

# Major League System

## Chapter 301 - 301: Preliminary Selection (1)

FWHEE

"Alright that's enough, everyone make your way over here." Chris blew his whistle and got the attention of everyone who was busy running laps.

A cacophony of relieved grunts and groans was heard as the players finally ended their run and made their way over to where the coaches were.

Ken placed his hands on his head as he tried to stabilize his breathing. Since his stamina was high it didn't take long for him to compose himself.

Unfortunately not everyone had monstrous stamina like him. Hiroki was okay since he'd trained with Ken for a long time, but Daichi looked like he'd just run a marathon.

It didn't help that they'd been forced to do drill after drill for the past 4 hours.

While he could have dealt with the constant workouts, the real issue was that he had no idea how he was performing. Not once throughout the day had their results been leaked.

Now that he thought about it, Coach Takashi had barely said any words since his speech at the start of everything. His father had been the one directing all of the players, in tandem with the other staff members who would take down their scores.

"Take a seat and catch your breath." Chris said, giving them a small smile.

Out of all the coaching staff, his father was the only one who gave off a sense of warmth, albeit a lot less than he did at home. Since Ken didn't want to cause any disturbances, he treated his father as a coach only in their interactions.

It wouldn't be good if the other players thought he had an unfair advantage.

Coach Takashi waltzed out in front of everyone, his face showing no emotion. He gestured to one of the staff who brought him a clipboard.

"Alright. If I call out your name, come and grab a red bib."

Hearing the coach's words, everyone suddenly tensed up. Now was the moment where they could see how well they performed against the other players.

"Riku Sato."

The smiling teen from earlier got up quickly and headed over to the staff member with the bibs. He quickly placed the red bib on and stood next to the coach in front of everyone.

It was clear that it was not his first time going through this process since no one had told them to remain up front after receiving a bib.

"Ichiro Kimura."

A teen with long hair tied up in a ponytail stood up from the group and made his way forward. He collected his own bib and stood next to Riku.

"Hiroki Kondo."

Ken's eyes lit up as he finally heard a familiar name. He reached out and patted his friend on the back with glee before watching him head up to collect his bib.

"Kuro Tojo."

"Akimitsu Jin."

Ken waited patiently as a few more names were called out. The gloomy guy he'd seen earlier and the one with the shaved head were now among the 7 players lined up next to the coach.

"Ken Takagi."

Coach Takashi's deep voice called out his name, causing Ken to almost leap up in joy. Thankfully he managed to contain himself before heading up to join the others.

As he went to stand beside the other players, he noticed something on the back of the bibs, causing his eyes to widen. However, he had no time to dwell on it as the coach continued calling out names.

"Satoshi Subaru."

"Masayuki Yamazaki."

This continued for a while before there were only 8 people left seated on the ground in front of him.

Ken's gaze met with Daichi whose name had not been called. He felt a bitter taste in his mouth in that moment, however he still held some form of hope.

There was another figure from Koshien that he recognized in the group of players remaining. It was Kei, the delinquent pitcher.

"Gentleman, if I did not call your name it means that you are not currently selected for the National Team..."

He paused briefly, letting his words sink in.

"However, you still have another day left to show me that your skills make up for your lack of athleticism. After all, baseball isn't just about how much of an athlete you are..."

Daichi let out a visible sigh of relief after finding out he still had another chance. While he thought that his fitness was good, it was clear that his athleticism did not match up to the best in the nation.

"That's all for today. There will be a bus that will take us all back to the place we'll be staying tonight. Use this opportunity to stretch your muscles and cool down."

With that, the coach walked off the field, flanked by the other staff members.

Once adjourned, the players did as they were told and began to stretch their burning muscles.

Ken and Hiroki both returned to where Daichi was. It was a little awkward since he wasn't wearing a bib, but Daichi did well to not make them feel bad.

"Don't worry about me, today was just physical drills. When it comes to playing baseball, I've got a lot more of a chance." He said with a grin.

This put the two at ease and they began to join in on the stretching routine together.

"Hey what's with the number on your back?" Hiroki asked a few minutes later.

Only when stretching did he finally see that there was the number 8 on Ken's bib.

"Wait, does mine have a number also?"

He turned around and showed his back which depicted the number 3.

"Maybe it's based on your results today?" Daichi asked, scratching his head a little.

"Well it makes sense. The number 1 position is reserved for the Ace of the team, yet Riku isn't a pitcher. I can't think of any other reason why they numbered us as such." Ken added.

If that was the case, Ken was a little surprised that Hiroki had scored so high. Then again, fitness and athleticism weren't directly correlated.

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

## **Chapter 302 - 302: Preliminary Selection (2)**

Of course the more physically fit one was, the more their athleticism could shine.

Take Ken for example, he had an SS grade in all of his Physical Fitness attributes. According to the system, that was at least the college grade, yet he was placed in the middle of the pack.

This was because his body wasn't naturally athletic. While he had the height and fitness to make up for it, his vertical leap wasn't all that great, nor was his lateral movements.

Grumble~

"Ah man I'm hungry after all that." Daichi said in the middle of his stretch.

The afternoon sun in addition to the tough workout was enough to expend majority of one's energy. He was inwardly hoping that their residence was not too far away and that it served decent food.

"Where are we staying anyway?" Hiroki asked. He didn't know Tokyo well and since it was a last minute call up for him, he was left clueless.

"We'll be staying at the nearby Tokyo University Campus."

Riku seemed to overhear the grumbling of Daichi's stomach and had walked over, wearing his trademark grin.

"Wow really? I'm surprised that they would let a bunch of High School students stay there." Hiroki remarked, feeling rather impressed.

"Well, we've stayed there every time so far and they don't seem to mind." Riku shrugged, clearly not too concerned.

"Finish up your stretches, the bus will be here in a second."

"Aye aye sir." Ken did his best impression of a soldier's salute, which looked odd since he was currently stretching out his hips on the ground.

"Pffft."

Both Hiroki and Daichi stifled a laugh, only holding back because they were in the presence of one of their seniors.

"Hehehe, you're a funny guy. I like you." Riku replied, his grin growing wider.

After he left, the two began to give Ken strife for his earlier display.

"Aye aye? Are you a pirate?"

"Hahaha."

Ken couldn't help but be infected by the laughter, feeling a smile touch the corner of his lips. Despite the circumstances, it was great that they could have a good time while under such pressure.

"Everyone! Grab your stuff and let's get to the bus."

Chris's deep voice roared out from the other side of the field, grabbing the attention of the players. Everyone wrapped up what they were doing and jogged over to get their bags before heading onto the bus.

Since no one had had time to shower, they were still stuck in their sweaty uniforms.

PSHHH PSHHH

Thankfully, Ken was always ready for situations like this. Ever since he'd started walking home with Ai after practice, he'd forged the habit of bringing his deodorant with him wherever he went.

"Ah, let me borrow some too." Daichi said, letting out a sigh of relief once the cool air touched his skin.

"Mind if I have some too?"

Ken almost jumped in fright as he turned to see who had asked the question. Kuro Tojo with his pale skin and gloomy features suddenly appeared in front of him, looking like he'd just arisen from the grave.

"A-Ah sure man, here you go." Ken handed over the spray, trying to act normal.

The teen sprayed himself briefly, being careful not to use too much. He then respectfully handed the deodorant back with two hands and bowed slightly.

"Much appreciated Ken, let's get along in the future."

After saying these words, he turned around and walked onto the bus, leaving Ken and the others in slight disbelief.

"That guy... was kinda nice?" Hiroki muttered, surprise evident in his tone.

Both Ken and Daichi nodded.

"I guess we can't judge a book by its cover..."

The three were the last ones to get on the bus and had to sit up the front. Though they didn't seem to mind.

"Alright, everyone here?" Ken's dad hopped onto the bus and began to count the teens in his head. After ensuring that no one was missing, he spoke to the bus driver briefly before alighting from the bus.

Ken and Daichi had arrived in their dad's car, which made sense why he didn't ride on the bus with them.

After a few moments, the bus doors closed and then they began to move.

Thankfully, the University was not far away, only taking around 10 minutes to arrive from the field they'd been training at.

Once they arrived and everyone had gotten off the bus, they were met with a youthful girl who looked to be in her late teens. She wore the same clothes as the National Team staff and wore a serious expression.

She had long black hair was tied up into a practical bun, contrasting with her fair skin. Her green eyes seemed to scrutinize the players, seemingly able to see through the fabric of their clothes, inspecting their body structure.

A few of the players instantly felt insecure, including Ken and Daichi whose faces had already turned a shade of red in response to the probing.

Daichi's eyes seemed to glaze over as he stared at the well proportioned figure and beautiful features of the girl in front of them. He felt his heart beat a little faster in response.

"Miho, why do you always look at us like we're a piece of meat." Riku stated, letting out a light chuckle as he moved to walk past her.

The woman named Miho rolled her eyes in response, before replying.

"I fear for the current state of Japanese baseball if you were the best outfielder we could find again this year." Her words were filled with sass, as her expression turned annoyed.

"There there, a lady must remain calm and collected." Riku patted her head on the way past, a wide smile plastered on his face.

"Hmph." Miho puffed her cheeks in annoyance and sent her leg kicking out towards Riku on the way past.

"Hahaha."

However, he seemed to be expecting it and dashed forward, making her kick nothing but air.

The players who were attending the National Tryouts for the first time were flabbergasted by the display.

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

## **Chapter 303 - 303: Dorms (1)**

Miho finally managed to compose herself after a few moments. This year would be Riku's 3rd year on the National Team, so they had some familiarity with each other. He almost felt like a big brother the way that he annoyed her so much.

Unfortunately, she had lost a lot of face while dealing with his antics, leaving the newcomers with questionable expressions.

"Ahem. My name is Miho and I'll be in charge of your nutrition while you're competing with the National Team. Please head inside and pick a dorm in the west wing."

Once she said this she smiled sweetly, painting a completely different picture than the one they had experienced earlier.

Daichi seemed even more enamored by her smile, his cheeks reddening even further.

Ken who was about a foot away from Daichi could feel the heat emanating from his face, causing his eyes to widen in shock.

'Damn, is this love at first sight?' He thought inwardly.

Before his brother embarrassed himself, Ken quickly nudged him in the arm and got his attention.

"Let's head in and grab a room." He said, adjusting the bag on his shoulder.

"Ah, yeah sure."

Daichi suddenly snapped out of it, though he still seemed a little shaken. He had never experienced such a situation before throughout his entire life.

Ken made sure to push his brother on the outside as they walked past so he wouldn't make a fool of himself. However, Miho's gaze caught his own before she sent a soft smile his way, full of unknown meaning.

'Eh? Why did she look at me like that?'

However, Miho's mind was currently filled with other thoughts.

'He's tall and has plenty of muscular growth potential. No wonder he can throw so fast.'

Miho's eyes were sparkling as she watched Ken's retreating figure, not even noticing Daichi who was walking next to him.

As the players made their way into the building, there were another couple of staff members to direct them to the west wing where their rooms were located.

Ken, Daichi and Hiroki made their way down the long hallway and could already see some players getting into their rooms. Each room had two beds and two desks with a small TV in the corner.

Since there were 24 players, they were allocated 12 rooms from the University. This led to a situation where their group would have to split up, with one person joining one of the other players.

Hiroki knew that he was at a disadvantage since the two guys with him were literally brothers, so he pulled the only trick at his disposal.

"How about we play rock, paper, scissors to see who has to split up?"



Ken's eyes narrowed at the sneaky guy who would rather leave things up to chance than be voted out altogether.

Daichi agreed, still half in a daze thanks to falling under love's spell, leaving Ken with no choice but to adhere to the man's wishes.

"Alright, here we go..."

"First comes rock, Janken Pon!"

Ken threw out scissors, hoping to cut off at least one of his competitors. However, his face turned to one of horror as he stared at the two large fists that the two had produced.

Suddenly he lowered his head in defeat, feeling a tinge of annoyance at Hiroki's celebration dance.

With that, he left in a huff and walked back down the hall in search of a room. There was nothing more awkward than bunking with a random person, particularly in this case where they were competitors.

He walked back to the start of the hallway, still not having found a place.

"Ken, are you looking for a room?"

Suddenly Ken's ears perked up, hearing an unfamiliar voice.

He turned around only to see the bleach blond hair of the delinquent Kei Hama, the person he'd knocked out in the first round of Koshien.

"Um yeah, do you have space?" Ken felt a little awkward, but he still needed a room.

"Sorry, I don't like sharing rooms." He said, closing the door swiftly in his face.

Ken's jaw almost dropped to the floor as he stared at the outside of the door. Why would the guy ask if he was looking for a room in the first place if he was going to slam the door?

His eyebrow twitched in annoyance before the door suddenly opened again, revealing the grinning and punchable face of Kei.

"Sorry, I thought a little joke would break the ice." He said, stifling a laugh.

"Hah... haha."

Ken laughed awkwardly, lamenting how socially inept the guy in front of him was. Yet he still managed to work up the courage to step into the room.

'It's just for one night...!' He told himself, over and over like a mantra.

He placed his bags on top of the remaining bed and quickly dug through it to grab a change of clean clothes. From what the staff had said, they should have time to shower before dinner was served.

"Well, I'm gonna go shower before dinner." Ken stated, before leaving with haste.

Kei watched his retreating figure blankly.

"Damn, did I mess that up?" He muttered aloud.

Around 40 minutes later, Ken returned to the room and let out a small sigh of relief. Kei wasn't in the room yet, which meant he should be able to slip out to the cafeteria before he returned.

Just as he was leaving the room, both Daichi and Hiroki were walking past.

"Oh hey, good to see you found a room." Hiroki said with a snigger.

Ken felt the sudden urge to inflict some heavenly retribution upon his friend, however he thought of something much better. His face morphed into one of a plotting nature, causing Hiroki to shudder unconsciously.

'Oh no, what have I done?' Hiroki's expression crumbled as he felt instant regret.

He knew intuitively that he might have gone too far with his smart-assery. However, before he could apologize, Ken already had a lead towards the cafeteria.

Unaware of his roommate's plight, Daichi let out a hollow chuckle and followed his brother.

The staff members were like guides as they ushered the players towards the cafeteria. Once the trio walked in, they noticed it was a huge room which could likely fit upwards of a few hundred people at once.

Therefore it felt kind of empty when it was just 24 teens and a few staff members.

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

## - Chapter 304 - 304: Dorms (2)

### Chapter 304 - 304: Dorms (2)

Ken was forced to stop by the person in front of him, who looked to be getting into line. He peaked his head to the right in order to see what was going on at the front.

That's when he saw Miho with a notepad in her hand. She would inspect the next person in line before writing something on a piece of paper and handing it to them.

Once this was done, the player would head over to the serving line and hand the piece of paper to one of the staff members in the kitchen.

Although perplexed, Ken only needed to wait for a few minutes before he was next in line.

"Ken Takagi." She stated, looking at him up and down.

Once again she seemed to be undressing him with her eyes, giving Ken an appreciative glance. She grabbed him by the arm and lifted it up briefly, checking out the muscles on his arms and obliques before turning her gaze downward.

Ken was in such shock that he didn't even pull away from her touch. He felt like a livestock being checked over by the Quality Assurance officer.

"Good muscle constitution, but could still use some more mass." She muttered just loud enough for only him to hear.

"Pardon?" Ken blinked a few times, feeling mystified at the entire interaction.

However, she ignored him before writing down something on the notepad and tearing off the paper. Without a word she handed it to him and gestured for him to move along.

He could only accept the piece of paper and move forwards following the line in front of him.

After collecting a silver tray, Ken looked down at the piece of paper which just appeared to be a number with scribbles written next to it.

Only after a few moments was he able to decipher it thanks to his improved mental capacity.

'4 x bowls of rice. Needs protein for increased muscle development.'

As he was trying to interpret the chicken scratch upon the paper, Daichi was currently having the time of his life. He willingly participated in the livestock viewing, raising his arms and even striking poses as he tried to impress the woman in front of him.

When he finally made it through the line, his face was flushed and he was wearing a coy expression.

Ken turned to notice him acting weirdly before he was drawn to the piece of paper in front of him.

"Can I see that?" he asked, feeling slightly curious as to what the difference between them would be.

"Hehe sure." Like a man who was drunk on love, Daichi handed it to his brother, thinking nothing of the coded message.

'1 bowl of rice. Reduce carbohydrates to remove unneeded weight around the hips and thighs.'

Ken sucked in a cold breath of air as he saw the harsh words written on the sheet of paper. His gaze slowly moved to Daichi who still looked to be riding a high and quickly decided to keep this information to himself.

"Great mother of Mary!"

Everyone turned their attention to Miho who had just had a sudden outburst.

They then saw the scene of Hiroki with his shirt lifted, showing off an impeccable six pack which looked like they'd been carved by the hands of Michaelangelo himself.

Daichi's expression suddenly changed to one of blatant jealousy. He gnashed his teeth in annoyance as he locked gaze with Hiroki who had an embarrassed look on his face.

The poor kid was asked to lift up his shirt to which he initially refused. However, after being told he wouldn't be able to eat if he didn't comply, he could only do as he was told.

Yet once he did so, she caused a large commotion, drawing everyone's attention to the two of them.

Suddenly feeling as if he'd been caught out, Hiroki pulled down his shirt and lowered his head in embarrassment. He swore that he could feel the burning gazes of all the players on his figure at that moment, yet none scalded him more than Daichi's fierce gaze.

"Hmph."

Daichi turned his head away, yet inwardly he was fired up.

'I'll do 100... no 200 sit ups every morning and night...'

Unaware of what was going through his brother's head, Ken continued down the line until he was met with another staff member who he handed the note. She scrunched her face and squinted her eyes before finally able to decipher what was on it.

With that, she served up his meal which was two double stacked bowls of rice and various side dishes of meat and fish, along with some miso soup.

Despite what one might think, the meal smelled amazing and he was eager to get tucked in. Without waiting for Daichi, he walked towards the seating area and picked out an empty table.

Not wanting to let the food go cold, he dug in.

He was joined not long later by Hiroki and Daichi. The two looked at his tray which was filled with lots of rice and proteins, only to compare it to their own meals.

While Hiroki had 2 servings of rice, he only had fish and vegetables as a side dish. Daichi on the other hand only had a single bowl of rice and fish, making his meal look pitiful in comparison.

"What is with this disparity?" He mumbled, feeling even more down.

Ken tried to cheer the two up by trying to explain the situation nicely.

"I'd say Miho is a nutritionist for athletes judging by her notes. She probably recognized that I need to bulk up some more to match up with my height, which was why I got more rice and protein than you both."

Thankfully, Daichi seemed to cling onto his theory since it suited him more than the one he had come up with.

So the three ate their food and were able to make some small talk before it was time for bed.

Since it was going to be a big day tomorrow, they went straight to bed after eating, but not before agreeing to go for a light run early in the morning.

Ken was eager to get into bed since he had still yet to use his Golden Tickets from the National Tournament rewards.

'I wonder what I'll get this time?'

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

## Chapter 305 - 305: The Roommate (1)

Upon arriving to his room, Ken was so caught up in guessing what kind of rewards he would receive with the Gold Lottery ticket's that he had completely forgotten who his roommate was.

Ken almost jumped in fright as he saw Kei with a tank top on, staring at the door with a menacing look.

"Welcome back roomie."

His tone was deep, casting an intimidating presence.

"H-Hey... Roomie." Ken managed to say after a few moments, cursing Hiroki inwardly at that very moment.

Kei tilted his head in confusion, "Well why are you just standing there? Come in come in."

He sounded like one of those gangsters on TV who would lure the protagonist into their lair with sweet words, only to attempt to do harm instead.

'Surely he won't do anything to me right?' Ken thought, battling his instincts that told him to run. He had no fighting experience or technique after all, therefore he liked to err on the side of caution.

The only time he'd been in a fight was saving Daichi from the bullies back in middle school. Although he broke the perpetrators nose, it hurt his knuckles like hell.

Ken made his way into the room and sat down on his bed, not diverting his attention away from the delinquent looking teen.

Kei didn't seem to notice anything wrong as he walked over to the bedroom door and closed it slowly and locked it.

'W-What is he doing!?'

Instantly Ken's mind began to race as he instinctively looked for either an exit or a weapon to defend himself.

The tall blond teen turned around and flashed a grin, his expression adding onto the fear that Ken was currently experiencing.

"Good, now that we're alone..." He said, inching closer towards Ken.

The closer he got, the more stressed Ken felt. He slowly moved his body closer to his bag, intending to take out his metal bat and swing for the hills if needed.

As Kei stood in front of Ken, both of his hands moved to his pockets in a flash.

'Danger!'

Before waiting to see what he would pull out of his pockets, Ken made his move. He reached his right hand into the bag and grabbed the handle of the bat securely.

Without wasting any time, he swung the bat from within the bag, intending on incapacitating the tall delinquent before he could do any harm towards him.

WHOOOOSH

"Thank you for beating us at Koshien."

Ken was instantly flabbergasted as the metal bat sailed over the back of Kei who had just bowed at 90 degrees to thank him. A rush of wind caused the guy's shirt to rustle in response, causing a shiver to run up his back.

Seeing that Kei was about to raise his head, Ken quickly hid the bat under his pillow, his heart pumping loudly in his chest.

'I-I almost assaulted an innocent man!' He screamed in his heart.

"Hmm, what was that noise?" Kei asked, looking around oddly.

"Oh um must have been the wind ha haha." Ken replied, trying to act casually as he closed the window next to his bed.

"Sorry what were you saying again?"

Kei seemed a little suspicious for a moment, but he shrugged it off in the next second.

"I was just saying, you really helped me out by beating us at Koshien." He reiterated.

Though he was giving his thanks, Kei's face still looked somewhat menacing. It was quite possible that he was born with a scary face, and did not actually intend to do harm to Ken.

"Huh?"

It was only a single word response, but it perfectly summed up his confusion. What kind of person would give thanks to the opposing team for beating them in the first round of Koshien.

'Is this guy a masochist or something?'

Suddenly, his expression turned into one of slight disgust instead of fear.

"Hey... Are you thinking something rude?" Kei asked, a flash of annoyance appearing on his features.

"Ah... No no, I just don't understand why you would thank me."

This time, Kei's features softened a little. Perhaps if he wore such an expression from the beginning, Ken wouldn't have jumped to such conclusions and almost knock him out with a metal bat.

"Do you remember our short stop Tatsuo? The short immature kid who looked bored for the first half of the game."

Ken nodded. How could he forget since it was the same kid who had plagued his nightmares in his previous life. He could still remember being made a fool of in front of thousands of fans whilst on the mound in his first year of High School.

"Yeah, what about him?"

Kei sighed a little before sitting back on his bed and facing Ken.

"You see, Tatsuo has always been a genius. Whatever sport or game he picked up, he would rapidly become the best seemingly overnight. Soccer, badminton, basketball... You name it."

Ken's expression darkened slightly before remarking something under his breath.

"Must be nice."

However, Kei continued his story as if he hadn't heard anything.

"However, because nothing was a challenge for him, he became bored quickly. He'd stop turning up to practice and eventually games, becoming blacklisted from joining clubs in the future."

Ken silently listened to the story, though he inwardly admonished such a person. He wasn't surprised when he heard that the school had blacklisted him.



"Well I finally managed to convince the student council to lift the ban so he could come and play baseball."

"At first it was fine... But he quickly slipped into his old ways due to his talent. He could intuitively hit the ball after only a few attempts and could easily steal bases from anyone we played against."

Kei let out another sigh.

Ken could tell by the way the guy was acting, that he truly was a good friend to Tatsuo.

"After a few weeks he stopped going to practice, looking down on the players who couldn't even beat him, a newbie. If it wasn't for my insistence, he wouldn't have even shown up to games."

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

## **Chapter 306 - 306: The Roommate (2)**

"He relied on his instinct and athleticism to dominate our opponents. At least until the first round of Koshien when we met Yokohama, or should I say, you."

Kei's eyes shined as he came to this point in the story, his gaze staring at Ken as if he was his idol. There was a sort of fanaticism that should not have been present in his eyes.

Ken couldn't help but shudder subconsciously, not appreciating such a gaze from another man.

Yet the guy didn't seem to care, still looking at Ken like his prized possession.

"S-So? You're happy that we beat you guys because of Tatsuo?" While Ken probably could have put all the pieces together himself, he was having a hard time thinking while being stared at in such a way.

"Yes! Ever since you beat him, he's been serious about baseball, almost to the point of obsessing over it."

"Okay, that's good I guess." Ken nodded

Kei smiled warmly, "Our coach said that Tatsuo could be the best player in Japan if he ever decided to take baseball seriously."

Only now did Ken's jaw drop.

"What!? Coach Hashira said that??"

"Eh? You know our coach?" This time it was Kei's turn to be confused.

"Know him? Who doe— ahem... I've heard rumors of his ability." Ken quickly cut himself off. He had almost blown his cover as a regressor in that moment.

Coach Hashira was the newbie coach who took over the Hanshin Tigers and turned them from a lower tier team into a powerhouse. In fact, Daichi was a player they had recruited the year before they won the NPB title.

He had recognized the quiet and calculating guy who was hovering around the edge of the field when they played Shinjuku. The fact that the farsighted and sharp Coach Hashira had said such a thing about Tatsuo, meant that it was likely true.

Ken had a feeling that if they met in next years Koshien, their match up would be much harder.

Kei didn't seem to recognize the oddness in his tone, or he just chose to ignore it. Either way, he was happy to talk about his friend seemingly all night if Ken didn't put an end to the conversation.

"Hey um, it's getting pretty late so I was thinking about getting some sleep." Ken said, doing his best to extricate himself.

"Yes yes, sorry. I get a little carried away when talking about Tatsuo. You see, he's like a little brother to me. Since I grew up in an orphanage, it was like I had 20 brothers and sisters growing up. It wasn't until a foster family..."

Kei continued on his conversation, as if he was detailing the life of a protagonist in a novel. He spared no detail as he went through his life story, even vividly describing meals he had on certain nights.

There were many times where Ken tried to interject and suggest that it was time to get some rest, however Kei would just agree with him before continuing his story.

'I just want my damn lottery prizes!' Ken cried inwardly.

Almost an hour later, Ken was having dark thoughts as his hand slowly and stealthily moved its way towards the bat he'd hidden under his pillow.

He was at the point where he wanted to put an end to the conversation himself, regardless of the consequences.

"Ah man, my mouth is dry. I think that might be a sign that it's time for sleep." Kei announced before jumping off the bed and grabbing his drink bottle. He was like a camel as he devoured the whole thing in a few gulps.

After finishing he turned to Ken and smiled.

"Thanks for the chat, goodnight."

He flicked off the light and hopped into his own bed. Within 10 seconds there was the sound of snoring, causing Ken's eyebrow to twitch.

'This guy... is such a weirdo.'

Ken stared daggers through the dark at the guy who had forced him to listen to his life story. Though in the next moment he was caught in between a sigh and a hollow chuckle.

It seemed the old adage was true, one shouldn't judge a book by its cover.

While Kei looked like a typical delinquent and even wore a scary face, he was actually a caring person who cared deeply about his friends.

In that regard they weren't too different.

Of course his social skills were utter garbage, particularly when it came to picking up certain queues. Like the one where he said that he was tired and wanted to sleep already.

Yet at the end of the day, he was not a bad guy.

'I definitely won't be sharing a room with him again though...' Ken thought inwardly.

He would beat the daylight out of Hiroki if he tried to pull the same trick he did today.

Ken quickly looked at the time on his phone before hopping into bed. It was rather late, but he wouldn't be able to sleep if he didn't use his Golden Lottery tickets tonight.

Without wasting another second, he quickly brought up his system window and went straight to the lottery screen.

A few moments later he heard the familiar sound of the wheel spinning, bringing with it a sense of excitement.

[Congratulations, you have received 1 x Recovery Elixir]

'Nice!'

Despite no longer being able to use one on himself, he knew just how effective the Recovery Elixir was. It was able to fix his brain injury, leaving nothing but a superficial bruise to cover its tracks.

From the description, he knew that it could be used on others. Who knew when he would need something like this again.

He spun the wheel once more, crossing his fingers for something good.

[Congratulations, you have received the Trait: Dauntless]

\*DING\*

[User has unlocked their first Trait and is rewarded with 15,000 Major Points]

'Huh? What is this?'

Ken heard the notification go off in his mind and was startled. He read the text a few times, just to make sure that he wasn't going crazy.

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

## **Chapter 307 - 307: Dauntless (1)**

BUZZ BUZZ

While Ken was staring at the system window, he felt his phone vibrate, removing him from his shock. He half-mindedly checked his phone, only to see an email from Ai asking how the tryouts had gone.

'Ah damn...'

He had meant to mail her earlier but he had been forced to listen to Kei's life story. Ken quickly sent a message back, saying that he'd been selected for the preliminary squad but wouldn't find out until tomorrow afternoon.

Ken made an excuse that he needed to go to sleep and would contact her tomorrow afternoon once he found out the results.

'Man it's tough being popular' He thought inwardly, before turning his attention back to the system window.

Ever since he'd received the system, he'd never heard of a Trait. There were skills and functions, yet this was the first time hearing of something like this.

'I wonder what it does.'

Without waiting another moment, Ken brought up the system window and tried to locate it.

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: SS

>Pitching: SS-

>Fielding: B

>Game Intelligence: B

>Mental: SS

>Skills: 20

>Traits: 1 (new)

He clicked on the flashing icon that drew his attention, only to be assaulted by a wall of text.

Trait: Dauntless

Description: The Dauntless trait endows the user with an unwavering resolve and an indomitable spirit, allowing him to face any challenge head-on without fear or hesitation. This trait enhances his mental fortitude, making him exceptionally resilient in high-pressure situations and virtually immune to intimidation or discouragement from opponents.

With Dauntless, user becomes a beacon of courage and determination, inspiring his teammates and setting an example of relentless pursuit of victory.

Effects:

Fearless Mindset: User's confidence is unshakable, enabling him to maintain composure and clarity of thought even in the most daunting circumstances.

Resilience Boost: Increases user's ability to recover quickly from setbacks, whether it's a poor performance or an injury.

Inspiration: User's courage and determination have a motivating effect on his teammates, boosting their morale and performance.

Intimidation Resistance: Opponents find it significantly harder to unsettle or demoralize user, no matter the situation or provocation.

Enhanced Performance Under Pressure: user's skills and abilities are amplified in critical moments, allowing him to excel when the stakes are highest.

'Eh?'

Ken blinked a few times almost not believing his eyes. It was as if he had suddenly won the lottery overnight, bringing with it a rush of euphoria.

For the first time in a long while, Ken felt once again just how cheat-like the system really was.

This trait was like having 5 skills at once.

He found it rather odd that this was the first time finding out about traits despite having the system for well over a year now. It was as if he was missing the right circumstances or prerequisites in order to access it.

'Could it be because of my mental grade?' He thought inwardly.

Now that he thought about it, the Dauntless trait was primarily centered around his attitude and mental state. After all, the word Dauntless meant courage and fearless determination in the face of adversity.

Ken felt his body heat up in excitement. Not only was this trait beneficial to him during games, it would also spill into his real life. He could already feel his unease regarding Kei begin to slip away completely.

'What a treasure... I wonder what other traits there are.'

He quickly shook his head, admonishing his greedy thoughts.

'I should already be happy getting this much.'

A wide grin formed on his face as he stared at the description a few more times. At the very least this should help him in his quest to make it onto the National Team.

'Mika, can you please activate sleep protocol.' He asked politely.

He knew that with this much excitement before bed, he would have a lot of trouble sleeping. Thankfully he had a useful friend who could help him out.

[Understood. Activating sleep protocol, good night.]

'Eh?'

As Ken's eyes began to close, he realized that Mika had said good night. Something that she'd never done before.

However, before he could bring it up, he had already entered the dream land.

BUZZ BUZZ

Back in Yokohama, Ai was laying in bed and staring out the window at the crescent moon outside. The moment she heard her phone, she quickly opened up the message.

However, her pretty face turned disappointed in the next moment.

"Why is he being like this?" She muttered before closing her phone abruptly.

She had been wanting to tell Ken about her decision to change schools so that she could pursue her dream, yet the opportunity hadn't presented itself.

The school semester was about to start in 1 week. After which she would be moving to Tokyo to live in her own apartment with the help of her parents.

It might be a little selfish of her, but she wanted to see him a few more times before that happened. But it seemed as if fate was against it.

Ai shook her head.

She couldn't blame Ken since he was actively pursuing his dreams of playing baseball at the highest level. If anything, Ai didn't want to disturb him in case the news affected him negatively.

'I wonder if he'd be sad when I leave?'

Ai thought wistfully.

'Would he miss me?'

\*\*\*

The next morning, Ken woke up at 5am feeling refreshed.

As he sat up and let out a big stretch, he heard the rhythmic snores of the delinquent in the other bed. Unlike the night before, Ken felt no intimidation from him any longer, likely from his lottery reward last night.

With a grin, he jumped off the bed and quickly got changed. He wanted to get a run in before it was time for breakfast.

After leaving his room, he walked over to the room where Daichi and Hiroki were staying.

Just as he was about to open the door, he heard something odd.

"Urgh Haah urgh haah."

The sound of grunting and heavy breathing was coming from the other side, causing his face to morph into one of shock and disbelief.

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

## **Chapter 308 - 308: Dauntless (2)**

Suddenly Ken was reluctant to open the door, afraid of what he would see on the other side. However, his Dauntless trait seemed to quash any of the fear in his heart in that moment.

A look of resolution appeared on his features as he quickly opened the door.

"Eh?"

Ken stared blankly at the scene laid out before him.

Daichi was shirtless in the middle of the floor, doing core exercises like a mad man. He was covered in sweat, creating a pool beneath him as he worked out.

"Daichi... are you all good bro?" Ken asked, feeling a sense of worry for his brother.

"Ah Ken..."

His brother almost jumped in fright as he heard his voice from the open door. It seemed that he was fully focused in the workout and hadn't heard anything until now.



He got up off the floor and quickly looked for a shirt. It wasn't that he was embarrassed about having his shirt off in front of his brother, just that Hiroki with his godlike abs was still asleep nearby.

Daichi glanced at Hiroki on the bed with a look of annoyance before putting his shirt back on.

Ken's mind suddenly put the pieces together as he thought about what had happened last night in the cafeteria.

"Pfft."

He quickly covered his mouth to prevent his laughter from peeling out yet his eyes still danced with amusement. Before he could be discovered, Ken turned around and tried to compose himself.

"Wake up Hiroki and let's go for a run..."

With that he closed the door and waited outside, leaving Daichi in the room filled with questions. It was then that he heard muffled laughter from behind the door.

"Huh? What's so funny?" He murmured.

"Oi, wake up. We're going for a run." Daichi said with annoyance, shoving Hiroki's innocent and peaceful sleeping figure.

"Snort. Huh? What's wrong?" Hiroki let out a snort before almost jumping out of bed as he was suddenly awoken from a deep sleep.

"We. Are. Going. Running."

Daichi spelled out, his annoyance evident. Without saying another word he grabbed his shoes and left the room.

Hiroki blinked in confusion. He had sensed the annoyance in Ken's brother since yesterday, though he had no idea what he'd done to deserve it.

"Man those brothers are an odd bunch." He murmured, still feeling half asleep.

Around a few minutes later, the trio began their run around the Tokyo University campus.

Since they had plenty more trials to do later that day, Ken wanted to keep the run light. Yet Daichi seemed to have other plans as he did his best to compete with Hiroki throughout their run.

Ken was growing more and more annoyed as time grew on. He finally got to a point where he just stopped in place, causing the other two to also stop and ask what was wrong.

"Hey man, why did you stop?" Daichi asked, his breathing already labored.

"What are you doing?" Ken asked, his annoyance evident.

Daichi started to get a little defensive, "What do you mean? I'm running of course."

Hiroki suddenly had a bad premonition and was about to make some excuse about needing to leave. However, just as he was about to move, he received a glare from Ken, rooting him on the spot.

"Why are you expending all of your energy? Don't you know that we've got trials today?"

"O-Of course I do. It's just that—"

"Don't give me that crap!" Ken interrupted his brother who was about to make up some excuse. In that moment he truly looked angry, something they hadn't expected.

A brief silence followed as the two stared at Ken.

"Can't you see that I'm trying to lessen our pace? We need to conserve our energy for what happens today."

"Do you not think I can handle it?" Daichi asked, his face turning up in a frown.

Ken walked closer to Daichi and got into his face. He wasn't sure what was going on with his brother, but he needed it to stop.

Throughout both of his lifetimes of knowing Daichi, he'd never seen him act this childish before.

"There's something else wrong, and I need you to tell me."

Ken was firm, his eyes unyielding as he stared at his brother.

Daichi's eyes imperceptibly flashed to Hiroki in that moment, almost a dead giveaway that there was some tension there.

'Don't tell me it's jealousy?' Ken was flabbergasted.

At first he thought the whole situation was a little funny, a nice little rivalry that could help light a fire under his brother to improve. However, he could tell that Daichi was not taking it this way.

He let out a small sigh and placed his hand on Daichi's shoulder before turning to Hiroki.

"You go on ahead, we'll meet up in the cafeteria."

Hiroki didn't hesitate to make a run for it, realizing that he had no place in what was about to come next.

Once he'd left, Ken gripped Daichi's shoulder a little before letting out a smile.

"This is about Miho right?"

"Eh!?"

Daichi's face turned red before he quickly backpedaled a few steps. It was clear that he wasn't expecting Ken to nail it right on the head.

"It's okay bro, we're both men. There's no need to hide such things." Ken said soothingly.

Daichi paused, looking at his brother's face, a man he trusted more than anyone. It took a little while, but he finally let out a sigh and began to speak his mind.

"I... I don't know how to explain it. Whenever I see her I get this feeling inside my stomach." He admitted.

Ken nodded. He had an inkling that Daichi had a crush on the nutritionist, but his words now confirmed it.

"Is that why you're being so childish with Hiroki?" Ken said with a grin.

Daichi's guilty face confirmed it. It seemed that he had felt threatened when Miho had reacted in such a way to Hiroki's body. That's why he was also trying to get a killer six pack of his own.

Ken threw his arm around his brother's shoulder and began to walk along back to the dorms. Though he was inept when it came to women, he was good at problem solving.

"First of all, we need to make sure you get selected to the team. That way you'll have more time to impress Miho."

As the two walked, Ken began to lay out a plan for Daichi like a good brother. Of course his main goal was for Daichi to be selected in the squad, so he made sure everything revolved around that point.

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

## Chapter 309 - 309: Tryouts Day 2 (1)

By the time they had showered and gotten ready for breakfast, Daichi was already on board with Ken's plan. He took all of his brother's words seriously, even taking down notes upon returning to his room.

Of course Ken had absolutely no experience in the matters of relationships, however he had seen quite a few soap opera's when he put the TV on for background noise in the evenings.

Daichi on the other hand was just as clueless. These were new feelings that he was experiencing, since his past was filled with bullying and abuse.

Even so, he trusted his brother with his life, and apparently his relationships also.

The duo went to the cafeteria in order to get some breakfast, planning on meeting Hiroki when they arrived.

Daichi seemed to be holding out hope that Miho would be there to inspect them again, however she was nowhere to be seen.

Fighting back his disappointment, he collected his food and headed to the table where Hiroki was. After a quick yet sincere apology, the three sat down and enjoyed their breakfast.

Thankfully everything went back to normal and there was no petty jealousy remaining.

It was then that the coaching staff walked into the cafeteria, donning their National team outfits. Judging by the fact they were carrying all sorts of notepads and sheets of paper, they likely just finished a meeting.

Coach Takashi, Miho and Chris along with a few others that were present yesterday went and placed their belongings down at a table not far from Ken and the others.

Ken's father sent him and Daichi a wink before heading up to grab his own breakfast. He made sure that no one could see it, before wearing his serious expression once more.

They would likely keep up this facade until the team members were finalized.

Upon their arrival, most of the teens quietened down. The atmosphere seemed to become tense, like they were at an execution.

The only people unaffected seemed to be Riku and the others who'd already competed for the National Team.

Ken on the other hand only felt intimidated for a moment before the feeling washed away completely, like water off a ducks back.

'Dauntless trait huh?' He couldn't help but smile as he already felt the effects of his new rewards already paying dividends.

After a tense breakfast, everyone turned their attention to Coach Takashi who had just stood up and cleared his throat.

"Everyone, gather your things and meet on the baseball field in 30 minutes. That is all."

With that, the coaching staff left the cafeteria without another word.

It seemed that they were using the Tokyo University baseball facilities today instead of the park they were at yesterday. Ken thought it was a little odd, but he shrugged it off.

Who was he to question the eccentric coach?

Once the coach's left, the cafeteria broke into whispers and mumbles. The atmosphere which was thick enough to cut with a knife was suddenly filled with nerves and anxiety.

This was particularly so from those who had failed to receive a bib yesterday.

"Are you guys ready?" Ken asked, looking at both Daichi and Hiroki.

"Let's do it."

"Aye aye sir."

Daichi saluted after borrowing Ken's catchphrase from the day before, eliciting a bunch of laughter from the trio. Many eyes looked at them, yet they didn't care.

Around 30 minutes later, all of the players arrived on the Tokyo University field raring to go.

The grounds were well maintained and was many times better than the one at Yokohama, though it fell short of Koshien. Perhaps only Daichi's school would have similar standards to the university.

Ken didn't have long to think before his father stood in front of the group and took them through a bunch of warm up exercises. While everyone usually had their own routine, this could be considered due diligence on the coaching staff's behalf.

After all, the 24 teens here were handpicked as the top under 18 players in the entire nation. If they were to get injured during tryouts, it could be a great loss for Japan as a whole.

Once the warm ups were complete, Chris spoke up with his clipboard back in his grasp.

"Today we'll be going through some more drills to get an idea of your baseball skills. We'll continue as a group at the start and then break into your specific roles."

Chris's voice rang out over the players as he moved his gaze from left to right. His usual warm features were replaced with a sense of professionalism, as if he'd flipped a switch.

"Keep in mind this is the final day of tryouts so do not hold anything back. We have 16 positions to fill, which means 8 of you will be going home at the end of today."

Some of the players who didn't receive a bib yesterday shuffled nervously, however Daichi's hands balled into fists as his face filled with determination.

He was confident in his abilities on the baseball field. As long as he could perform as usual, there should be no issues being able to appeal to the coaching staff.

This time Coach Takashi stepped forward, running his hand through his goatee as he inspected the players. His gaze was sharp, yet his expression gave nothing away.

"Do your best today. Show us that you deserve to be on the team, the one that will take down the United States in the World Cup."

He didn't say much, but those words were enough to light a fire within the players. The lofty goal of defeating America didn't sound so far fetched or out of reach when coming from this man.

"Yes sir!"

Ken's voice rang out from the back of the pack, causing all of the players to turn and face him.

Daichi and Hiroki were horrified as they slowly shuffled a few steps away from Ken who had drawn everyone's attention. They felt a wave of second hand embarrassment assault them, causing their face to redden.

'Ah crap.'

Ken had been so caught up in the speech that he'd blurted out something unconsciously.

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

## Chapter 310 - 310: Tryouts Day 2 (2)

Chris's eyes danced with amusement as he saw his son standing at attention. He was about to adjourn the gathering to give Ken some respite, however a peel of laughter came out in the next moment.

"HAHAHA, Good!"

For the first time, the players heard Coach Takashi laugh out loud with a giant smile on his face. He seemed to really enjoy Ken's response.

"At ease soldier."

With that he turned around and walked off, yet they could still hear his chuckles.

Suddenly, everyone who had been staring at Ken like he was an idiot, wished they had responded in kind. However, what person in their right mind would respond in such a way?

Hiroki and Daichi let out a sigh of relief seeing as how Ken wasn't singled out or reprimanded in anyway. One wouldn't want to get on the bad side of the Head Coach, particularly before the team was selected.

"Okay you lot, let's jog some laps to get your muscles warm." Chris announced, grabbing his whistle from around his neck and blowing it.

FWHEE

With that, the group of players began their jog around the field. Since it was just a warm up, they kept it light. No one wanted to burn themselves out before the training started.

After around 10 minutes, Chris blew his whistle once again.

Once the players lined up, he walked forward and placed his arm between two players shoulders.

"Those of you on my left, head over to the infield for some grounders. Those of you on the right, you're in the outfield with me."

His tone left no room for argument, regardless of the player's positions.

Ken and Daichi were in the outfield for the first exercise, getting split up from Hiroki who would be doing some grounders.

"Okay this drill is simple. I want three of you in the outfield and one of you standing on second base over there." Chris said, pointing to one of the markers that were laid on the field.

"The outfielders must communicate and field the ball, sending it to the player on 2nd base. I also need 1 person to tag up and run from 1st base to 2nd base once the ball is caught."

"Once you're done, the outfielder who caught the ball will get off the field, replaced by the player on 2nd base. Then the next person starts from 1st base."

Chris explained the rules concisely and loud enough for everyone to hear. If they couldn't understand such a simple drill like this, then how could they call themselves the best in the country.

"Understood?"

"Yes coach."

Majority of the players called out in affirmation, leading to Chris nodding his head in appreciation.

"You three go into the outfield, you on 2nd base and Ken, you'll be the runner."

Ken sprang to action, heading over to 1st base or in this case the marker. He had not done this drill before, but he was rather impressed by it nonetheless.

Not only was the drill multifaceted, it also simulated actual game play and a sense of urgency. It would test the outfielders catching position and arm strength by forcing them to throw under pressure.

While he hadn't played a lot of outfield before, he knew that there was much more to it than just taking catches.

Once everyone was in position, Chris blew his whistle before firing off a bomb with his bat.

DOOONG

The sound of the metal bat rang out in their ears as the ball flew upward into the sky.



Ken was rather impressed that his father was able to hit such a ball so casually. He knew that the guy had played baseball in America during High School before continuing in University in Japan, yet he'd never seen him play.

"Alright alright, I got it."

Masayuki in the center outfield, positioned himself underneath the ball, standing a few feet back from where it was going to land. Ken could tell instantly that the guy had experience in the outfield and knew he was going to be tough to beat.

As the ball got closer, the guy caught it in motion and was quickly able to throw the ball thanks to his efficient movements.

Ken had dashed from his base the moment he heard the ball enter the glove of the fielder. There was nothing on his mind except the base in front of him.

Through his peripheral vision he had seen Masayuki's throw and felt his mind going into overdrive as he began to assess the amount of time he had to make it to the base.

'I'm going to have to slide' Ken thought, his eyes narrowing.

The 2nd base marker was quickly closing in, not giving him much time to make a move.

Ken lunged his body forwards, breaking into a slide along the grass while extending his long arm in order to touch the base before he was tagged.

The throw from Masayuki was spot on, dipping low as it approached the player on 2nd base. The player on 2nd base caught the ball with ease before tagging Ken on the wrist.

There was a bout of silence since there was no umpire present to make the call. However, both Ken and the other player couldn't definitively say whether he was safe or out.

Thankfully though, it didn't seem to matter.

FWHEE

"Alright switch!" Chris called out in the next moment, intending to continue on with the drill.

The player on 2nd base ran out into the outfield while Masayuki made his way off the field. As he passed by Ken, his eyes seemed to look at him in a different light.

"Nice run." He said before jogging off.

"Ah... Nice throw." Ken replied, a little taken aback from the sudden compliment.

They were currently competing for a place on the team, which was why he wasn't expecting such words.

'Is this perhaps part of my Dauntless trait as well?'

Yet he didn't know that Masayuki was another player who'd been on the National team since a young age alongside Riku in the outfield. The fact that he'd praised Ken's run was a good indication of how he'd performed.

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

## **Chapter 311 - 311: Altercation (1)**

"Daichi, you're the next runner." Chris called out, pointing to the base.

"Yes Da— Coach."

Daichi almost slipped up and called out to his father like he usually would. Thankfully no one seemed to notice, too focused on the drill they were going through.

Once he arrived, Chris blew his whistle and fired off another high ball, this time to the right outfield.

DOOONG

There was a lot of hang time once again, allowing the fielder plenty of time to get into position for the catch. However, the position of his body was unlike Masayuki from beforehand.

Upon catching the ball, the player was stationary. Therefore once he caught it, he had to take a few steps before throwing the ball towards Ken upon second base.

This allowed Daichi a good head start to run between the bases.

The throw came in a little higher than Ken wanted it, forcing him to almost stand on the tip of his toes to reach it. If he was of average height he would have needed to jump in order to catch such a ball.

However before he could bring the ball down, Daichi was already safe on 2nd base.

The staff members referred to their clipboards and began to make some notes, only for the player in the outfield to let out a disappointed sigh. He knew that he'd messed up, however he was not an outfielder.

FWHEE

"Rotate!"

Chris hit a few more big one's into the outfield. He was surprisingly good at controlling both the height and direction of the balls, making sure that each fielder had a chance at the fly ball.

Ken watched the ball head in his direction in the right outfield, tracking it carefully with his eyes.

In his peripheral vision, he could see the player in the center gravitating towards his side, looking as if he was going to make a play at the ball.

"Alright, I got it!" Ken yelled.

However, the other player took no notice, almost as if he'd blocked out all of his senses to focus on the ball in the air. Ken frowned, feeling a little irritation creep into his mind.

"I GOT IT!" He yelled once more, yet he was ignored once again.

The ball was rapidly approaching his position which was about to get intercepted by the center fielder. It was clear that if things continued as they were, they were going to have a collision.

Ken felt his mind go to work, calculating the speeds of both the ball and the approaching fielder, trying to come up with a solution.

In the moments before all disaster, Ken sprang into action.

Using his peripheral vision, he located the fielder before throwing out a stiff arm like he was playing American football.

Thanks to his long limbs, Ken's reach was long enough to slow the other fielders momentum without injuring either of them. In the next moment he shoved forward, knocking the fielder out of the way and onto the ground.

Pah

With his forward momentum, Ken caught the ball and was able to lead into a run up, throwing the ball with all of his might into the waiting glove of the person on 2nd base.

The glove which caught the ball easily dipped down and tagged the runner for an out.

"W-What the hell was that!?"

The fielder who'd been thrown to the ground suddenly got up to his feet and charged towards Ken who'd just completed the throw.

His eyes were full of fury as he faced the person who had just manhandled him in front of all the coaches. Yet as he approached, he saw just how intimidating Ken was with his tall frame and powerful figure.

Ken stood his ground, not giving an inch as he stood tall above the center fielder. He had done the right thing, preventing any injuries from the carelessness of the player, and still managed to field the ball properly.

Daichi who was on the left wing quickly ran towards the scuffle, intending to step in the middle. Yet he underestimated the coaching staff, or in particular, his father.

FWHEEEEEEE

Chris threw his bat to the ground and quickly jogged over to the scene, his eyes sharp and full of anger.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" His tone was deep and full of fury, causing the player to jump in fright in the next moment.

"T-This guy pushed me down." He said, pointing to Ken as if it would clear himself of any wrongdoing.

"You're lucky he did. You two could have collided and done much more damage!"

"W-What?"

"Didn't you hear him call for the ball? TWICE!?" Chris berated the teen, clearly not impressed with both his conduct and his awareness.

"N-No he didn't call for the ball." The player shook his head, adamant on that point.

Chris could only shake his head too, yet his features were filled with disappointment.

"Alright, I've seen enough. Not only did you put another teammate in danger, you're arrogant enough to talk back to your coach."

The player's face quickly changed as he felt a bad premonition overcome him.

Chris continued, "Grab your things, Japan doesn't need a player like you on our squad."

"W-What??"

It was as if the whole world crumbled down before the teen as the words threatened to damage his psyche. All that he'd worked hard for was suddenly stripped away from him, for something that he didn't even do.

Suddenly his face morphed into anger as he lashed out.

"You're just getting rid of me because of your stupid son! You don't want to admit that he did anything wrong so you're using me as a scapegoat."

The player spat out the first thing that came to his mind and began to make a scene.

"IT'S BLATANT NEPOTISM!" He shouted, pointing towards Ken and Chris.

Even if it was possible to have the same last name, it was made rather obvious that the coach and Ken were related since they looked quite similar. They were both tall and carried a similar build, each sharing foreign features also.

Chris calmly stared at the player, his eyes not changing in the least.

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

## **Chapter 312 - 312: Altercation (2)**

"Are you done? You can leave now."

After realizing that his tantrum was getting him nowhere, the player stomped his way off the field. Yet in the next moment his face changed, carrying an arrogant smile.

'Let's see what the Head Coach has to say about your bias.'" He thought inwardly.

At this point he had already accepted he would not be in the team, but if he was going out, he wanted to other down with him.

With his new plan in mind, he headed towards the infield practice instead of going off the field. His target was Coach Takashi who was standing on the side with his arms behind his back.

"Are you okay Ken?"

Chris's concerned voice broke him out of his reverie.

"Ah, yeah I'm all good coach." Ken said with a small smile.

Thankfully there were plenty of witnesses to what had happened, otherwise he might have been in hot water after pushing down a fellow player.

Of course Ken had no regrets. If it had have been in a real game, he would have likely been praised for his actions since it would have secured an out.

His father patted him on the shoulder a couple of times before heading back to his bat to restart the drill, paying no mind to the earlier incident.

If someone couldn't communicate or listen to their teammates, then they were not the kind of player Japan was looking for, simple as that.

Just as Chris picked up the bat, he heard a commotion on the other side of the field.

He saw the player he'd just cut talking to Coach Takashi animatedly. The guy then turned and pointed to him and Ken before continuing his story.

Chris merely rolled his eyes before turning his attention back to the outfield.

"Alright, let's shuffle. You're the next runner." He said, pointing to the gloomy looking Kuro.

FWHEEEE

DOONG

The drill continued as if the previous incident never happened.

On the other side of the field, the player was pleading his case to Coach Takashi, doing his best to sound pitiful. Of course he only told his side of the story, making sure to paint both Ken and Chris in a terrible light.

As long as they also suffered from this, he didn't care if he didn't make the team.

"And then the coach said that Japan doesn't need a player like me before kicking me out."

He finished his impassioned words, ensuring to make a pitiful expression, much like the one he gave his parents when he was younger.

Coach Takashi's expression was unreadable as he listened to the story of the youngster. It was as if he was just a bystander, not letting anything effect him at all.

"So, why are you here?" He asked in a disinterested tone.

The player was slightly taken aback so he couldn't answer right away.

"W-What do you mean? I'm reporting some obvious favoritism in your coaching staff. Surely that's not acceptable in the National Team right?"

He began to feel a little worried after not getting the response he was after.

"No, I mean why are you still here? Didn't Coach Takagi tell you to get your things and go?" His tone was genuinely confused, as if he was looking at an idiot.

"I-I..." The player was dumbstruck. He could only stammer a few words in response to the coach's question.

"Alright goodbye." Coach Takashi said, making a shooing motion with his hand as if he was dealing with a fly. Afterwards, he turned back around and continued to watch the players catch grounders.

'W-What the hell!?' The player suddenly felt the strength leave his body as he was promptly ignored. He had no choice but to grab his things and retreat from the field, cursing the coach's internally.

Ken had watched the entire conversation from afar and couldn't help but chuckle as he saw the player retreat after being dismissed by the head coach.

Although he would be lying if he said he wasn't nervous, Ken nodded in appreciation afterwards. It seemed that his father's integrity was not in question, at least from Coach Takashi's perspective.

He could already tell that the Head Coach had a no nonsense outlook, though he could still be considered as eccentric. But in Ken's eyes, he was a reliable and old school coach who would do everything in his power to win.

Subconsciously, his respect for the coach increased.

No one seemed to bat an eye at the removal of one player so early into the day. In their eyes it was just 1 less person that they needed to compete with for a spot in the team.

After going through the rotation another 3 times, the whistle was blown and the group of players swapped drills. Hiroki's moved to the outfield drill, while Ken and Daichi's group moved to the infield.

Unlike the outfield drill, this was something that they'd practiced often in their own clubs.

They lined up around the short stop position and would come forward to receive a ground ball from one of the staff members. After collecting the ball, they needed to throw it to first base accurately.

The drill went quickly with the staff sending accurate grounders every 5 to 10 seconds depending on the speed of the fielder.

While they had only gotten 4 rotations in the other drill, each player was able to get at least 10 before they put an end to it.

FWHEE

The sound of a whistle on both sides of the field echoed out, bringing an end to the two drills.

Ken felt like he had performed well enough throughout the two drills, but what he was looking forward to was getting to pitch in front of Coach Takashi.

Chris led the 2nd group over to the infield where they merged once more.

"Alright, next up we'll be breaking up into positions. Pitchers and Catchers, you'll be with Coach Takashi. Everyone else is with me."

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

## **Chapter 313 - 313: Up Close (1)**

A smile crept onto Ken's face as he heard his father's next words. Finally, the time had arrived for him to showcase his pitching skills.

"Good luck." Ken held out his fist to Hiroki who flashed him a grin.

"You too Ken, Daichi."

Hiroki sent a cheeky salute his way before wandering off with the other group.

Ken placed his arm around Daichi and whispered.

"This is our chance to impress and make it onto the squad."

Daichi nodded in agreement. Since he wasn't selected in the preliminary squad yesterday, he needed to showcase his talents today otherwise his hopes of competing alongside Ken would be finished.



Once they arrived at the bullpen, the coach turned around and spoke up.

"Alright, looks like we have 5 pitchers and 4 catchers." He said, surveying the group of players in front of him.

"We'll be taking a maximum of 3 pitchers and 2 catchers in the team which means you'll be competing against each other. Catchers get your gear on, and pitchers warm up your arms."

The players sprang into action, using the gear available to them.

Ken was left with the other pitchers who began to go through their warm up routines. He recognized Kei and another 3rd year player named Satoshi Subaru. He had been the Ace last year for the National team's Asian Baseball Championship run.

The guy was average height and had sharp sword-shaped eyebrows, giving him a fierce expression. His messy hair was hidden beneath his cap, giving him a more refined and dangerous aura.

He had led the National team to victory over the Chinese Taipei squad in the finals of the Asian Baseball Championship. With his dynamic and precise pitching, he held the team to 0 runs until he ran out of gas in the 7th inning.

Unlike most High School baseball teams, the National Team generally had a starting pitcher, relief pitcher and closing pitcher. This was closer to how professional teams operated, putting less stress on the shoulders of the Ace.

Ken knew that Satoshi would be his biggest threat in these tryouts, yet he was not discouraged.

While Satoshi had a wide array of pitches, he lacked the killer fastball that Ken possessed. That wasn't to say that his pitches were not effective, just that Ken's had more impact.

Ken's gaze moved to the other pitchers in the lineup and could not recognize them.

"Looks like we'll be competing against each other again, Ken." A voice came from behind him, startling him.

He turned around to see a teen with his hair tied into a ponytail. However, that was the only thing memorable about his features.

The guy was average height with an average physique, even his voice sounded average.

'Who the hell is this guy?' He questioned in his heart.

"This time it will be different though..." The teen said, a determined look appearing on his average face.

"S-Sure, good luck."

Ken quickly turned around before he was found out. He didn't want to seem rude or embarrass the guy since he'd forgotten who he was.

At the same time, he couldn't be blamed.

'I doubt this guy's mother would be able to pick him out in a small crowd.'

"Alright, everyone line up in the bullpen. I want to see your pitches." Coach Takashi announced, getting everyone's attention.

The players did as they were told and took a spot at the marker. Since there were only 4 catchers, Ken found himself without a partner. However he didn't make a fuss since he was sure the coach would have something else planned.

Oddly enough, he had only just noticed that the coach was putting on a chest protector himself, followed by a face mask.

'Eh!? The coach is going to catch my pitches?'

Now that he looked at him, the coach looked far too adapt at putting on the equipment. This told him that he'd had plenty of experience doing so in the past.

"We'll throw 10 pitches warm up and then another 15 before moving down the line."

With that, he approached the empty position in front of Ken and sent him a smile.

"Start when you're ready!" He announced before crouching down.

**CRACK CRACKLE CRACK**

The moment he squatted down, the sound of cracking bones rang out in the bullpen, causing everyone to snap their heads in the direction of the coach.

Ken's jaw was wide open, and he was not the only one.

Coach Takashi let out a few uncomfortable grunts before he finally got into the right position.

"Well? What are you waiting for? Throw!"

Ken quickly picked up his jaw and got into position. Thanks to his Dauntless trait, whatever trepidation he felt earlier quickly evaporated as he stared down at the coach.

He started slowly, throwing some warm up pitches and gradually increasing the strength he used.

Coach Takashi was a natural, easily collecting the throws and sending the ball back with ease. It was in complete contrast to his age.

After finishing his tenth pitch, Ken nodded towards the coach. From now on it would be where the real deal started.

Since the coach hadn't made any signs, Ken decided to throw a fastball right down the middle to show off his speed and accuracy.

The aura around Ken suddenly changed as his face turned serious. Power and determination seemed to seep from his figure, painting the surroundings in an ethereal glow.

Ken lifted his left knee and coiled his body, poised to strike. S

When he stepped forward and planted his left foot, the coach's eyes widened as he felt a sense of danger grip his body. Yet his experienced body did not falter, tracking the ball as it left Ken's fingertips.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Mmm"

Coach Takashi instantly felt his hand start to go numb, even after catching it perfectly within his glove. He couldn't help but let out a little grunt of approval before throwing the ball back to Ken.

"Again." He stated, squatting down once more.

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

## **Chapter 314 - 314: Up Close (2)**

Ken felt a rush after seeing the look of approval, feeding even more into his confidence.

The next ball he sent was a two-seam which aimed to break towards a right handed batter.

Once again the coach caught it perfectly, feeling his blood heat up.

'He's fast...'

He threw the ball back, already caught up in the moment.

After another 8 balls, each as fast as the last one, Coach Takashi frowned a little. This time he actually made a sign, yet since they had not spoken beforehand about signs, Ken had no idea what it meant.

He could only make the assumption that the coach wanted to see a breaking ball this time, so he nodded in response.

Ken performed his usual wind up and sent a forkball flying towards the strike zone.

PAH

'Good good. But I really want to see that curveball.' The coach thought inwardly.

"Let's see your curveball." Coach Takashi said aloud, throwing the ball back to Ken.

"Yes sir."

Ken grinned. He was inwardly thankful that he'd taken the time to improve the proficiency of his curveball.

In the two days before they came to the tryouts, Ken had enlisted the help of Daichi and his Image Training in order to bring it to 100%.

He looked down at his hand holding the ball and ensured that his grip was correct before entering his wind up. This time, the ball left his fingertips at a higher angle than usual and flew towards the coach.

It was around 125km/h, much slower than his fastest pitch. Yet the ball's trajectory was perfect, almost landing directly on top of the plate.

Pah

Coach Takashi couldn't help but grin, feeling satisfied with what he had seen so far. With those 3 pitches, he could already understand Ken's value.

"Alright, let's rotate." He announced, dictating the pitchers to change places.

The drill went for another 30 minutes with a couple small breaks in between.

While the coach was catching for the 5th pitcher, there were other staff members who were taking notes and inspecting the pitchers.

"Alright that's enough. Let's head over to the field for the next drill." The coach said, taking off his mask.

His old body seemed to have had enough after squatting for over half an hour. If anything, Ken was impressed he was able to do so much considering his age.

Ken caught up with Daichi on their walk over and got closer.

"How was it?"

Since this exercise was mainly for the pitchers, Ken really wanted to know how he stacked up against the other competition.

Daichi considered his words for a little before replying. "You're definitely the fastest pitcher here, but the rest are definitely good... Especially that thick eyebrow guy."

His words sounded a little ominous. It seemed that even his own brother wasn't certain that he'd be one of the 3 picked for the national team.

Ken was deep in thought the rest of the way, his mind a little uncertain.

Another problem was that designated hitters could be used in international competitions, which means that despite how good he was at batting, it wouldn't work too much in his favor.

It would be a different story if he could play multiple positions, yet he'd only played 1st base for around 6 months total in middle school.

Ken shook his head, there was no point in thinking about these points right now. They still had more drills that they needed to complete.

Coach Takashi arrived at the diamond and waited for everyone to pay attention to him.

"We'll be testing the catchers next with some in game scenarios."

"We'll have someone stand in the batters box and will call out which base is being stolen. You'll need to avoid the batter and throw the ball to either 2nd or 3rd as if a runner is stealing."

The coach looked around, ensuring that everyone understood him.

"We'll be testing your footwork and your response time, as well as your throwing arm. Pitchers, I need 3 of you on base and one on the mound, the last will be in the batters box."

In the next moment, nearly all of the pitchers sprinted onto the field, their goal being the mound. Only Ken was left near home plate with a mystified expression on his face.

He seemed to have missed the memo about the race to the mound.

Kei ended up winning the impromptu race and stood victorious upon the pitching mound, forcing the others to split up and head to one of the 3 bases.

Coach Takashi seemed amused as he turned to Ken.

"Looks like you've volunteered to be our batter." He said with a grin.

Ken could only let out a wry smile, rolling his eyes inwardly. Who would willingly volunteer to step into the batters box when they knew they couldn't swing.

Yet there was nothing he could do but grab a helmet and bat before stepping up to the plate and facing Kei.

It felt kind of funny, since only a few weeks ago they had faced off against each other at Koshien. However, this time he wouldn't get the chance to swing for the fences.

Ken let out a small sigh as he waited for the drill to begin.

'I really want to hit it...' he thought inwardly.

"Keiichi, you're up first."

Coach Takashi pointed at a wide shouldered teen who was among the 4 catchers present. Even when his name was called, Keiichi seemed a little timid.

However, Ken would be shocked if he found out that this guy was also one of the mainstays in the National team like Masayuki and Riku.

Once everyone was in place, the coach's voice spoke up, "When the pitch is being thrown, I'll yell out if there's a base being stolen. You'll have to throw it quickly and accurately."

"Begin!"

Kei started his sweeping wind up and sent a pitch towards the strike zone. Ken's fingers twitched as he fought back the urge to swing at the ball going right down the middle.

PAH

Coach Takashi frowned in response.

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

## Chapter 315 - 315: Catchers Drill (1)

Kei felt Coach Takashi's sharp gaze on him and instantly began to feel anxious. He wasn't sure what he had done wrong, but he knew he would find out in a moment.

"What kind of pitch was that?" He shouted, clearly annoyed.

"If there wasn't a pitcher in the batters box right now, that ball would have been sent flying for a home run."

After saying so, he looked back at Ken and paused, as if remembering something.

"Ahem, okay maybe it would have been hit regardless." Coach Takashi said, clearing his throat.

"Catchers, I want you to lead the ball like you're trying to get the batter out. I won't accept any half-hearted play even if it's only a drill! Ken, go ahead and smack the ball if you see another one you can hit."

The coach increased the stakes, giving Ken permission to hit the ball.

The drill which had begun lightheartedly, suddenly turned serious.

Ken almost couldn't believe his ears at the coach's words. It had taken a lot of his willpower not to swing at the ball that was going right down the middle of the strike zone.

Yet now that he'd been given free reign, he suddenly felt a lot more comfortable.

'Let's see how this goes.' He thought, tightening his grip on the bat.

Keiichi who was the current catcher for the drill, sent a few signs to Kei upon the mound. Since he now had to treat the drill as if he was in a game, there was a sudden switch that happened in his mind.

His earlier timidness seemed to disappear, replaced with a determined gaze. It seemed that he was a player who excelled in actual game scenarios rather than drills.

"The count is 0-0, let's proceed." Coach Takashi yelled.

Kei nodded before kicking out his leg and beginning his unorthodox wind before whipping out his left arm.

"Second base!" Coach Takashi shouted aloud just as the ball left Kei's fingers.

Ken watched as the ball flew towards him, his eyes glued on the trajectory. With his improved mental capacity, he found it far easier to track where the ball was going to go.

'Outside and low...'

It looked a bit far for him to get a proper hit in, so he decided to let it go.

PAH

Keiichi sprung up and shifted his feet, sending the ball rocketing towards 2nd base with ease. Kei quickly crouched down, not wanting to get hit in the crossfire.

Pah

Satoshi who was standing upon 2nd base managed to catch the ball precisely, even making the action of swiping the glove down to tag the imaginary runner.

"Good! Again."

Coach Takashi called out, much more impressed with the play.

Once again Kei nodded before throwing his pitch.

"Third!"

This time, it was an inside ball which forced Ken to step back from the plate.

PAH

In one smooth movement, Keiichi shuffled his feet and moved behind Ken with swiftness. In the next moment he'd already let the ball loose and thrown it perfectly to the player on 3rd base.

Pah



Coach Takashi's eyes showed a hint of satisfaction. Usually it was difficult to throw to 3rd base when a right hand batter was in the box. They were not required to move out of the way, as long as they didn't intentionally impede the catcher.

Ken could tell that the catcher was experienced, particularly when trying to stop a runner stealing base.

However, the past 2 pitches had been balls which meant the count was currently 2-1.

If he kept on calling for balls, soon enough he would walk the batter.

"Let's keep going, remember the count." Coach Takashi said, gazing at Keiichi.

However, the catcher seemed rather unperturbed as he made the signal for the next pitch.

The next ball came flying towards the strike zone once again, however this time the coach remained silent.

'Two-seam fastball, breaking away...'

Ken flashed a grin before planting his foot and swinging with all of his might.

DOOONG

Everybody turned their attention to the ball which flew towards the outfield, their jaws slack.

While there were a few who knew that Ken could hit a ball, it was one thing knowing about it and another thing seeing it up close.

The ball didn't stop, clearing the back wall for a home run.

Even the players who were doing drills in the outfield had seen the ball clear the fence. They too turned their attention back to the diamond in question.

"Ahem..." Coach Takashi cleared his throat, buying himself some time to think about a solution.

In essence, the pitch was a good one. It was a tricky ball to hit for most batters and would be a strike as long as it went through to the catcher.

It was a perfect ball on the outside which could be used to protect against a base steal.

"Ken, let's have you switch with... Satoshi." Coach Takashi said, his face slightly red.

He didn't know many of the other pitchers, but he at least knew that Satoshi wasn't great in the batters box. If he picked another random pitcher and they were the same as Ken, he'd feel embarrassed.

"Ah, no problem." Ken muttered, dropping the bat and placing the helmet back in the pile of equipment.

As he got his cap on, he ran towards 2nd base and was met with a wide grin from Kei upon the mound.

"You won't let me have anything for free will ya?" He asked half-heartedly.

"Haha sorry roomie." Ken replied, letting out a small chuckle.

With that he took up position on the 2nd base and awaited the remainder of the drill.

After around 10 more pitches, Keiichi was told to rotate off. The next catcher came up, yet he was significantly slower in getting the ball to the bases.

It wasn't the fact that he had a bad throw, just that his footwork couldn't measure up to that of Keiichi's who seemed to have perfected the technique.

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

## **Chapter 316 - 316: Catchers Drill (2)**

Daichi was the last catcher to come up to perform, feeling a little nervous. It wasn't as if he was afraid or anything, just that he didn't want miss out on this opportunity to show off his talents.

Ken's eyes narrowed as he saw Daichi step up.

'Come on bro, you can do it.' He said inwardly, gripping his fist.

"Second!"

As the ball left Kei's fingertips, the coach called out loudly.

Daichi sprang to his feet and shifted his body as soon as the ball entered his glove before firing a blazing throw directly to Ken upon second base.

Even though he'd been anticipating the throw, Ken's eyes widened at the quick reflexes and sheer speed of his brother. He made sure his feet were on the base before catching the ball around his knees and making the action of tagging the imaginary runner.

Ken breathed out a sigh of relief. The throw was quick and accurate, landing exactly in the best position to tag the runner if he was sliding.

Coach Takashi nodded in satisfaction. Apart from Keiichi, that throw was leagues quicker than all of the others, not to mention the swift footwork and body positioning that went into the action beforehand.

Daichi continued his good performance, leading to many strikes and run outs throughout the drill. It was clear that he was one of the front runners alongside Keiichi.

"Alright, I think that's enough. Grab a quick drink while I call over the others for our next drills."

With that he turned around and made his way over to the outfield at a slow pace, his hands held behind his back. If it wasn't for his National Team outfit, one might confuse him with a random old man going for a relaxing walk.

However, no one would say such a thing out loud, no matter how brave they were.

Ken was all smiles as he walked off the field. He caught up to Daichi and held out his fist, completing a fist bump with his brother.

"That was some nice work bro." Ken said, patting the teen's back.

"Haaaah, thanks. I was a little nervous to begin with." Daichi admitted after letting out a sigh of relief. It had been a tense moment for him, being last to go up.

The two chatted for a while longer, both happy with how they had performed. The only thing that they hadn't been assessed for just yet was their batting skills, yet both Ken and Daichi were confident in their ability.

Not long later, Coach Takashi returned with the other players. They were all dripping with sweat and breathing heavily, making the pitchers and catchers reaffirm their positional choices.

Ken looked around a little and couldn't see his father with the other group.

"Where's dad?" He whispered to Daichi.

"Hmm?"

Daichi looked around for a little while only to shrug in the next moment.

However, before they could look further, Chris appeared rolling a machine from the corner of the field.

The players also saw the machine and began to murmur among themselves, excitement evident in their features, particularly from the non-pitchers group.

"Looks like we'll be batting against a pitching machine for the final drills." Ken said with a smile.

Yokohama did not have a pitching machine. It was not that they couldn't afford it, just that Coach Hanada preferred to use live pitches and didn't see the point in using one.

However, in a trial setting like they were in right now, Ken could see the benefits. Not only would the pitches be rather uniform, they wouldn't tire anyone out by using them.

Daichi on the other hand, was quite used to pitching machines. With the budget and facilities of Osaka Toin, it was no surprise that he would have access to this kind of apparatus.

The players watched on as Chris slowly dragged the pitching machine onto the mound with care. Only when he'd finished placing it properly did he return to stand next to Coach Takashi.

"Alright you lot. This will be the last drill of the day before we pick the squad, so don't slack off now."

Coach Takashi stood with his chest out and hands behind his back as he surveyed the 23 remaining players in front of him. His expression was neutral, so much so that no one knew what he was thinking.

"Each player will get 30 balls in front of the pitching machine. I want to see at least 5 to left field, 5 to center and 5 to right field. You'll also need to successfully bunt at least 5 times."

Ken's eyes widened a little in surprise. Although the drill might sound simple, it was actually rather unforgiving.

Rather than just allow a player to swing for the fences, they needed to pick the right balls and hit them with the right timing to get the desired result. This put a lot of pressure on everyone from the start.

"We'll have 3 outfielders to field the balls. Once the batter has finished their 30, they'll rotate to the outfield. Any questions?"

Ken fought back the urge to say "No sir" settling with a head shake instead.

Seeing that there were no questions, Coach Takashi nodded.

"You, you and you, head to the outfield." He pointed to Ken, Daichi and another player.

Ken and the others quickly grabbed their gloves and headed to the outfield. Thankfully they were not the first ones to face the pitching machine and would be able to check how the other players performed.

"You're up first."

"Eh."

Ken and Daichi both saw that Hiroki was the first unfortunate soul to be chosen for the drill and would likely be the scapegoat for everyone else present.

"Ah, poor Hiroki..." Ken lamented aloud.

'He'll be fine right?'

Chris was fiddling with the pitching machine and told Hiroki to stand back. The first pitch skidded along the ground and went flying into the fence.

Hiroki felt a cold sweat pour down his back after seeing such a thing.

'Is this thing safe?'

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

## **Chapter 317 - 317: End of the Trials (1)**

After some time, Chris seemed to have calibrated everything correctly and gave the thumbs up to Hiroki. He could tell the the kid was a little nervous, but he wasn't surprised.

As Ken watched his friend walk up to the batters box, he couldn't help but say a silent prayer. He knew just how much Hiroki had improved this year, particularly after breaking through his limited potential.

He wasn't sure who had been in the National Team this year in his previous life, but he knew that both Hiroki and Daichi were certainly not in the squad.

Now that he thought about it, he had almost forgotten that they all used to play for Yokohama in his previous life. It was no wonder why none of them had received an invitation to the tryouts after getting knocked out so spectacularly in the first round of Koshien.

Yet this time around, the effects of his regression and the system had made an indelible mark on each of their lives.

Not only was Hiroki elevated to another level, he had introduced baseball to Daichi a year earlier than he was supposed to. This allowed him to attend a prestigious baseball school and improve at the speed of light.

As Ken reminisced, he was interrupted by the sound of the metal bat striking the ball.

DOOONG

He quickly averted his gaze to the ball that was traveling towards him in the center outfield. Without a word, he easily tracked down the ball and caught it before it touched the ground.

Yet only a few moments later, he heard another noise.

DOOONG

This time it went to the left outfield to where Daichi was stationed.

At first the players watched on with a little interest, mainly to get a gauge on how fast the pitching machine was. Yet at almost 20 balls in, Hiroki had already completed the 5 balls to each outfield.

If this was all, then it wouldn't be too impressive. However, aside from the one that Ken had easily caught in the beginning, only 3 more had been caught.

Hiroki had hit almost home runs already and showed no signs of slowing down.

DOOONG

Ken could only watch the ball sail over his head once more, yet his face was set with a wide grin. There was no doubt that Hiroki was the clean up batter for the Summer Koshien winning team.

When it came time to bunt however, Hiroki's charm seemed to wear off a little.

Out of the last 10 balls, he had managed to hit 6 bunts in total, missing or fouling the remaining 4.

Yet despite the poor showing at the end, no one had the heart to make fun of him. It was clear from how he'd performed that Hiroki had definitely made an impression on everyone present.

"Okay, head to left outfield. Everyone else shuffle along." Coach Takashi said aloud, gesturing for the outfielders to move.

Ken moved to the right outfield and Daichi moved to the center while Hiroki slotted into the left. The two couldn't help but smile and send thumbs up to their friend who had performed well.

"Riku, you're next."

"Yes sir~"

Riku's tall frame sauntered up to the batters box after putting his helmet and gloves on. He moved his hips from side to side in an odd rhythmic way before giving a nod to Chris behind the pitching machine.

WHOOSH

DONG!

The hit was perfectly placed, sending the ball to the left outfield which dropped to the ground in front of Hiroki. It was an easy base hit if this was a real game.

Riku continued with his clinic, only missing the mark a few times and fouling off a ball here or there. He easily completed the coach's wishes, even hitting the 5 bunts casually.

The only real difference between this guy and Hiroki was the power aspect. While Hiroki had hit 10 home runs during his 30 balls, Riku had placed them perfectly out the reach of the outfielders.

"Next!"

Ken shuffled off the field and returned to the group of the other players before placing his glove down on the ground.

The next player up was the average looking pitcher with the ponytail who had spoken to him before. Even at this moment he still had no idea who the guy was.

Since he was a pitcher, no one expected much from him, which was just as well. Out of the 30 pitches, he only successfully hit 7 into the outfield, the rest were either missed or fouled off.

The drills continued for a while longer as everyone began to have their turn.

Apart from Hiroki and Riku, there were a few stand outs.

Masayuki had a similar hitting style as Riku, which made sense since they were both likely lead off batters. The gloomy looking Kuro and the clumsy Akimitsu were both solid, yet it was a quiet player who had caught Ken's attention.

Ichiro Kimura, an unassuming guy who was rather quiet compared to the others. Despite this, he was able to show out against the pitching machine, netting 7 home runs and hitting the ball wherever he wanted.

Even his bunts were perfection, showing just how solid his fundamentals and vision was.

"You're next." Coach Takashi pointed at Daichi, motioning for him to step up to the plate.

Daichi tensed up a little after being called out, yet his face flashed with determination in the next moment. As he walked forward he felt a slap in the middle of his back.

"Go get em!" Ken said with a grin.

"Heh, I'll be back soon."

After placing on his helmet and grabbing a bat, Daichi saw his father behind the pitching machine and flashed him a smile. He was going to show everyone here that he belonged in the National Team squad.

Ever since not making the preliminary at the conclusion of yesterday's trials, he'd been rather nervous. Yet this was the time to prove the coaching staff wrong.

'This is it. I'm right back to where my baseball journey started, in front of a pitching machine.'

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

## **Chapter 318 - 318: End of the Trials (2)**

Daichi's mind suddenly went back to spring of last year when Ken had taken him to the batting cage. A small smile formed on his face as he remembered the god-awful form in which he used to bat with.



Yet surprisingly he was still able to hit all of the balls. Of course they were only 100km/h, but that didn't matter.

Life seemed to have a funny way of going full circle.

WHOOOSH

Daichi's eyes narrowed as he saw the pitch fast approaching. His body seemed to shift into another gear as his instinct swiftly took over, clearing any obstacles in his way.

DOOOONG

He felt the ball hit the middle of the barrel before skyrocketing into the air through center field. No one needed to follow the ball to know that it was clearly a home run.

DONG

DONG

DONG

It was as if he was casually hitting some balls at the batting cages with how effortlessly he sent the pitches flying. Starting from the center, he alternated between all of the outfields.

Center, right, left.

Center, right, left.

Center, right, left.

While not all of them were home runs, they were all hit with that intent. Each time the bat connected with the ball, a resounding noise swept over the field, filling the spectators with awe.

Soon enough, the 30th ball was bunted towards first base, stopping just short of halfway.

Apart from the players who wore their emotions on their faces, the coaching staff were still stoic. Coach Takashi watched on like a bored spectator, though if one looked hard enough, they could see his eyes sparkling.

"Alright, you're next." He said, pointing to Ken nearby.

Ken smiled after hearing his name called. He was in a great mood after seeing Daichi stomp the drill, firing him up to elevate his game.

After grabbing his helmet, Ken placed his gloves on and headed into the batters box.

For some reason, Ken's mind also traveled to the time he spent with Daichi at the batting cages. He still remembered that he couldn't even hit a single ball at 100km/h almost 2 years ago.

Yet here he was, trying out for the National Team in front of his father and arguably the best coach in Japanese history.

'Time to show how much I've improved.' He thought inwardly.

WHOOSH

Ken's mind quickly analyzed the pitch speed and trajectory as it flew towards him. With his new mental capacity, it increased not only his vision, but also his coordination.

'Inside low...'

DOOOONG

Ken swung perfectly, lining up the ball with the center of the bat and sending it flying along the foul line towards the left foul pole.

DING

A few seconds later, the confirmation of the home run rang out over the field like a bell which had been struck at an old church. A small grin crept onto Ken's features as he waited for the next ball.

DOOONG

DOONG

DONG

Although he couldn't control where he hit the ball as well as Daichi, Ken still found it simple to make contact. Out of the 20 hits into the outfield, he'd sent 8 to left, 7 to center and 5 to right.

Out of those 20 pitches, 11 were hit for a home run. This brought his home run tally to the 2nd highest on the team, beating Hiroki by a single home run and losing to Daichi by 2.

When it came time for the bunts, he completely out shined every one of the players.

Even Coach Takashi who had been doing a great job of wearing a neutral expression for the entire drill had faltered after witnessing them.

Each one of Ken's bunts were sent along the foul line towards either first or third base. All of them slowly fell into position around the half way mark, showing just how much control over his strength he had.

"Alright that's enough." Coach Takashi said, masking his expression once more.

Ken was the last person to complete the drill, which could have been a blessing or a curse. Either way, he was happy with his performance which fully showcased his ability with the bat.

After the players who were in the outfield gathered, the coach addressed everyone.

"I'll be bringing the tryouts to a close now. I want you all to go through your cooling down exercises."

"Once you're done, head back to your dorms and take a shower. There will be lunch provided for you all while we deliberate your results." Coach Takashi's deep voice rolled over everyone present.

"You all performed well today, you should be proud of yourselves." Chris spoke up from beside the head coach after seeing the expression of some of the kids.

He felt a little empathetic since they were all just teens at the end of the day.

Coach Takashi nodded and he ran his fingers around his goatee.

"Alright, you're all adjourned."

"Um coach, when will we find out the results?" The average looking pitcher with the ponytail raised his hand and asked.

Chris took the lead on the question, "We'll let you know the results after lunch."

With that, the coaching staff made their way off the field while some of the other staff members stayed around to clean up and maintain the field.

"Ahhh, that was a bit tougher than previous years." Riku said aloud, falling onto his back on the ground.

"Yeah, it's probably because they added Coach Takashi as the Head Coach." Masayuki quipped as he began his stretches.

Some of the players were a little annoyed that these two were so nonchalant about everything. However, it was just them projecting their own uncertainty onto others.

Ken let out a small sigh of relief, only to feel his stomach protest loudly. Those who were giving rough looks to the former two quickly turned their gazes to Ken and glared.

"Ahem... Let's quickly cool down so we can go eat" Ken said to both Daichi and Hiroki.

"Dude, your stomach needs to learn how to read the room..." Daichi replied, shaking his head in exasperation.

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

## **Chapter 319 - 319: Deliberation (1)**

Chris opened the door to the meeting room before ushering in all of the staff members.

The meeting room had a large table with over 20 comfortable office chairs set up around it. As Hajime Takashi made his way in, Chris closed the door behind him and followed the older man to one of the chairs at the head of the table.

Since entering the meeting room, the other staff were finally able to relax. It seemed that keeping a neutral expression throughout the past 2 days had taken its toll on them.

Even the Head Coach let out a small smile of satisfaction.

"Firstly I want to say well done to you all for following my silly plan. I know it was tough, but I do believe that it has allowed us to see the best results." The coach spoke up, addressing everyone in the room.

The coach had asked all of the staff members to keep the results from the players, something that was not usually done in such a situation. He also required them to stay neutral during the drills, not reacting to anything no matter how good or bad it was.

It was a little unorthodox, but if anyone could be described as such, it was definitely the Head Coach.

He continued speaking.

"Now that the trials are complete, we'll be going through each player and discussing if they belong on the team."

He moved over to the white board and flipped it over, revealing head shots of the participants in the trial. It looked as if they'd pulled the school photo's of the players and printed them out.

"Let's start off with outfielders."

Chris pulled out his note book and flipped through a few pages before saying the first name on his list.

"Riku Sato. 6'1 and athletic, has been part of the National Team since Under 15's."

Coach Takashi nodded, moving his gaze around the room.

"He's a good lead off batter and able to make great contact on pitches. I think he's a lock for left outfield." An older man spoke up from the back of the room, adjusting his glasses as he looked down at his papers.

"I agree."

A few murmurs of agreement rang out from across the room, essentially giving a unanimous vote for his acceptance into the team.

Chris also added his agreement, prompting Coach Takashi to grab his head shot and place him on the crudely drawn baseball field upon the white board.

"Next."

"Masayuki Yamazaki, 5'9 with fast legs and great technique. He's also been next to Riku in the National Team before."

The coach didn't even wait to hear the staff's opinions on Masayuki, quickly placing his photo in the center outfield.

"He is the perfect center outfielder for us. Not only is he experienced, he's also very vocal and can help keep Riku in check."

Coach Takashi had done plenty of research on the players beforehand, therefore he was not just basing his decisions on what he'd seen in the tryouts.

"Next."

"Toru Fujiwara, 5'8 outfielder. He's a hard worker, but seems a little timid during the exercises." Chris said, turning to the other staff members.

"He's too slow."

"Yeah he seems a little sluggish, even in the athletic trials yesterday."

Coach Takashi seemed to also agree as he placed the photo of Toru onto the other side of the white board.

Just like that, someone's dreams had been cut off in just a few words. While Toru was still a top notch player, he was competing against the best Under 18 players in the country therefore it was tough.

Chris continued with the next few people, getting a yes or no from the staff members present. Coach Takashi rarely added anything, however he had the final say when it came to whether or not someone would make the team.

"Kuro Tojo, 5'9 and plays 3rd base. I'd say that he's above average in batting and he has a killer right arm."

"Is that the gloomy guy? He seems a little... creepy." A female staff member added.

However, she quickly regretted making such a statement as the Head Coach turned around and glared at her.

"I don't care what they look like. He can play baseball, and he does so at a high level."

\*Smack\*

With his eyes still focused on the woman, he slapped Kuro's photo on the open 3rd base before going into a bit of lecture.

"Remember boys and girls, Japan has never won an U18 World Cup... Do you think that we can afford to overlook great players because of the way they look?"

Coach Takashi's nostrils were flaring, showing just how impassioned he was about the subject.

The woman who'd spoken up earlier quickly lowered her head, feeling some shame and embarrassment.

"I think what the coach is trying to say, is that we should be looking at players purely based on their baseball abilities. Leave any behavioral or personality quirks to us."

Chris's calm words did a great job of relaxing the tense atmosphere caused by the Head Coach's outburst. While he was correct in saying what he said, Chris had relayed it in a better manner.

The eccentric coach nodded, pleased with his assistant coach's summary.

"Next."

"Hiroki Kondo, 5'10 and plays 1st base. He was the 4th batter for Yokohama High who won Nationals just a couple of weeks ago." Chris stated, trying to sound as neutral as possible.

"Mmm, he's one of the more athletic players and is dangerous in the batters box." One person agreed.

"He's good but... My concern is that his wingspan isn't sufficient to play at 1st base." The older man at the back of the meeting room spoke up, sounding a little torn.

"So what are you suggesting?" Coach Takashi's eyes lit up momentarily as he asked.

"Ah... Maybe we can move him to the outfield instead?"

The coach shook his head in response.

"I like him at 1st base. He's quick and athletic on his feet, we'll need this for the infield."

Without another word, he slapped Hiroki's face on 1st base.

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

## **Chapter 320 - 320: Deliberation (2)**

"Next."

"Daichi Takagi, 5'10 catcher. While lacking in athleticism, he was the best batter by a good margin. Coach Takashi would probably need to speak to his catching abilities."

Chris called out his own son's name and felt anxiety begin to grip his heart. He had to stay impartial in this moment, so after saying a brief introduction, he handed it over to the head coach.

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Meanwhile in the cafeteria, Hiroki, Daichi and Ken sat down with their food in silence. Though they had performed the best they could, one couldn't help but get anxious when they knew what was at stake.

It wasn't just them, majority of the players who were in the cafeteria bore some level of anxiety.

The only outliers were Riku and Masayuki who either had immense confidence, or had experienced this situation enough times to get used to the feeling.

Daichi let out a small sigh before looking down at his food. Although he hadn't eaten since breakfast, he had lost his appetite.

"Ken, what time do you thi—"

Daichi's words died in his throat as he witnessed the sight in front of him. Ken had his rice bowl above his head and was shoveling it into his mouth with his chopsticks greedily.

He looked like someone who had been starved for days, not a mere 5 hours.

Seeing this, Daichi felt his eye twitch in irritation.

"How can you be so carefree Ken?" He asked, gripping his fists.

"Mmm?" Ken looked at his brother with a confused gaze while trying to chew and swallow all the contents in his mouth.

He was only able to answer after a while.

"It's out of our control, why should I be anxious?" He said simply, almost as if he didn't truly care about the result.

In reality, it was likely a result of his Dauntless trait. While it didn't specifically state so in the description, it seemed to dull any negative emotions like stress and anxiety, allowing Ken to function properly in any circumstance.

Of course Hiroki and Daichi did not possess this cheat-like trait like Ken, however seeing his carefree attitude had seemingly rubbed off on them a little.

"Are you gonna eat that?"

Ken who had finished his 4th serving of rice, pointed to Daichi's plate and asked.

Out of nowhere, a growl like that of a dog protecting its food came out of Daichi's mouth, causing Ken to yank back his hand.

In the next moment Daichi began wolfing down his food as if he was scared it'd be taken from him.



Hiroki watched on with exasperation as the two brothers stuffed their faces like a couple of wild dogs.

'These two really are something else...!' He thought inwardly.

Just as he was about to tuck into his own food, he felt two sharp gazes from Ken and Daichi who had finished their food and turned their attention to his.

"D-Don't you dare... That's my food!" He yelled in a hushed tone.

However, he was too slow to prevent two of his side dishes from disappearing from his tray.

"Oi! That's mine." Hiroki cried out.

Yet the two rabid dogs didn't listen to him, shoving the food down their throats.

This only left him with one choice, eat everything before they could steal even more of his food.

By this time, the other players in the cafeteria had already heard the commotion over at the 1st year's table. They saw the peculiar sight of what seemed to be an eating competition between the 3 teens.

"Looks like we've got some lively juniors." Riku stated with his usual grinning expression.

Masayuki lifted his gaze towards the trio and couldn't help but chuckle.

"Those 3 are monsters, I'm not surprised that they act like it off the baseball field."

Riku raised his eyebrow, "Oh? That's rare coming from you. I thought that you looked down on first years."

Masayuki's eyebrow twitched, feeling some annoyance.

"I never said that... Plus, can those guys even be considered first years?"

"What do you mean?"

He let out a deep sigh before responding. "Each one of them are monsters. A pitcher with a 100mph fastball, a dude with the physique of a Greek god and a catching prodigy who is wicked with the bat."

There was no jealousy in his tone but he sounded exasperated.

Riku let out a hollow chuckle, "I don't think having a physique of a Greek god has much to do with baseball."

Masayuki gave his friend a look which said something along the lines of "You know what I mean."

"Mmm, it's true I guess." Riku said while shrugging his shoulders.

If there was one term that Riku could be described with, it was probably "Happy-go-Lucky."

Instead of getting caught up in the details, he just went with the flow or perhaps rolled with the punches would be a more apt description.

"So do you think they'll get selected?"

This time it was Masayuki's turn to shrug.

"We've never played under Coach Takashi before so how would I know."

As the minutes ticked on, even the players who had been holding up alright through lunch were starting to crumble. Waiting for the results was probably the hardest thing for a player to do.

Even after an hour had passed there had been no word from any of the staff.

The players were too anxious to leave the cafeteria, just in case they were not present for the results. At the same time, they weren't told they could leave after lunch.

Tap tap tap

Everyone's ears perked up as they heard the sound of footsteps ringing in the hallway towards the cafeteria. A few of the players stood up in order to confirm that it was indeed the coaching staff returning from their meeting.

The staff walked into the cafeteria with Coach Takashi and Chris at the forefront, holding a clipboard in front of them.

"Thank you all for waiting. If we call your name, you've been selected as part of the 2017 National Team for the World Cup."

Chris's words rang out, causing those in attendance to quickly swallow their anxiety and pay attention.

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

