the side, sending the ball right where Daichi asked for it.

DING

Pah

Hiroki had clipped the bottom of the ball, clearly not expecting the pitch to be so high. His face morphed into one of disappointment as he knew what would happen next.

The field fell silent for a few moments after Daichi caught the ball. He turned his attention to the umpire and showed him the ball in his glove before...

"Strikeout!"

"YES!"

Yatsuo pumped his fist in triumph after getting Hiroki out at the plate. All of the stress he'd felt before seemed to wash away as he basked in the accomplishment.

The crowd seemed energized as one of the big hitters of Yokohama were taken out.

However, that was only the 2nd out of the innings, there was still 1 more person they needed to get through.

Daichi turned his attention to the tall figure who made his way up to the batters box with a small grin tugging at the edge of his lips.

"Batting 5th, Pitcher, Ken"

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

Chapter 275 - 275: The Incident (1)

A roar of cheers assaulted the field as Ken stepped up to the batters box for possibly the last time in the match. He had played remarkably throughout the game, not allowing Osaka to get a single run.

Not only this, he was responsible for his own teams 2 runs. 1 by way of a home run, and the other through a sneaky squeeze bunt which had guaranteed the runner a way back home.

Now he had arrived to put an exclamation point on his performance.

Ken sent a cursory look to Daichi behind the plate before getting into position. Seeing the fire in his eyes was enough to put Ken at ease for now. It seemed that his brother had not given up just yet which was good.

'Now I don't have to kick his ass.' He thought with a chuckle.

He turned his attention to Yatsuo on the mound and saw his scary expression.

'Yikes, he looks like he wants to murder me.'

It was obvious that the Osaka team was desperate. They had to get Ken out no matter what and it showed.

It wasn't only Yatsuo and Daichi, the rest of the team had stern expressions on their faces as they all turned their burning gazes to him.

Daichi got into position and called for a pitch to the outside. Since Ken had surprised him in the 2nd innings, he'd essentially thrown out all of the data he'd researched on him.

Therefore he only used what he had discovered in this match.

'As long as I keep it on the outside, he won't get any big hits.' Daichi thought, placing his glove out in front of him.

Yatsuo nodded, his expression firm.

WHOOSH

DING

"Foul"

The ball went scurrying outside of first base along the ground for a foul ball. Despite the ball being so far away, Ken was able to track it down and make contact.

DING

"Foul"

Once again Daichi called for an outside ball, this time slightly higher. However, Ken once again made contact, this time sending it into the stands next to 1st base.

"Are you just gonna keep pitching outside?" Ken remarked, a grin on his face.

It seemed the question was rhetorical, as in the next moment he turned his attention back to Yatsuo. After which he moved his body closer towards the strike zone, crowding the plate.

He was challenging Daichi to go for another outside course.

Daichi frowned, feeling a little stifled.

Yet despite the goading, he still asked for another pitch to the outside, this time low and away.

"Oops."

PAH

"Ball"

Ken grinned as he leaned back and watched the ball go through to the catchers glove. He could feel that both Daichi and Yatsuo were flustered by his antics, yet he didn't care.

Mind games were a part of baseball. It felt good to be able to give Daichi a taste of his own medicine for once, instead of being on the receiving end.

Seeing Ken easily defending against the tricky pitches of the Osaka battery, his teammates couldn't help but cheer on from the dugout.

Jun, Yuta and even poor Yuki couldn't help but feel vindicated at the role reversal. Since they had been played like a fiddle, it was good to see the shoe on the other foot.

"Hit a big one Ken!"

"ORYAAH"

Hearing the cheering of his teammates, Ken felt full of confidence. He was pretty sure that he'd completed most of the missions for the Koshien Tournament, but it wouldn't hurt to get another home run added to his tally.

He once again crowded the plate, yet this time his aura shifted. It was as if the playful Ken had been replaced with a viper who was poised to strike out with lethality the moment something got within its range.

Daichi's expression darkened. He could feel a tremendous pressure and fighting spirit coming from Ken's tall figure.

Despite being up on the scoreboard, it looked like his brother would not pull any punches.

'Good! That's how baseball should be.' Daichi thought, feeling his spirits rise.

He had always looked up to his brother, particularly when it came to his work ethic and ideals. Sometimes it felt like Ken was much older than his real age, yet other times he seemed young and carefree.

Daichi had decided to respond in the only way that he knew how.

Head on.

'First off, I need to get him off the plate.' He thought.

He called for a fastball inside, placing his glove right next to Ken's chest. Since he was crowding the plate, it would still be a strike if he didn't get out of the way in time.

Yatsuo didn't question Daichi's decision. In fact he commended his will to call for such a pitch against his own brother. It just showed how committed he was to trying to win the game.

He paused for a moment and adjusted his grip before taking a deep breath in through his nose and out his mouth.

'Just a couple more pitches.' Yatsuo said inwardly, staring at his right hand.

Yatsuo set his feet and nodded towards Daichi behind home plate. He took one last look at the position of the glove and entered his pitching form.

Despite pitching for a full 9 innings, his whole body still felt light. His quick and effective pitching motion made great use of his bulky figure, not putting a lot of pressure on his body.

From the long step forward to his throwing action, nothing felt out of place.

At least, until it came time to release the ball from his fingertips.

Yatsuo felt a tremendous shock run from his wrist in both directions. It shot towards his fingers and then up to his arm, causing him to call out in pain.

"ARGH"

Time seemed to slow down as Yatsuo fell onto his knees, clutching his wrist in pain.

However, in the next moment, there was a sickening thud that rang out from the field, turning everyone's blood cold.

"K-KEN!!!"

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

Chapter 276 - 276: The Incident (2)

[User has sustained blunt force trauma to the head, shutting down brain functions...]

Mika's voice was the last thing that Ken heard as he suddenly lost consciousness.

"KEN!!"

The whole of the dugout was about to run onto the field before Coach Hanada did his best to block the stairs.

"WAIT HERE!" He bellowed, snapping the teens out of their frenzy.

His eyes were full of worry as he looked onto the field.

"Medic! Please, please get the paramedics."

Daichi grabbed his brother who had slumped into a pile right in front of him and felt hot tears run down his face. His body was shaking violently as he panicked.

The whole arena was in shock at what just took place. One moment they were watching one of the best matches of the tournament, and in the next tragedy struck.

"M-MY BOY!"

Chris cried out from the stands, his heart beating wildly in his chest. Those in the surroundings who heard his calls felt a sick dread well up from within them.

They couldn't imagine seeing their own child be hit by a fastball to the head.

He frantically tried to make his way past the crowded seats and onto the field.

Meanwhile on the field, the paramedics arrived and tended to Ken. Daichi was asked to move away and give them some space to work, something that was very difficult for him to do.

He stood up and anxiously moved around, hot tears pouring down his cheeks as he paced in worry.

Yatsuo who had recovered from the shock that ran up his arm, suddenly saw Ken lying on the ground surrounded by paramedics. He fell to his knees again in pure and utter shock, his throat feeling dry.

Only after a few minutes did the paramedics call for a stretcher to be brought onto the field. Since he was still unconscious, they needed to get him into the shade and away from the prying eyes of the crowd.

Chris managed to somehow get onto the field, or at least to the edge of the field until he was stopped by security. It took all of his self control to not blow past these guys and attend to his son.

As Ken was getting taken off the field in a stretcher, applause rained down from the stands, showing appreciation for his valiant performance throughout the game.

Daichi's eyes followed Ken's figure, only to see his father standing worriedly by the side.

His heart felt as if a knife had gone through it and he suddenly couldn't hold his emotions together. An intense feeling of guilt and remorse flooded through his body, threatening to overwhelm him.

His vision began to blur from the tears which wouldn't stop falling from his face.

Just as he thought he would have a panic attack, he felt a strong pair of arms pull him close into an embrace.

'Huh?'

Daichi's mind went blank as he felt the warmth surround him like an all encompassing blanket.

"It's alright son. Ken will be okay."

Hearing his Dad's voice, all of the fear and guilt poured out of him in the form of tears. It was as if he had found a safe space to vent all his negative emotions on, something that he had never had before growing up.

Only after a few moments did his cries grow weaker.

Earlier, Chris had wanted to rush to Ken who was on the stretcher, however he knew that he would only serve as a hindrance to the medical professionals on the scene.

That's when he saw Daichi who was in a bad state upon the field. He moved forward to go comfort his son, but was quickly blocked by the security.

It was then that his tall frame seemed to grow in size and his tone became icy.

"Get out of my way." He said sternly, causing the guards to shrink back a little.

"Let him through."

Coach Hanada who had followed the stretcher to the medic area saw what was happening between Chris and the two guards. The game was already in shambles at the moment and he didn't want a scene to break out.

Although he wasn't in a position to give such an order, the guards reluctantly let the tall man pass, slightly out of fear of violence.

Chris sent him a word of thanks with his eyes before pleading in a broken tone.

"Look after Ken for a moment please."

He nodded, though his expression was grave.

Elsewhere on the field, the umpires had called a stop to the match while the medics had attended the injured player. Since it was the last game of the day, it wouldn't effect anything else on the schedule.

The Yokohama team were beside themselves as they were forced to wait in the dugout while Ken was receiving attention. Ai in particular looked heartbroken as the whole scene played out.

She was currently crying in Yuko's embrace, her ample bosom creating a safe haven for Ai's tears.

There was a somber mood on the field as Coach Narukami approached Yatsuo on the mound who was currently on his knees in shock. The 3rd year player didn't even notice his coach who had closed the gap.

"Give me your hand." He said calmly.

Only now did Yatsuo see the outstretched hand of the coach. Without a word he complied, placing his large hand in the older man's.

The Coach's hands explored every part of his fingers and knuckles, finally stopping on the wrist. He pressed down gently, only to force Yatsuo to suck in a cold breath of air in pain.

"Do you feel any numbness in your fingers?" He asked calmly.

Yatsuo nodded.

"Is it a shooting pain from your wrist? Almost like a shock?"

The big guy nodded once more, which was followed by a long silence.

"How long?"

"..."

"Since the start of Koshien."

Coach Narukami looked at his player and felt a mixture of emotions. He was sad that Yatsuo hadn't confided in him about his injury, yet also angry that he had put another person in danger because of it.

Not only did the coach feel like he had failed his team, but he had also jeopardized much much more.

Without a word, he walked back towards the umpire, his footsteps seeming heavier than usual. He tapped the official on the shoulder and said some words, causing the expression on their face to warp in shock.

"You what!?"

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

Chapter 277 - 277: Awaken (1)

The sounds of tapping keyboards filled his ears as he stared blankly into the monitor sitting in front of him. A spreadsheet which he had been working on for seemingly months, taunted him with its broken formulas and corrupted data sets.

Ken sat at his computer feeling his soul get sucked dry by the boring office job he'd been employed at for over 2 years. 4 years of university wasted on a median paying role within a consumer goods company.

His head was pounding as he tried to fix whatever mess the bosses had made while last using his spreadsheet. Out of habit, he rubbed his right shoulder trying to sooth the pain.

'Huh?'

He almost recoiled in shock as he realized that his right shoulder wasn't hurting at all. For 7 years he had been in constant pain, so much that it had plagued him every moment that he was awake.

Ken tried to think of what could have cured him, yet the moment he did, the headache he was experiencing throbbled in response.

DING

He heard an alert come from the computer, grabbing his attention.

"An article?"

He opened up the email that just so happened to pop up in front of him which read, "Prodigy catcher Daichi Suzuki wins the Japan Series Trophy for the Hanshin Tigers with a walk of Grand Slam"

He frowned seeing the familiar name, yet a wave of happiness filled him.

"Maybe I should have gone to the game." He mumbled, feeling a little guilty.

Ken cradled his head after receiving yet another wave of pain from the headache he was experiencing. It was so bad that he was having trouble remembering what day it was.

"Do I need to go home?"

Weirdly, when he said the word home, the faces of both his mother and father appeared in his mind, making him feel odd.

'But I haven't lived with my parents since High School.' He thought, once again feeling the headache throbbing.

DING

Before he could follow this line of thought even more, Ken heard another notification through the computer. This time it was an instant message from one of his colleagues.

[Mika: Extensive damage detected to the temporal lobe. Recommend using Recovery Elixir]

"Huh? Temporal lobe? Recovery Elixir?"

He looked at the jargon that his obviously sleep deprived colleague had written and had half a mind to ignore it completely. However, he needed this job so he didn't want to put himself in a bad position with the bosses.

[Ken: Um sure. I'm not IT, but have you tried turning it off and on again?]

He breathed out a sigh of relief, hoping that that would end the matter.

"What's the time?" He mumbled, pulling out his phone from his pocket.

"Hmm? Is that my old phone?" Seeing the flip phone that he used to always carry around in High School, he felt surprised.

Things were becoming very weird in this moment, causing him to feel a hint of anxiety creeping up. He stood up and looked around, only to see an empty office around him.

This was even creepier considering he could still hear the tapping away of keyboards from the unattended office cubicles. While his mind was trying to process what was happening, his head was continuously throbbing.

The pain was so great that it made him feel a huge wave of nausea threaten to overcome him.

DING

[Mika: Time is running out, please confirm you wish to use the Recovery Elixir]

[Y/N]

Ken saw Mika's message pop up on his screen, demanding an answer. He clutched at his head as the pain was becoming unbearable.

"DAMN IT! WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?" He screamed out, on the verge of losing consciousness.

There was a sinking sensation in his stomach as he once more stared at the screen shining in front of him. He had a feeling that if he lost consciousness, he wouldn't wake up again.

Fear instantly overtook his senses as he slammed his head on the keyboard while trying to stay awake. He tried to think of happier times, yet they were blocked by the severe pain in his mind.

[Warning: Intracranial pressure increasing. Please use Recovery Elixir]

[Y/N]

This time the voice came from inside his mind, a monotonous one which seemed to hold no emotion whatsoever. Ken gripped both sides of his head, feeling as if it was going to be torn apart from the inside.

"YES! YES! JUST PLEASE MAKE IT STOP"

He screamed in agony, begging for the pain to go away.

[Confirmed. Using Recovery Elixir]

At those words the pain instantly subsided, bringing with it a wave of warmth that he had never experienced in his lifetime. It was as if all of his pain and worries had disappeared, birthing him anew.

'Is this what death feels like?' He wondered.

However, in the next moment his consciousness went dark.

The sound of rhythmic beeps filled the small room located in the children's hospital wing in Osaka. Upon the bed lay a figure with bandages upon their head, looking peaceful as if they were sleeping soundly.

Chris walked into the room and saw his son who was just playing baseball not even a few hours ago, now bedridden. Daichi who was clutching his brothers hand was currently asleep, resting his head upon the side of the bed.

He felt a lump in his throat as he saw the scene in front of him.

The preliminary results weren't great. Not only had Ken received a mild traumatic brain injury, the Doctors had also hinted their may be bleeding in his brain. If things did not go well, a clot could form and create increased pressure on the brain.

Never in a million years had he expected his sons much awaited match to end in such a manner.

Chris took a look at his watch before quickly leaving the room. His wife should be arriving to the hospital any moment.

As soon as she saw the incident on TV, she had rushed home and grabbed a few things before catching the first flight to Osaka. No parent would be able to sit idly by once something like this had happened to their child.

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

Chapter 278 - 278: Awaken (2)

Ken felt groggy as he tried to open his eyes. The afternoon sun was shining through the windows upon his face, giving off warm sensation.

He looked around the room and was shocked to see that he was in the hospital.

The first thing that he felt was a sweaty palm attached to his own hand. He was about to yank it away until he recognized the culprit.

"Daichi?"

His voice was hoarse and his throat was dry, likely from not getting enough water.

Hearing his name, Daichi stirred from his slumber. He gripped onto Ken's hand tightly as he lifted his gaze to see his brother watching him in puzzlement.

Ken could see the tear stains left upon Daichi's baby face, a sign that he had been bawling for some time now.

"K-Ken!?"

Daichi's eyes lit up with pure joy as he saw Ken's dumbfounded expression. He didn't care that he was being stared at weirdly, he moved forward for a hug.

Thankfully his brain was thinking straight and he only hugged Ken's waist, even then he made sure to be gentle. His tear ducts which should have been empty, once again let the flood gates open.

Ken could only smile gently as he patted his little brother's back. While he was still feeling a little groggy, his brain was working in the background to piece together all the information.

He could guess what had happened by the bandages on his head and the fact that he was in the hospital. However, the burning question on his mind was, what happened to the game?

Did they win or lose?

While he could ask Daichi, he felt it would be a little insensitive in this moment.

'Haaah, I'm such a good guy. Worrying about my brother when I'm the one admitted to hospital.' Ken lamented inwardly, letting out a small chuckle.

A cute nurse who had just walked in to check up on Ken suddenly froze as she entered the room, her gaze focused on him like she'd seen a ghost.

"Hi there."

Feeling a little awkward, Ken waved and said hello to break the ice.

"I-I-I'll go get the D-Doctor."

With that she rushed out the door with as much haste as possible.

Ken felt a grin touch the corner of his lips after seeing the funny sight.

While he had a moment, he remembered the state he'd been in while unconscious. For some reason his mind reverted back to his old life as an office worker, with a few differences.

He was sure that there was no real deep meaning behind it, yet he thought it was interesting. If anything it made him not want to settle for such a life in the future even more so.

While deep in thought, Ken heard the sound of two people talking as they approached the room. He could instantly recognize them as his father and mother.

'Ah crap, here we go.'

"They said that he might not wake up for another—" Chris's words were cut off abruptly as he saw his son's smiling face looking at him when he walked through the door.

"Kenny!"

Yuki dropped her bags and threw herself at Ken, her eyes already moistened by tears. She had been so worried all this time that she'd never be able to see his smiling face again.

Chris was too shocked in this moment to register what was going on. He had heard from the Doctor that things weren't looking great and that they might be in for a long road to recovery.

The only thing that he could do in that moment was to thank god for the miracle that had brought his son back to him. While he didn't know all the details, the fact that Ken was already awake could only be a good thing right?

Disregarding any information he'd heard, Chris walked forward and joined his family in the hug.

"Welcome back Ken." He muttered, feeling the stress and anxiety drift away from him in that moment.

A few minutes later, the Doctor walked into the room after hearing what the nurse had reported to him. At first he hadn't believed her, yet now there were no doubts in his mind.

He saw Ken sitting up and talking with his family, no signs of pain on his face.

"H-Hi. I'm Doctor Hige, the one assigned to your son."

After an awkward introduction, he went through a physical evaluation with Ken before checking all of his vital signs. By the time he had finished, he was in shock.

Not only was Ken healthy, there were no signs that he'd ever been struck by a ball in the first place.

"I just want to remove your bandage if you don't mind." He said, reaching up and pulling it off gently.

Doctor Hige held his breath as he took the last bit of the bandages off, only to breathe a sigh of relief. The place where the ball had hit showed a lump, evidence that he was not in fact going crazy.

"We'll have to run a few more tests, but I think your son is more than healthy." He said, sounding relieved.

"Thank you so much Doctor." Yuki said, her face turned up in a beautiful smile.

Once the Doctor left, everyone breathed a sigh of relief, including Ken.

He had been worried that there would be no evidence of the ball striking his head thanks to the Recovery Elixir he'd taken. Yet it seemed that the system was not stupid, and did not want to draw attention to itself.

So it left a lump and bruise at the site, in order to cover its tracks.

'Thanks for all your help Mika.' Ken said to his AI friend.

[You're welcome]

Ken smiled. That was the first time he'd heard a response like that from Mika, and she sounded pleased.

With that out of the way, Ken decided to ask the question that had been burning in his mind since he'd awoken.

"What happened with our game? Who won?"

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

Chapter 279 - 279: Forfeit (1)

"What!?"

Ken's face changed to one of shock.

Daichi nodded, his expression rather forlorn.

"When he found out that Yatsuo had been keeping his injury a secret, Coach Narukami went straight to the umpire and forfeited."

Though he was regretful that their match had ended in such a way, Daichi was just happy that his brother was okay.

The amount of panic and anxiety he had experienced throughout the past few hours were more than he'd felt in his entire life.

Chris seemed to be satisfied with the decision of the Osaka coach, although he still thought that what the pitcher had done was far too reckless.

The problem was, it wasn't too uncommon for players to hide such injuries in the Japanese High School circuit. It wasn't so much Yatsuo's fault as it was the current state of the competition.

Just thinking of all the talented youths who had thrown their future careers down the drain in such a manner was enough to warrant a big change.

Ken on the other hand felt slightly embarrassed. He too was another player who had hidden his shoulder injury from his parents and the coaching staff in his previous life.

Therefore he felt as if he was not qualified to speak so morally on the matter.

After a while, Ken's face lit up slightly.

"So we've made it into the finals huh?" He said, his tone light.

"Does that mean I can play in the—"

Ken didn't even get to finish the rest of his sentence as he felt both Chris and Yuki's icy gaze drill into him. They both looked as if they wouldn't hesitate to incapacitate him in order to keep him in hospital for as long as it takes.

"Ha ha ha, I was just kidding" Ken said, sticking his tongue out.

However inwardly he was crying.

'I'm fully healed! I swear.'

Both his parents expressions softened a little. The fact that Ken was able to joke around still was a miracle in itself, therefore they were not too mad.

Of course if he was really being serious about playing, they would do everything in their power to stop it.

The four then chatted for a while longer on different subjects, creating a harmonious atmosphere. This continued right until the time for visiting hours was over.

Despite being fully healthy thanks to the Recovery Elixir, Ken had to stay another night for further testing and monitoring. Head injuries were not a minor thing, therefore his parents readily agreed when given the option.

Just before they were about to leave, Ken spoke.

Since he would not be able to play in the finals, he wanted to bring this up.

"Dad... About your job overseas."

Chris turned and saw his son struggling to find the words. He knew exactly what he wanted to ask and did not let him continue.

"Don't worry Ken. Your Dad will be quitting the moment we get back home." He said with a small smile.

It wasn't just Ken's eyes that lit up, both Yuki and Daichi's expressions brightened as they heard the news. Without a word, they both hugged him tightly, leaving Ken with a bright smile as he watched them.

He breathed out a sigh of relief, now no longer feeling remorse about not playing in the finals. After all, Ken's main drive to win was because of his deal with his father.

Now that it had been settled, it didn't mean as much to him.

Of course he still wanted to win, but he could only rely on his teammates for the final match.

Chris accepted the hugs of his wife and son and couldn't help but smile. In truth, the moment he saw what happened to Ken, his mind had been made up to stay in Japan.

If he was in America when the incident happened it would have taken far too long to come back.

Seeing how his family reacted only further served to let him know he'd made the right decision.

"Okay Ken, we better go now before we get kicked out. We'll be back in the morning and hopefully you can be discharged." Chris said with a smile.

"Dad, Mom. Do you mind if I talk to Ken alone quickly?"

Daichi asked softly. It seemed that he had something to get off his chest.

"Okay, we'll wait outside for you." Chris responded, leading Yuki out the door.

Yuki was a little puzzled, but she still did as instructed. A lot of things had happened, but for some reason she felt a lot closer to her family in this moment.

Once the two left, Daichi turned to Ken, his face full of emotion.

Before a word was spoken, Daichi bowed at 90 degrees towards his brother.

"Ah, w-what are you doing?" Ken panicked a little. He wasn't sure what Daichi had wanted to say to him, but he sure didn't expect this sort of reaction.

However he didn't receive an answer right away.

"I-I'm sorry Ken. It's all my fault."

Daichi balled his hands into fists so hard that his fingers drew blood from his palms. It could be seen that he was carrying so much guilt for the whole ordeal, despite finding out that Ken was now fine.

Ken let out a sigh, somewhat seeing where this was going.

"First of all, raise your head. Let's talk about this face to face." He stated. It would be difficult to get to the bottom of things if things stayed like this.

Only after a few moments did Daichi finally lift his head. His expression was full of remorse, and he was not even able to look Ken in the eye.

"Okay good. Now tell me why you think it's your fault?" Ken asked in a calm tone.

He let Daichi narrate the story of what happened. How he had guessed about something being wrong with Yatsuo, yet still not stepping in and calling for a substitution.

Also the fact that he had called for an inside ball when Ken was crowding the plate, which ultimately led to the ball being close enough to hit him in the head in the first place.

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

Chapter 280 - 280: Forfeit (2)

Ken listened silently, not interrupting his brother at all.

Only when he had finally finished did Ken open his mouth.

"Did you tell Yatsuo to throw the ball at my head?" He asked simply.

Daichi recoiled at the question, his face turning up into a frown. "Of course not!"

Ken couldn't help but laugh at the exaggerated response, his spirits rising.

"Well then how the hell was it your fault? It was simply a freak accident. Sometimes these things happen in baseball, that's why they make you wear a helmet." Ken stated, placing his hand on Daichi's shoulder.

"But... If I had have—"

"No buts. I'm not saying what you did was good or even ethical, but I can say wholeheartedly that you were not at fault for the accident." Ken interrupted his brother, putting an end to the matter.

"Ken..."

Ken's face turned up in his usual warm smile, "I'm fine lil bro. Stop beating yourself up okay?"

Daichi paused for a moment, as if he was processing his brother's words. He then leaned forward and pulled Ken into an embrace, almost squeezing the life out of him.

"Hnng. Yep, ok big boy... hug it out."

Ken felt the strength of Daichi and felt the air get squeezed out of his lungs. He did his best to hold on, even consoling him and patting him on the back.

"Thank you."

"Visiting hours are over now, you'll have to come back tomorrow morning."

The feminine voice broke through the atmosphere, causing Daichi to let go of his vice grip.

Ken sucked in some air to replace what he had lost in the exchange before breathing out a sigh of relief. He waved to Daichi who was ushered out of the room by the nurse.

Thankfully he could see that his brother's expression had lightened significantly. It was good that he'd brought it up now instead of burying it deep down to fester.

Now that he thought about it, the old Daichi from his previous life would have likely done exactly that.

"Haaaah, I wonder how everyone else is holding up?" He mumbled, letting out a long sigh.

He looked around the room briefly, only to see his bag that he'd packed for the trip to Osaka. However, since he was hooked up to some monitors, he couldn't exactly move at this moment.

"We'll be serving dinner in a few minutes. Are you hungry?"

The nurse returned after seeing Daichi off. She looked to be in her late twenties and quite skinny. If it wasn't for her height and the long hair tied up in a bun, she could probably pass as a small man.

Keeping his thoughts to himself, Ken nodded vehemently.

"Ah miss nurse. Could I possibly be taken off these monitors? I'd also like to use my phone." He asked nicely.

"You'll have to wait for the Doctor I'm afraid."

Around 15 minutes later, Ken received his dinner which was an even spread of rice and a few side dishes. While it wasn't as luxurious as his mother's cooking, he didn't have any complaints.

Perhaps it was a little on the small side for his kind of appetite, but it would only be for one night.

After getting the go ahead from the bearded Doctor Hige, he was free to grab his phone and go to the nearest phone friendly zone. In Japan's hospitals, phones needed to be switched off unless in one of these zones, to prevent the wireless frequencies from messing with the medical equipment.

Ken walked out onto the balcony, feeling the fresh breeze on his face. The sun was already almost over the horizon, painting the landscape a deep orange.

The streetlights were beginning to light up as the city of Osaka transitioned from day to night.

As he looked out, he felt the sudden urge to drink some alcohol. Perhaps it was because he had accomplished what he wanted to, or maybe because he had a near death experience.

Either way, he would have to wait until he turned 20 to do such things.

As Ken turned his attention to his phone and turned it on, it began to vibrate continuously, his notifications piling up as the messages rolled in.

"Ah... This might take some time to respond to all of them." He murmured.

Only after around 30 seconds did they stop rolling in.

Just as he was about to go through and reply to them, his phone started buzzing once more.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ

"Hmm? Whose number is that?" he murmured, not recognizing it.

It wasn't surprising since he mainly communicated by email. The only phone numbers he had in his phone were his family members.

"Hello?"

"Ken! I was so worried. Are you okay?" The voice was obviously female, and one that he knew well.

"Ai? Y-Yeah I'm okay. Thank you for worrying about me." He replied, feeling his cheeks redden a little.

"Wait, how did you get my number?" Ken blurted out, unable to read the atmosphere.

"Your mom called my mom to give her an update. She then sent me your number after I kept asking." Ai sounded a little embarrassed, but it was overshadowed by her obvious relief.

"Ah, that makes sense. How is everyone doing?"

"They're a lot better after I gave them an update. We are going to visit you in the hospital tomorrow morning."

Ken shook his head vehemently. He did not want the whole damn baseball team packed into his small room. He could just imagine the poor hospital staff who would have to deal with their rowdy group.

"No need. I'll be heading back to the residence tomorrow after I'm discharged, I'll catch up with everyone then." He stated.

The two then talked for a while longer before Ken hung up. After chatting to Ai he started to feel a bit better, she didn't even talk about the finals so as not to upset him.

'She's so thoughtful' he commented inwardly with a smile.

Even though he was not upset about not getting to compete in the finals, he still appreciated that she cared enough not to mention it.

With that, he ignored all of the other messages and headed back to his room.

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