

# Major League System

## Chapter 341 - 341: Film Study (1)

"I know that players of your caliber are used to playing a certain role on a team, particularly with your clubs. However, I need you to reign in your ego and get on board. This is the Japanese National Team, all of you were chosen because we believe you have the skills and flexibility to help us succeed.

What I'm trying to say is that you may not get the same level of playing time that you are usually used to."

Coach Takashi gazed at the players in front of him with a serious demeanor. Ken nodded with satisfaction, complimenting the coach in his heart.

With a stacked roster of the best players under 18 on one roster, it was guaranteed that not everyone would get a lot of playing time. If things were not laid out in the beginning, it was possible for it to fester and effect the teams morale.

"So, I'll be detailing the starting line up for the World Cup first before we continue."

The coach nodded in the direction of a staff member who was standing by the side.

The guy walked over to the computer and pressed a few buttons before a projection suddenly appeared on the white screen in the middle of the class. In the next moment the lights turned off, making it much easier to see.

What appeared was an aerial view of a baseball field.

"In the infield we have Kuro, Akimitsu, Ichiro, Hiroki."

As the coach spoke, those four players mugshots appeared upon the screen. While some of them looked rather normal, Hiroki's photo looked like it was from middle school, making him stand out.

Ken felt a laugh surge from his chest, wanting to break out into the serious atmosphere. As he was fighting for his life, he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder, followed by a tense and icy feeling.

He slowly turned his head to see a seething Hiroki, silently threatening him to keep his mouth shut.

Thankfully this managed to calm him down enough to hold back the impending laughter.

"Hahaha, who is that elementary schooler on first base!?"

There was a brief silence before the room broke out into small chuckles, echoing within the half-empty classroom.

Hiroki's gaze snapped to the culprit as he looked at him intensely. It was as if he was burning every detail of Aki's shaved head, looking for the best spot to attack.

Surprisingly, Coach Takashi laughed a little in response.

"Haha. Apologies, we were unable to get up to date photos for some of you to put in our slide show. Don't worry though, there will be a media day when we get to America."

Hearing this, Hiroki let out a small sigh of relief. However, he still hadn't forgiven Aki for making fun of his photo.

"Moving on. Our starting pitcher will be... Satoshi."

Ken felt his heart sink a little at these words, but he quickly remembered that there would be plenty of games. If he was named a relief pitcher then he'd likely get to start alternate games anyway.

"Starting catcher is Daichi."

Daichi froze in shock, yet he was quickly overcome by happiness, a genuine smile appearing on his face. Ken sent him a nudge, celebrating his brother's achievements.

It was quite an accomplishment to be named as a starting player for the Under 18's as a freshman. Those who had done this generally went on to be great professional players.

Coach Takashi continued, "Outfield we have Riku, Masayuki and Ken."

"Eh?"

Ken couldn't help but respond after hearing his name called in the outfield. It wasn't just him that was confused, both Hiroki and Daichi felt as if their brain was about to implode.

A lot of the team were also stunned by the news. Who in their right mind would put the Ace pitcher who won Koshien in the outfield?

He couldn't help but look at his father in question, however he only received a smile in response, making Ken even more confused.

Thankfully, the Head Coach was an astute old man and could see the confusion within the team. Though he didn't have to, he still spoke up to explain the decision.

"Ken is a real asset to our team as a batter. We believe it's too much of a waste to have him sit on the bench as a relief pitcher."

Hearing this, the team couldn't really refute the coach's words. After all, they were all present when the batting drills were underway against the pitching team.

Even as an Ace pitcher, Ken still managed to hit the second most home runs, falling just short of Daichi in that regard.

However, Ken who was a staunch believer in his pitching abilities couldn't help but feel a little deflated. While he was happy that he'd get to play, he loved to pitch more than anything.

Seeing that Ken was still unconvinced, Coach Takashi grinned in response.

"We'll also be using Ken as a closing pitcher when needed." He stated.

"Ah."

Only after getting confirmation that he would get a chance to pitch did Ken relax a little. In fact, he was more than happy. Not only would he get to play the whole match, he could even pitch to clinch the game.

"Moving on. Kei will be our relief pitcher and Keiichi is our backup catcher."

Their mugshots appeared on the projection moments later, with Keiichi's bowl cut looking as impactful as ever.

No one seemed to want to pick on Keiichi though, as he was rather intimidating with his wide shoulders and serious attitude.

After saying this, the coach grabbed an armband from his jacket pocket and held it up for the team to see. It was white and had the letter C in bold black stitching.

"The captain for the U18 National Team is a prestigious position, given to those who will carry the burden of all his teammates. It's their job to ensure everyone on the field is working together and upholding both our values and our standard of play."

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

## Chapter 342 - 342: Film Study (2)

There were a few coveting expressions amongst the players, however Riku merely scoffed. He already knew who would receive the armband, so he patted the guy next to him and said his congratulations.

"Masayuki, come get your armband."

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Once the team had been announced, the players were feeling rather fired up. The coach had a mysterious charisma which seemed to pull the team together.

Even those who were relegated to the bench did not seem to have any complaints. The way he spoke made it sound like they were all one unit, disparaging any thoughts of individualism.

The contents of the discussion was surrounding the format for this year's world cup.

There were 12 teams invited to the world cup. These teams then got split into group A and group B for the group stage elimination portion.

Each of the teams would play their own group in a round-robin style.

The top 3 teams of each group were then combined and forced to play another round-robin. This part of the competition was called the Super Round, and would dictate the final matches.

Top 2 from the Super Round played against each other for 1st and 2nd place, whereas the the next 2 teams played for 3rd and 4th.

Taking all of these games into account, they could play up to a possible 11 games in the span of 11 days.

Even in Koshien, teams were at least given a break once they made it into the quarter finals. However, the world cup would see them having to play a game every day.

"We've been put in Group A alongside Cuba, Dominican Republic, Chinese Taipei, South Korea and Canada."

Once Coach Takashi said this, the table was shown upon the projection screen.

Ken saw the list of teams and sucked in a cold breath of air. He knew that Cuba and South Korea were tough teams, yet he couldn't help but think of a certain person when seeing the Dominican Republic show up.

His thoughts moved to earlier this year when he faced the curly-haired monster batter from Shuei High.

'I wonder if he's in the team?' Ken thought.

While he had improved leaps and bounds since they'd last played, Carlos still left an indelible mark on him. After all, he'd gotten one of his best skills after completing the urgent mission from the system in that game.

While Ken's mind was wandering, Coach Takashi kept speaking.

"To be honest, it's a tough group to start out against... But I have confidence in you all." He stated, his deep voice resonating through the room.

"Cuba have the most U18 world cup gold's and South Korea are only behind America. While we will be chasing our first win this year."

This news certainly wasn't the most uplifting for the players, but that wasn't to say that they were scared. If there was one thing that young athletes had, it was supreme confidence.

Coach Takashi looked around the room a little, a smirk forming on his old face as he stroked his goatee.

"Good, very good. I see no one has lost any motivation. As long as you listen to us, I have the utmost faith we can secure that win..."

"So I guess I'll ask you all... Are you with me!?"

"Yes sir!"

"Hehehe, I knew I wasn't wrong about you all." He stated happily.

With that, he turned to Chris and sent him a nod before moving out of the way.

"Okay everyone, the fixtures have been released. We'll have only 2 days to get settled in America before our long stretch of games begin. First off we're against South Korea..."

As Chris began to talk, the start of the film session had begun. Thanks to the Head Coach's words, everyone was feeling motivated and therefore didn't find it boring.

Chris was also very thorough in his lecture, intuitively pointing out the main points in a direct and interesting way.

Both Ken and Daichi were surprised since they'd never seen their dad at work before. Yet they could tell that he had done these things many times while he was a scout for the Yokohama Warriors.

Even Coach Takashi nodded in appreciation as he watched from the side, once again patting himself on the back for getting such a capable assistant coach.

After around an hour and a half, the session finally came to an end.

By the time everyone walked out, it was already 4pm.

"What are you guys doing now?" Ken asked, letting out a big stretch.

"I've got homework..." Kuro muttered gloomily.

"Homework!? Damn man, that must suck..." Ken replied, however inwardly he was gleeful. He hadn't even been back to school, there was no way he'd be given homework now.

"You didn't get any?" Daichi asked, raising his eyebrow in response.

Ken suddenly had a bad feeling rise up from within him.

Then he felt a hand on his shoulder suddenly, causing him to freeze in place.

"Ah Kenny, I forgot to tell you. This came in the mail from the school this morning. I almost forgot to bring it with me."

His father handed him a heavy stack of papers before patting him on the shoulder a few times.

"Alright, I'll see you at dinner."

Chris left, leaving Ken in despair. Aki, Hiroki, Daichi and Kuro had large grins on their face as they saw his expression.

"Well, guess you DO have some homework after all." Aki replied, letting out a hearty laugh before walking away.

"Come on bro, let's get it over and done with." Daichi stated, shaking his head and letting out a sigh.

Ken could only silently weep as he followed Daichi towards the dorms, not even able to lift his head the entire way.

Hiroki followed behind the two, doing his best not to laugh at the depressed Ken. He also had some homework to do since they would be missing out on at least 2 weeks of school.

Yet even though Hiroki was a training addict, he was rather smart and never dropped below 5th in exam results for his year.

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

## **Chapter 343 - 343: Rendezvous (1)**

Ken stared at the lesson contents and homework that he'd been given, feeling a headache starting to form. It was rather depressing to find out that despite representing the Japanese National Team, he would still have to do his studies.

'Damn it. I've already finished school and college, can't you just let me be?' He cried inwardly.

Yet even if this was the case, no one would possibly believe that he had regressed back in time.

Thankfully, his increased mental capacity allowed him to scour his memories so that he was somewhat familiar with the content.

While it was likely possible to copy the same answers he'd used back then, he had been barely above average in the grades department. What person would want to stay in mediocrity if they were given the chance to improve?

So after a few more complaints, Ken dove into his homework, making sure to tackle the English homework first since it was his best subject.

It was times like these that he thanked his Grandfather who was from America.

'I wonder if we'll get to see him while over there?' Ken thought.

However, now was not the time to dwell on such things. He hadn't seen his Grandfather more than a few times in his life. All that he remembered was the guy was tall and old.

After almost 2 hours of study, both Ken and Daichi left the dorms to go grab some lunch. Surprisingly they had another guest at their table this time.

"I must say Daichi, your training plan has been a real hit with the coaching staff. Even the Head Coach sang your praises during our meetings today." Chris said, a proper grin on his face.

"Ha haha." Daichi tried to smile, yet he could still feel some tension from the other players nearby. It seemed that they would not forgive him so easily for the torture he had caused.

Ken's eyes widened as he thought about what his father said.

In the next moment he nudged his brother and whispered, "Bro, if the Head Coach has a good opinion of you, maybe he won't be mad when... you know."

"Ah... You're right!" Daichi's mood swiftly changed as he almost stood up in triumph.

Chris gave him a knowing smile followed by a wink, also lowering the volume of his voice.

"Just remember, try and hold off until we get to America."

Daichi beat his chest in response, "Don't worry dad, I'm a patient guy." He said confidently.

Hiroki watched as the three Takagi's acted as if he wasn't there, saying some rather treasonous things in his presence. He could only turn his attention to the food and began eating in silence.

'I don't want to be involved... I didn't hear anything.'

Apparently Kuro and Aki felt a little intimidated by Chris's presence, so they decided to sit at another table for dinner which was just as well. Ken could already imagine the big mouth on Aki if he were to overhear their conversation.

Of course he trusted Hiroki, if anything he could pull him into some responsibility if it ever leaked out.

After around 30 minutes, Chris stretched his long limbs and let out a contented sigh.

"Better make the most of this food here guys, America's cuisine will be a big change from what you're used to." He said with a grin.



"We've had burgers before though Dad. Can't we just eat those over there?" Daichi asked, his head tilted up in confusion.

"Try explaining that to Miho~" He said with a big grin.

"Alright, get some sleep tonight guys. We've got 2 training sessions tomorrow and another film session. Goodnight."

With that, he stood up and took his tray back to the counter, leaving the trio at the table.

"Guys, I'm beat. I'm heading to bed." Hiroki said, standing up in the next moment.

"Goodnight."

"Wait, I forgot to ask. Who is your roommate this time?" Ken questioned.

Hiroki's face paled, feeling a little exasperated.

"It's Ichiro..."

"Hmm? Why that expression?"

From what Ken knew, Ichiro might be a little serious, but he didn't seem to have any obvious flaws that would scare off someone like Hiroki.

"He's just so... quiet. I never know what he's thinking, and his statue-like face is intimidating."

Ken scoffed in his heart. If anyone could be likened to a statue or sculpture, it would be Hiroki with his chiseled abs. Inwardly, he was rather enjoying his friends plight, since he was forced to bunk with Kei the last time.

"Alright well good luck." Ken said abruptly, showing absolutely no sympathy.

"Geh."

Hiroki could only force a wry smile on his face as he took his tray back up to the front of the cafeteria.

Soon after, Ken glanced at his brother and could see him deep in thought. He had seen that look on his face before, so he didn't worry too much. If anything, he knew the guy would speak up if there was anything he couldn't handle.

"Alright, I'm heading off too."

"Ah, wait for me."

With that the two headed back to the dorms before going through their night time rituals.

Since Ken couldn't enter the Image Training with Daichi in the room, he looked at his system window for a while before activating Mika's sleep protocol. Within a few seconds he had entered a deep slumber.

Daichi was laying awake on the bed, staring at the ceiling for a while before he heard the soft snores of his brother.

"Damn that was fast..." He murmured.

It was a rather full on day today, even though they had only one training session this afternoon. Of course the training plan that Ken put together was a big reason why his muscles were tired.

Thinking of the training plan, his thoughts moved to Miho briefly.

Daichi had been so upset when seeing her reaction this morning. He'd seen a flash of hurt in her eyes upon seeing him that didn't quite sit well with him.

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

## **Chapter 344 - 344: Rendezvous (2)**

He was also feeling guilty for practically lying to her about coming up with the training plan. If he truly wanted to pursue her, then starting things off with a lie was definitely not something that he wanted.

With these thoughts, he grabbed his phone from the bedside table and opened up his contacts list. After opening up Miho's details, he paused for a moment.

"I need to set things right." He said softly.

With that, he began to type a message which ended up being a few paragraphs long.

After re-reading it a few times he let out a sigh and deleted it. Who would want their first mail to be a novel?

After almost an hour of typing and deleting, Daichi finally settled on something.

"Hey, it's Daichi. You up?"

Of course this was likely 10 times worse than whatever novel he had written and discarded before, yet being the naive teen that he was, he did not know its meaning.

Apparently, neither did Miho since she replied not long later.

"Heya :P I was just thinking about you."

Daichi felt his heart jump up to his throat as he stared at the message in front of him. He didn't know how to react to such words, especially since this was the first time he'd messaged someone of the opposite sex.

Just as he was about to formulate a response, his phone vibrated once more.

"Want to meet up somewhere?"

This time, Daichi's heart began to beat fast as he read the words. He felt that if his chest wasn't restricting it, his heart would beat right out of it.

Instantly, Daichi was torn.

He had promised his Dad that he wouldn't try and pursue Miho until he got to America, yet he wanted to clear up any misunderstanding as soon as possible.

Daichi who had been restricted too many times in his life, finally took the first step in being rebellious.

"Ok tell me where and when."

Just because he decided to do this, didn't mean he was doing so out of malice. He still intended to keep his promise, only after telling her the truth about the training plan.

"Meet me near the baseball fields at 11:30pm."

Daichi checked his phone and saw that it was only around 10:30pm which meant he needed to wait for a while longer.

By the time it was time to leave, his nerves were shot. He stealthily crept out of bed, peeping over at his brother who was still snoring softly as if he was having the most peaceful sleep in the world.

The funny thing was, it didn't look like he'd moved ever since he fell asleep.

Still, Daichi didn't want to get busted, especially by Ken. Therefore he took his sweet time, making sure to open and close the door as stealthily as possible.

As he entered the hallway, he felt his heart thumping loudly in his chest, pumping adrenaline into his body. It was good that he'd left early, since it meant that he could take his time to remain unseen.

However, what Daichi didn't know was that there was no real curfew in the University. Since everyone was considered an adult, the faculty posed no such restrictions.

So instead of walking like a normal person, Daichi's actions pretty much screamed that he was being suspicious.

By the time he had stealthily made his way to the lobby, a security guard confronted him.

"What are you doing?"

Daichi's face fell. His first time sneaking out and he was unceremoniously captured by a security guard. Instantly his mind went into panic as he tried to think of ways he could get out of his current predicament.

"Let me guess, you just moved to the dorms this semester?" The guard asked.

He had been stationed here for a few years and did not recognize the face of this person. However, since he'd caught him on the camera's walking from the dorm's, he made a guess.

"A-Ah, yes I just came to the dorms today." Daichi responded, not exactly lying.

The security guard let out a chuckle before patting him on the shoulder.

"There's no curfew here man. Just don't go around being suspicious." He said with amusement.

"Oh... Thank you." Daichi said, realizing his mistake. He quickly bowed a few times to the nice man and went on his way towards the baseball field.

The guard watched his retreating figure and couldn't help but laugh again.

"Man, I swear these kids are starting to look younger and younger these days." He muttered.

Despite getting away scot-free, Daichi felt his heart racing. The experience had almost shaved a few years from his lifespan.

Only when he got outside did he start to feel a little better. There were lights lit up along the path which made it easier for him to see where he was going.

Soon enough, Daichi found himself at the Baseball field and he began to look around for Miho.

"Hey, over here."

He heard a soft voice from the dark side of the field, near the bullpen.

"H-Hey..." Daichi replied before jogging over to her.

She was dressed in a simple short dress with short shorts on, her white legs reflecting the moonlight. Daichi did his best not to stare at her which was far harder than he had expected.

Once he arrived, she led him to one of the seated areas and gestured for him to sit down.

Daichi could only comply, feeling his nerves increase even further.

There was a stuffy silence that hung between them for a while as Daichi tried to find the appropriate words to say. Just as he was about to open his mouth, he looked up and saw Miho looking at him.

"Ah"

Daichi instantly forgot his words as he saw her pretty face staring at him. Her soft eyebrows and intelligent green eyes were enchanting, causing him to gulp subconsciously.

Miho smiled in amusement as she saw how coy the younger boy was. Since she was in her 3rd year of high school, she'd be turning 18 soon, so she was just under 2 years his senior.

"What's on your mind?" She said sweetly.

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

## **Chapter 345 - 345: Caught (1)**

"I have a confession to make."

Daichi said, moving his gaze away from her face. Every time that he looked at Miho, the words that he'd formulated in his head would just fade away from her beauty.

At the word confession, Miho's cheeks visibly reddened, though it was imperceptible in the moonlight.

Despite being almost 18, she'd never been confessed to, at least not so earnestly like this. Thus she began to panic a little, though she tried to hold it back.

"I... I didn't create that training plan."

Daichi's words seemed like a douse of cold water which was poured over her head. Suddenly, Miho began to feel embarrassed that she had misunderstood his words.

"Hmph."

Instantly, she went on the defensive, crossing her arms and looking at him with annoyance. In truth, she had an inkling that such a training plan was not written by him.

These days it was easy enough to research such a thing on the Internet and just claim it as their own. Even she herself had been doing all of her research online since she had not yet studied at University.

Daichi heard her harrumph and looked up slowly to see her annoyed face. He felt a little sadness creep up into his mood, but he resigned himself to his fate.

"And here I thought you were going to confess to me." She muttered under her breath, a small pout forming on her face.

"Ah what was that?" Daichi asked as he blinked a few times in shock.

"Nothing." Miho stated, still keeping her same expression.

"W-Wait, did you think this was a confession?" Daichi asked, gulping loudly.

"N-N-No w-what are you talking about?" Miho quickly stood up and gestured with her hands, forcing down her embarrassment.

Seeing her cute reaction, Daichi couldn't help but grin, feeling his heart throb in response.

For some reason his mind flashed back to the messages he'd seen on Ken's phone between him and Ai. He had known his brother regretted not making a move much earlier, therefore something shifted inside of him.

Without worrying about the consequences, he stood up and walked towards Miho with a serious expression.

"I wanted to tell you this because I didn't want our relationship to be built on a lie."

His words were quiet, yet they held a certain weight within them which forced Miho to listen. It wasn't that she couldn't respond, just that she could see his conviction and did not want to interrupt him.

'What... What is happening?'

Feeling her heart flutter, Miho stood in place as Daichi approached her.

"I might be a bit slow sometimes, particularly when it comes to these things. But I wanted you to know that ever since the first time I saw you, I wanted to be closer to you."

He continued forward, not stopping until he was at arms length from her.

Daichi seemed to have a burst of courage as he grabbed Miho's hands and placed them in his own. His eyes never left hers as he said the next words that seemed to come naturally.

"I like you Miho. Will you go out with me?"

Miho felt her face flush red, yet the feeling was overtaken by the butterflies which seemed to stir in her stomach. It was something she'd never really experienced before, but she didn't hate it.

"I... I'm not sur—"

"Miho? What are you doing?"

Suddenly a deep voice sounded from behind Daichi, causing him to almost jump in fright.

The moment she heard that voice, her face turned up into a frown. All of the tension in the air seemingly exploded as she glared at the figure who had appeared and ruined her moment.

Without a word, she stormed off back towards the campus, leaving Daichi and the newcomer in place.

Daichi felt his heart sink, so much so that he didn't want to turn around. He had yet to reveal his face to the person who'd just arrived, so he debated on whether or not to make a run for it.

However, if it was the Head Coach then he would practically be agreeing to his disposal from the team, perhaps even jeopardizing his father's job.

At the end of the day, Daichi was not a rebellious child, despite how he had grown up. For some reason, he felt as if running away now would only worsen his situation and bring shame to his father.

He let out a sigh and slowly turned around, ready to get his head chewed off.

However, he didn't seem to recognize the newcomer at all as he looked at his features.

The man was in his mid-40's and was wearing a suit. He was clean shaven and had a prominent brow which did little to hide his widows peak. Though he was unfamiliar, there was a few similarities with someone that he knew.

"H-Hi there." Daichi stammered, feeling quite exposed in that moment.

"Who are you?" The man responded, not in a good state after Miho had walked off.

"Err, I'm Daichi from the baseball team..."

The man's face turned up in a frown for a moment before he let out a sigh.

"I'm Miho's father, the Dean of Tokyo University." He said, holding out his hand.

Daichi despaired inwardly, trying his best to maintain a neutral face as his entire world seemed to be crumbling before him.

'I messed up... Father forgive me.'

As his mind was in turmoil, Daichi reciprocated and shook the man's hand, feeling the tight grip. There were callouses on his hands despite wearing business attire, making Daichi shiver subconsciously.

"N-Nice to meet you..." Daichi uttered.

The two stood in silence for a while and Daichi didn't dare leave before being dismissed by the big wig. Now that his identity was exposed, he needed to be completely respectful in front of this man.

Miho's dad seemed deep in thought as he brought his hand to his chin, almost as if he was going to stroke his non-existent beard.

"What are your intentions with my daughter?" He asked in a deep tone.

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



## Chapter 346 - 346: Caught (2)

If Daichi was feeling the pressure before, it was easily doubled after hearing such a question. What was he supposed to say in such a situation?

Yet he could only resign himself to his fate.

"At the moment, I just want to get to know Miho since we only met a few days ago. But I'll be completely honest... I intend to pursue her earnestly."

Daichi felt that if he didn't speak the truth now, then he would not be able to hold his head up high in the future. He couldn't be cowed by anyone, even if that someone was Miho's father.

A deep resounding laugh escaped the man's mouth as he tilted his head back. It echoed across the empty field, creating an odd and suspenseful atmosphere.

The laughter subsided after a few moments, bringing back the tense silence.

"Good, very good. I like an honest man." The Dean said, taking another look at his daughter's pursuer.

"With that kind of attitude, you shouldn't have a problem winning my daughter over."

Miho's father walked forward and patted him on the shoulder a few times fondly on his way past.

"How about you put in a good word for me with Miho and I'll pretend like this rendezvous never happened?"

His tone was soft and full of amusement, shocking Daichi a little.

"Y-Yes sir." He responded quickly.

What had felt like the end of the world was suddenly turned on its head. He hadn't expected to make it out of the situation in such a way, yet he was immensely thankful.

With that, the Dean made his way back to the campus, letting out a few chuckles as he walked away.

It was only after a few minutes that Daichi felt his heart go back to its normal pace. Yet at that time he felt a wave of fatigue hit his body, only now remembering that it was past midnight.

"I need head back quickly."

As he made his way back to the dorms, Daichi thought back to his conversation with Miho and couldn't help but feel his lips turning up into a smile.

Although he had been interrupted at the crucial time, just remembering her cute expression was enough for him right now.

Daichi leisurely walked back to his dorm room and slowly opened the door, only to hear Ken's soft snoring enter his ears. Even as he walked past, he saw that his brother was still in the exact same position.

"Damn, this guy looks like he's having a good sleep..." S

He resisted the urge to flick Ken's nose out of annoyance before jumping into bed himself. There was only 5 or so hours until he was supposed to be up for their morning run.

'Maybe Ken will let me sleep in.'

It didn't take long for him to fall asleep and dream of what could have happened if they weren't interrupted.

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The next morning, Ken awoke from his sleep, feeling strength fill his body. Despite a few taut muscles, he didn't feel much side effect from the tough training that he'd done yesterday.

'Thank goodness for Mika's sleep protocol.' He thought with a grin.

He swung his legs off the bed and sat up, his eyes focused on Daichi who was splayed out on top of his bed.

"Hmm, that's odd." Ken remarked.

Usually it was Daichi that was up before him every morning, at least ever since he'd moved in with their family.

"Oi Daichi, we're going for a run."

Yet he received no response in return.

If it wasn't for the rhythmic movement of Daichi's chest and the small smile on his lips, Ken might think the guy had kicked the bucket.

With a hint of annoyance, Ken grabbed his pillow and launched it at his brother, directly hitting him in the face.

Seeing no reaction, Ken let out a long sigh and got out of bed. Yet as soon as he got close enough, he was assaulted by a swift pillow strike to the temple, flinging him onto the ground swiftly.

Daichi then got up from his bed with bags under his eyes, the anger evident in his features.

"What the hell man? Can't I just sleep in for once?"

Ken could tell that the guy was probably running on almost no sleep, but he didn't care.

"Stop whining, we're going for a run... And you're gonna tell me what happened last night." Ken said matter-of-factly.

By the way Daichi's facial features changed after he mentioned the words last night, Ken was 100% sure that something had happened while he was asleep.

"Damn it." Daichi said, accepting his fate.

Ken was far too smart for him to pull the wool over his eyes.

Knock Knock

It was then that they heard a knock on the door followed by a creak.

Hiroki's face popped through the gap in the next moment, although it changed when he saw Ken on the ground with Daichi standing over the top of him.

"I-I was going to ask if you're going for a run... But I can come back later if you want?"

A moment later, two pillows flew at the door with force, followed by some curses.

Around 20 minutes later, the three of them were running around the campus. Ken wanted to keep it light since the other two might not have recovered as much as him. After all, they didn't have something like the fatigue management skill.

However, Hiroki looked as calm and confident as ever, sweat barely covering his face.

"Alright, what happened last night?" Ken said, his tone serious.

Hiroki's ears twitched in response, feeling his drama meter go off. He faced forward in order to not draw any attention to himself, yet he couldn't help but lean in a little closer, waiting for an answer.

Daichi continued to run, however there was a guilty expression on his face.

"I met with Miho last night..."

Ken frowned a little in response, yet he wasn't ready for the next part of the explanation.

"We were caught by her father, the Dean of the University."

"W-WHAT!?"

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

## **Chapter 347 - 347: Off to America (1)**

Daichi was forced to furiously explain himself for the next 5 minutes until Ken finally calmed down. He hadn't expected such a move from his brother who had shown no signs of rebelliousness the entire time they'd known each other.

Not only had he gone against his father's words, he'd also been caught by Miho's father who happened to be the Dean of the University.

Ken massaged the bridge of his nose, feeling a headache start to form behind his eyes. However, he soon decided to not think about it so much, lest he develop some type of anxiety disorder.

Daichi had never done such things before, and since he was a teenager, Ken couldn't exactly blame him for acting rashly in such a situation.

Thankfully, there were no repercussions at this stage. The Dean had also struck a deal with him, so the Head Coach shouldn't receive word unless Miho told him.

"Alright alright... Let's just be thankful that it didn't blow up in our faces." Ken said after a while.

He looked at his brother who had his head lowered like a child in trouble and couldn't help but feel a smile creep onto his lips.

'This damn idiot is making me feel like an old man... Aren't we meant to be the same age?' Ken thought.

The duo had stopped their run to talk over the situation, not paying attention to Hiroki who was lingering nearby.

If they paid attention to him, they would see his pale face which looked like he'd seen a ghost.

"Can you just wait 4 more days until we arrive in America? I'm sure it won't kill you." Ken stated in exasperation.

"Y-Yes..."

Daichi didn't find the request unreasonable. After all, that was his intention initially, however his conscience had gotten in the way and forced him to do something that was truly risky.

Although he appeared cowed, Daichi did not regret his actions last night. If he hadn't have made such a decision, he would have struggled to get closer to Miho and missed out on seeing such an expression on her face.

Just remembering her pretty features in the moonlight caused him to let out a contented sigh.

Seeing Daichi's lovestruck expression, Ken shook his head, letting out his own sigh.

"Okay, let's get back to our run. Just remember to act apologetic around our teammates, I don't want them to isolate you." Ken reminded his brother, thinking a few steps ahead.

"Eh?"

Daichi's expression suddenly stiffened, as if he'd been thrust back to reality.

"Oh, you're too busy thinking about Miho that you forgot what you did?" Ken replied snarkily, letting out a scoff.

"B-But it wasn't me..." Daichi replied pitifully.

Ken laughed before starting his jog and leaving the other two behind.

\*\*\*

The next few days went just as expected for the trio. They had two training sessions throughout the day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, followed by film study before dinner.

As they continued to sweat beside their new teammates, their relationships strengthened.

It was soon obvious as to why Masayuki was given the captain role for the U18 National Team.

He was the driving voice during training, always speaking up and motivating other players when things got tough. He was also the mediator between the team and Daichi, preventing any hard feelings to fester.

In a stroke of genius, he turned it into a competition, stoking the young athletes ego's.

Daichi and Miho had little interaction after their reunion on the first night. They hardly spoke to each other through the days, only saying perfunctory words in passing.

Yet for some reason, Daichi didn't seem depressed at all. He even wore a dopey smile most of the time, raising some suspicions as to whether or not he stayed true to his promise.

However, after asking Mika to keep an eye on Daichi after he went to sleep, he'd found out that the two had been messaging back and forth, sometimes past midnight.

Soon enough it was time for the team to head to the airport and make their way over to America.

Their flight was set for 11pm Friday night and would arrive just over 10 hours later on a direct flight to LAX. Due to the time differences, they would actually be arriving around 6pm on Friday night.

For Daichi, this was his first time catching a plane, therefore upon finding his seat on the aircraft, he gripped the armrests until his knuckles turned white.

Ken was forced to baby his brother throughout the first hour of the flight, particularly when it was in the act of taking off.

Perhaps the mental strain of the flight and the constant late nights messaging Miho had caught up to him, as Daichi eventually fell asleep.

The next 9 hours Ken did his best to get some rest. He could have probably done some Image Training to pass the time, but just thinking about being stuck if the plane had an emergency was enough of a deterrent.

Thankfully for Ken, Daichi slept the whole way through the trip, only waking up once the wheels had touched the ground.

Once the team were ushered off the plane, they were brought through customs and were forced to wait for their bags to come through on the conveyor belt.

After heading into the lobby, everyone was struck dumb at the amount of people.

Being from Japan, they had never seen so many foreigners in one place. Some of the newer players felt intimidated as they made their way down the escalators.

"Hey, who are those guys in the matching track suits?"

"Are they a sports team or something?"

Soon enough, whispers and looks were sent their way, making some of them nervous.

Ken who was fluent in English, translated a few of the words to Daichi and Hiroki, making them feel more at ease. It was stressful having others discuss you in another language.

The team were led through the lobby to where a bus was waiting.

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

## **Chapter 348 - 348: Off to America (2)**

It was rather odd to see that it was still night time, considering it had been over 10 hours since they'd left Japan. Unfortunately, they would likely be feeling jet lagged for a while.

Once they arrived on the bus, Chris stood up the front and addressed the team.

"Guys, I know it's been a long flight but please bear with us. We'll be staying at a hotel near Rodger stadium where our games will be taking place. If you haven't already, make sure you get plenty of rest when we arrive at the hotel as we'll need to be up early the next morning."

Chris's words had a mixed reaction from the players. Some were excited, while others were groaning since they had already gotten a lot of sleep on the plane.

Once arriving at the Hotel, Ken took in the sight in the surroundings. Although it was dark, there was still the sound of traffic and the lights from the streets, showing that there was likely a lot of night activity in the city.

"Let's head inside and wait in the lobby while I get our keys." Chris advised.

Thankfully there was not long to wait until everyone was handed their keys.

There were 2 players to a room which meant Hiroki had to miss out on bunking with one of them once again. Undeterred, Ken and Daichi went up the elevator and eventually found their room.

It was a simple studio with 2 single beds, a bathroom and a kitchenette.

The two weren't expecting much, but it had air conditioning and a large window to take in the view.

"Well, how was your first plane trip?" Ken asked with a grin.

"Terrifying." Daichi admitted, before flopping onto the bed and bouncing a little as if to test the firmness of the mattress.

"Have you ever been on a plane before?"

Ken nodded. "I've been to America before to visit my Grandfather but I was young."

"Well, I guess he's your Grandfather now too." He added with a chuckle.

Daichi was silent for a while as he heard this. It was a funny feeling having a relative that he'd never met, especially since he was adopted into Ken's family. S

On one hand he wanted to meet this Grandfather, but on the other hand he was afraid of being rejected. Not all people could be like Chris and Yuki who took him in and made him feel a part of the family.

"Can you tell me more about our Grandfather?" Daichi asked.

Ken shook his head, "I've only met him a couple of times when I was younger. All I remember was that he was very tall and would always buy me small gifts whenever he saw me."

"Are Dad and him not close?"

Ken paused for a while, trying to think. Since he'd regressed, it was almost 15 years since he'd last seen his Grandfather. His father never really talked about him, so he didn't have much information.



"I'm not sure, you'll have to ask Dad." Ken replied, feeling a little wistful.

It was only now that Daichi brought it up that Ken felt it was weird. He also wondered if his father had visited his Grandfather any of the times he was in America for work.

"Can you tell me about your old family?"

Ken wasn't sure where he found the courage to ask this, since he'd made a point of trying not to bring up such depressing things in front of his brother. Yet there was something that made him want to ask about it.

Perhaps it was because he felt guilty for not really showing care or concern towards Daichi in his previous life. Or maybe it just felt like the right time to ask.

Thankfully, Daichi didn't react negatively to the question, he merely silently stared at the ceiling for a while, as if he was formulating the words in his head.

"I never really knew my Dad." He said softly.

Ken put his bags down and sat down on the edge of his bed, facing his brother. He didn't say anything as he waited for Daichi to continue.

"He died before I was born, leaving just me and my... biological mother." Daichi paused for a little before uttering those words.

It didn't feel right to call that woman his mother. Doing so would be unfair to Yuki who had accepted him with love and affection.

"I never met anyone else in my family and even though I had my father's last name, it was far too common for me to try and track down my relatives."

"It wasn't until I met you last year that my life finally started to change for the better. Now I have a family that loves me and a brother who is also my best friend."

Daichi's words were sincere and full of emotion. This was the first time that Ken had heard his brother speak of this since they'd adopted him into the family.

"I had no attachment to my old family name, which was why I took up the name Takagi the moment I could. Even if my old family were to track me down, they would at least know that I'm no longer part of them."

Ken felt the heavy words wash over him, filling him with a hint of melancholy.

While everything had worked out in this life, just what kind of existence did Daichi live in his previous life?

The fact that he was a garbage friend weighed on his conscience heavily.

'I never had a right to be his friend in my previous life... But I won't let it happen again.'

Ken's made a vow in his heart as he looked at his brother. He would not let the same thing happen again, he would protect this guy so he could continue to grow and succeed.

He owed him that much.

BUZZ BUZZ

As soon as the sound of a phone rang out, Daichi quickly reached into his pocket and looked at the message. His earlier serious expression turned into a love-drunk one as he smiled stupidly at the phone in front of him.

Ken saw this and felt all of his earlier conviction get flushed down the toilet.

He let out a sigh and laid down on the bed.

'Mika, activate sleep protocol please.'

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

## **Chapter 349 - 349: Training Session (1)**

The next morning, the National Team met up in the lobby at around 7am, wearing their workout uniforms. There was a stark contrast between players who had received a good rest and others that slept on the plane.

While Ken was feeling fresh as a daisy thanks to Mika, Daichi flinched at the bright sun shining through the tinted windows of the hotel.

Since they were in a completely different country, Ken had to forgo the morning run, since he wasn't allowed to leave the hotel. He would need to find out where the gym was in the future.

They spotted Hiroki exiting the elevator, his expression solemn. As soon as he saw Ken and Daichi, he rushed forward with a pleading look in his eyes.

"Ken, Daichi, please change rooms with me... I can't take it." He yelled in a hushed tone.

A questioning look appeared on their faces, only to morph into one of understanding when they saw who stepped out of the elevator next.

Sporting his shaved head, Aki waltzed out of the elevator and lifted his arms into a deep stretch, a look of satisfaction creeping onto his face.

"Damn that bed is comfy."

"No thank you."

Both Ken and Daichi shook their heads and politely declined the invitation. No good would come of having a roommate like Aki.

Hiroki's face turned into one of despair as he hid behind Ken's figure.

"Alright you lot. We've got Elysian Fields booked from 8 till 12 so we'll need to hurry. Breakfast will be provided when we arrive, then we'll head to Rodger stadium to watch the men's National Team."

Chris's voice spoke up, grabbing everyone's attention.

A few excited responses were heard when mentioning the men's National Team, Ken being one of them.

"Men's National Team? Does that mean Yu Tanaka will be there?"

Ken felt his body heat up in excitement. Of course he knew that the men's world cup was also taking place soon, but for some reason it hadn't clicked that they might be able to meet the players.

"Who is that?" Daichi asked in confusion.

Ken resisted the urge to slap his brother, remembering that he had only been playing baseball for just over a year. He let out a small sigh before patiently explaining.

"Yu Tanaka was one of the youngest Japanese players to go over to the Major's. He was drafted into the NPB and only played for a single season before his contract was bought out by the Texas Riders."

"Ohh, okay."

Ken felt his eyebrow twitch in response after he heard the unimpressed tone of his brother. Unable to control himself, he placed his hand on Daichi's shoulder, using a little of his strength.

"I don't think you quite understand bro... Have you heard of the posting system between Nippon Professional Baseball and Major League Baseball?"

Daichi could feel his brother's fingers digging into his shoulder and couldn't help but squirm. He didn't realize how he annoyed Ken, but he could tell that if he didn't listen carefully, he would get in trouble.

"N-No I haven't heard of it." He responded meekly.

"Well..."

Ken then began to explain in depth the current state of professional baseball between the two countries.

Japanese players drafted into the NPB would be required to serve 9 years in the country before being allowed to enter Free Agency. This would allow them to pursue a career overseas with no strings attached.

Yet there was something called the posting system, which allowed Japanese players to enter conversations with Major League clubs. Should a Major League team want to sign the player, they would need to pay a commission to the Japanese club in order to do so.

The percentage rate was based on the total contract value agreed upon by the club. But in general, it was around 20%.

Ken continued to explain the details even as they got onto the bus.

"To get a contract after only 1 year of playing in the NPB, you can understand just how difficult that would be, especially when having to pay those additional fees."

Daichi frowned a little. Though it sounded impressive that Yu Tanaka pulled off such a feat, he found it a little odd.

"Why couldn't he just come to America first? Instead of being drafted by the NPB."

Ken shook his head and let out an exasperated sigh.

"You have much to learn brother."

"Hmm?" Daichi felt a flash of irritation at his brother's words, it was almost as if he was being treated like a child.

"Do you think it's easy to get into the Major's?"

"I... I mean, probably not right?" he replied, taken aback.

"America have their own draft, which is generally done via the College system. Even then, not even 10% of the senior college players will be drafted."

Ken let his words sink in, watching Daichi's face contort.

Without letting him respond, Ken continued, "If we want to play in the Major's we'll need to think about our path forwards."

Hearing this, Daichi turned to his brother.

Only now did he start to understand what kind of pact they had made back then. It might have been easy to say as a 15 year old kid, but the path ahead would be filled with all sorts of hardships.

Seeing Ken's serious expression, Daichi felt as if he was lagging behind. Ken's resolution was not fickle, he truly wanted to reach the highest level in baseball... The Majors.

Daichi finally nodded, feeling his own conviction strengthen.

"Let's first win the world cup, I'm sure that will increase our chances of being noticed by the major clubs." He said with a grin.

"Hahaha, you read my mind bro." Ken stated with a laugh.

It was rather funny that their original conversation had started out as praising another player, yet ended with them reaffirming their goals. It just showed how serious they were in their pursuit of greatness.

The bus ride didn't take long, soon coming to a stop outside the Elysian Fields.

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

## **Chapter 350 - 350: Training Session (2)**

As everyone got off the bus, the first thing they saw was a playground with kids already occupying it. Being kids, they stared at the unfamiliar players with no shame, looking at them as if they had two heads.

"H-Hi."

Kuro waved at one of the kids, using one of the only English words he knew.

The child closest to him turned up his face in horror before running off screaming to his mother.

"Mommy, that man has a scary mushroom head!"

"Pffft"

Both Ken and Chris felt chest hurt as they heard the child's words.

"Hahaha" Ken leaned over and couldn't help but burst into laughter, feeling his sides hurt. The confused expression on Kuro's face made the situation even funnier.

Due to Chris's position as the Assistant Coach, he needed to have a little more composure. He cleared his throat loudly, yet one could still see some vestiges of a smile that crept onto his face.

"Ahem. Let's head to the field."

"Ken what did that kid say?" Daichi asked, rather intrigued.

Ken fought hard to get his breathing under control before he whispered the words to Daichi.

"Oh man that's brutal..."

Fighting back his amusement, Daichi took a brief glance at Kuro who seemed a little sad.

'Maybe I won't tell him...'

Once the team arrived onto the field and put their things down, they were ushered over to the side.

"We've got some breakfast over here guys, don't eat too much as we'll be starting warm ups in about 20 minutes."

Everyone got in line and walked away with something.

Ken only found the egg and bacon muffins to be appealing, so he got two. There were other items that didn't look appetizing, like the scones with a light brown sauce.

'Who would want gravy on a scone?' He thought, letting out a shudder.

Soon enough, they were on the field going through their warm ups. Much to their dismay, they could see some of the other staff setting up the interval training on the field, once again eliciting glances towards Daichi.

However, after receiving a glare from Masayuki, the teens could only look away.

The training wasn't that different to what they had done for the past 4 days so there were no surprises. If anything, it seemed as if the intensity had dropped a little, likely because the games would be starting soon.

Once the training session was done, they were ushered off the field and back onto the bus.

However, just as they got seated, they saw another bus arrive.

Ken who was sitting in the window seat had a clear view of the players as they made their way off the bus. The first person he saw was a Korean teen with bangs that partially covered his eyes.

Yet the most eye-catching thing was a scar that ran horizontally across his nose and under his eye.

The teen's gaze moved around before finally setting on Ken who he could see through the window. Being a nice guy, Ken held up his hand to wave, acknowledging his presence.

What happened in response caused Ken to be taken aback.

Not only did the teen not wave back, he lifted his fist and produced the middle finger with a giant grin on his face.

"W-What the hell is with that guy?"

Yet before Ken could react, the bus started reversing.

"Bam, what the hell are you doing?"

The Head Coach stepped off the bus and managed to catch the tail end of the interaction. His voice was high pitched and filled with annoyance.

"Eh? Just greeting the Jap team." Bam replied, sticking his tongue out.

"Don't worry about him Coach Hyun, you know how he is."

Another player walked past and tried to cheer up the coach. It seemed like these kind of antics weren't uncommon for this player.

The coach grumbled before finally accepting it.

"Just keep that stuff off the field, there will be cameras everywhere when we play."

With that, the South Korean team made their way onto the field.

Not long later, the Japanese team arrived at Rodgers stadium. Stepping off the bus and entering the field, the teens looked around in awe.

"This is the biggest baseball stadium in the world, capable of holding up to 56,000 people in the audience." Chris said with a smile on his face.

He had visited this place a few times during his work trips so he was not surprised by the reaction of the players.

As they walked through the tunnels, the field appeared in their view, causing even more whispers to diffuse throughout the team.

Yet it wasn't until they stepped on the grass that they realized just how big it was. The seats seemed to block off the horizon, shooting into the sky and painting an awe inspiring picture.

"Is this where we'll be playing Coach?"

This time it was Coach Takashi who spoke up, "Yes, Group A will be playing here while Group B plays in Sacramento. The Super Round will also be played here."

"But don't expect the seats to be full for our games." He said with a laugh.

"The Coach is right. Although it's the world cup, most people only want to see the men's teams, not the under 18's." Chris added.

"Speaking of which, we're only here today to watch the men's training session. Remember, we're not to bother them."

With that, the team was led to the seats near on the left side of the field. Since it was a closed training session, there were no other spectators in the stadium.

"There he is!" Ken said with excitement, pointing to the mound.



Yu Tanaka, the player that Ken most admired was currently in front of him. The guy looked shorter in person, but he gave off a determined atmosphere.

As he watched him wind up, Ken wished that he had brought a camera, or something that he could get autographed a bit later.

WHOOOSH

PAH

The crisp sound of the ball entering the catchers glove made the hair on his arms stand up in response.

'So cool...'

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

## **Chapter 351 - 351: Eve of the World Cup (1)**

It wasn't just Ken who was starstruck in that moment. There were at least 5 different players on the men's national team that were played in the Major's and they were all gathered in the same place.

The players in attendance were the best Japan had to offer.

"You can all learn something by watching how these professionals train." Coach Takashi commented, addressing the players.

Unlike the rest of the team, the Head Coach was on the field. He received a few glances from the players, yet they quickly ignored his existence.

'Wait, wasn't he the Head Coach for the men's national team until last year?' Ken thought, feeling as if he was missing something.

The reactions of the players on the field seemed as if something was off.

"Aren't they treating their old coach a bit coldly?" Hiroki leaned forward and asked Ken.

"Yeah... I wonder what happened." Ken mumbled.

It was then that he remembered what the coach had said when they first met at the tryouts.

["I'm tired of training those fools who won't listen. I need soldiers."]

By the time that Ken thought he might be onto something, a figure approached Coach Takashi from the field.

Not wanting his team to overhear the conversation, the Head Coach casually waltzed towards the figure with his hands behind his back.

"Ah, it's the Toupee Coach!"

Aki pointed and yelled out from his seat, causing everyone to follow his finger.

The coach in question froze in place and stared at the seats with visible frustration as he gnashed his teeth.

A few of the professional players on the pitch started snickering in response to the outburst, yet they quickly went back to what they were doing after receiving a glare from the coach.

If it wasn't for the circumstances, Ken would have laughed. However, he was straining his ears trying to hear what the two were discussing. Unfortunately they were a bit far away, causing him to give up rather quickly.

"Riku, is that your old coach?" Ken leaned back and asked the boy behind him.

Riku nodded briefly, "That's Coach Katai. He was the U18 coach ever since I first made the team."

"Do you know why he left?"

Masayuki spoke up next, "We never got told why, but I'm sure he sees moving up to the men's team as a promotion."

"They don't seem to get along..." Before he could comment, Daichi spoke up, drawing everyone's attention back to the two.

Although they couldn't hear anything, it was clear by Coach Katai's body language that he wasn't happy with his colleagues words.

"I can already see what kind of players you've scouted! Don't come crying to me when you're knocked out in the group stages!"

Coach Katai pointed at the U18 players and yelled before storming his way back onto the field, leaving Coach Takashi unmoved. From an outsiders perspective it looked like he'd just thrown a tantrum before vacating the scene.

"Ah man, don't take it too harshly." Aki said, patting Daichi on the shoulder.

"Huh?" Daichi blinked a few times in confusion.

"He was talking about you, idiot." Masayuki bonked Aki on the head.

"Owww." Aki rubbed the top of his head, whining a little.

Chris who was not far away, couldn't help but utter a laugh after seeing the antics of the players.

"Dad, what was that all about?" Ken was too curious to stay silent, asking his father for the juicy gossip.

"It's none of our business." Chris said dismissively, much to Ken's disappointment.

Since his father wasn't willing to spill the tea, Ken could only try and put the pieces together himself. Unfortunately, he was missing a lot of context, so he had to throw it to the back of his mind.

After around 40 minutes of training, the men's team finished up what they were doing and began to cool down.

Coach Takashi approached the U18 players and told them that it was time to leave. There was a little disappointment since they were hoping to at least interact with the men's team, but it was clear that wasn't going to happen.

Ken thought that it might be because of the coach's earlier discussion, but there was no way to prove it.

So, the team was ushered back onto the bus rather quickly, unable to even interact with some of their idols.

They returned to the hotel and were led into one of the meeting rooms downstairs for their film study sessions.

"Alright, our first game is tomorrow against South Korea. They have a dynamic line up with excellent defense, so we'll need to be on our toes."

Chris led the film session as usual, pulling up videos and plays from the South Korean team's games earlier that year.

"Keep an eye on the player on 1st base, Dam Bon-Hwa. He is known for getting under the skin of opposing players, even resorting to petty tricks."

The moment his face appeared on the screen, Ken recognized him. He had a horizontal scar on the bridge of his nose which extended under each eye.

He remembered that the guy flashed him the finger earlier that day.

'So that's Dam huh?' Ken thought.

Chris continued, "While these guys aren't known for hitting home runs, they are fantastic at playing small ball."

He pointed to the screen and showed some examples.

Small ball was an informal term for a strategy which focused on getting players on base and advancing them into scoring positions. It was often used to whittle away at an opponent stronger than oneself.

Many of the Asian countries were known to use this tactic which relied more on technique rather than pure athletic abilities.

Until the last decade, Japan was also a large proponent of small ball.

"Therefore, we'll need to be sharp with our leads and pitching. I also expect our infield to be ready for bunts and quick to rotate when needed."

After saying this, Chris went on to reaffirm the defensive rotations and drill into the players their roles.

\*DING\*

As Ken and the others walked out of the meeting room, he heard the most beautiful noise.

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

## **Chapter 352 - 352: Eve of the World Cup (2)**

'Is that another mission?' Ken thought with excitement.

Since there were too many people around, he didn't want to bring up the system right now. But the problem was, it was only around 4:30pm which meant he wouldn't get to his room till later.

"You guys can hang out for a while, the buffet opens in 30 minutes."

Chris called out to the team before closing the meeting room door. It seemed that the coaching staff still had some things to discuss.

The team spread out amongst the lobby, waiting for 5pm to arrive.

'Do I say I need to take a dump?' Ken fidgeted, feeling a burning curiosity towards the new notification which threatened to overcome him.

"Looks like you're nervous brother." Daichi said with a grin.

"Eh?" Ken turned to him with confusion.

"See, your leg keeps bouncing. You only do that when you're excited or nervous."

Hiroki let out a chuckle, "Who would have thought that all 3 of us would have made it into the starting line up? There was a time when thought we wouldn't even make the team."

Faced with this sudden self-reflection, Ken looked at the two teens with exasperation.

'I just wanna see my damn mission!' He shouted inwardly.

"This is a big opportunity for us, we need to make the most of it." Daichi commented, gripping his fist.

The trio each had stern expressions, not something usually seen on the face of teenagers. Ken especially seemed to be a little anxious, with sweat pouring down his usually calm features.

Soon after, Chris came out of the meeting room with the rest of the coaching staff. He saw his two boys in the lobby and frowned upon seeing Ken. S

'Is he worried about playing in the outfield for the first time?' He thought.

Like a true concerned father, he made his way over and checked on his son.

'J-Just a peek... Surely no one will notice right?' Ken thought inwardly as he scanned the surroundings.

He quickly accessed the system window and saw the flashing icon.

"Kenny, are you okay? You're sweating a lot."

Ken jumped up from his chair in fright, almost colliding into his father. He quickly waved his hands, dismissing the system window that he'd just opened.

His heart was beating out of his chest as he stood up straight and faced his dad.

"I-I'm okay... Thanks for asking ha ha ha" Ken stammered.

But his words did not fool his own father.

Chris wrapped his long arm around his son's shoulder and dragged him away after his fatherly instincts screamed at him. After all, he felt some responsibility for the decision to move him to right outfield.

Ken blinked a few times in confusion.

'Damn it, now Dad thinks I'm anxious about playing in the outfield tomorrow.'

Ken could only cry inwardly. His burning curiosity to see what the system notification was about had brought him to this misunderstanding.

Once they were away from everyone, Chris leaned closer to him and spoke in a hushed tone.

"I know it's a little intimidating to be playing in a position that you're not comfortable with. But I saw you in the outfield drills, you have a killer arm and great technique which fits us perfectly."

"Yeah... I guess it's just a lot to take on at the moment." Ken said. He needed to steer into the narrative, otherwise he could tell that his father would not relent.

Chris let out a small sigh and gave his son a pat on the back.

"We wouldn't have made the decision if we didn't think you could handle it."

Despite not really being all that nervous about his debut in the outfield, Ken felt a sudden warmth at his father's concern.

"Thanks Dad, that means a lot." Ken said with a smile. His words were genuine, as he truly felt gratitude.

Seeing his son's face light up, Chris smiled in kind. He had been a little worried that Ken might be harboring some sort of grudge for not being named as the starting pitcher, especially since he'd won at Koshien.

Many people were hailing him as the next Yu Tanaka after his legendary performance at Koshien. While Chris advocated for this comparison and even believed it himself, he did not want his son to get conceited.

Conceit and arrogance was not something that fit in with the Japanese National Team's ethos.

"Alright good. Go have some dinner and get plenty of rest tonight." Chris stated with a grin.

Ken nodded before heading back to Daichi and Hiroki who had been watching the whole interaction. It felt a little embarrassing to be coddled like so in front of his friend and brother, but they didn't give him any flack for it.

Daichi smiled widely, happy that his brother had calmed down.

Thankfully, the trio didn't have to wait much longer for the restaurant to open. The whole team practically stormed the line as soon as the doors opened, leading to the staff freaking out a little.

"Ah, sorry about them. They're a little hungry after practice today." Chris said politely to the waiter.

Soon enough, everyone had their fill and headed back up to their hotel rooms.

Ken patiently waited as Daichi yapped at him for a while, his words filled with excitement as he talked about tomorrow's game.

After his verbal diarrhea, Ken thought that Daichi had finally fell asleep, yet he was wrong.

"I didn't get a chance to talk to Miho today since the Head Coach was always nearby."

"Ah... I see." Ken rolled his eyes.

Out of everything he wanted to do right now, talking about Miho was at the bottom of the list. However, it wasn't like he could blow off his brother in his time of need.

"I think you'll have plenty of time to chat to her while we're batting tomorrow."

"Oh yeah! How could I have forgotten?"

At this new revelation, Daichi began to chatter away without a care in the world.

'My mission...' Ken cried inwardly.

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

## Chapter 353 - 353: First Pitch (1)

Ken was forced to suffer through the ramblings of a teenager in love for the next 30 minutes. There were a few times when he tried to insist that he was tired, yet his brother always found a way to start the conversation again.

Only when he heard the soft snores of Daichi did he finally breathe out a sigh of relief. He grabbed his phone and checked the time, only to let out a groan in disbelief.

'This guy kept yapping for an entire 2 hours?' He complained inwardly.

Just as he was about to close the phone, he saw that he had a message from Ai.

"Not sure what time it is there, but good luck against South Korea tomorrow, I'll be rooting for you xo"

Ken felt his irritation subside significantly as he read through the message. It felt nice to have someone think about him, even if they were so far away.

He quickly replied to her and gave a quick update of what time he was playing.

BUZZ BUZZ

A few moments after he hit the send button, he felt his phone vibrate as another message showed up. The words "Mom" showed up on the screen as the sender.

'I don't have time for this.' He said inwardly, quickly putting his phone away.

Yet he felt a sudden wave of guilt threaten to overwhelm him. How many times had he done the exact same thing in his previous life?

No matter how many times his mother called or messaged him, he would always dismiss it with the excuse of calling her back later.

"Ugh." Ken let out a groan before bringing his phone out once more and viewing the message.

"Hi Kenny, I just arrived in Los Angeles. I'll see you tomorrow before the game, have a great sleep, I love you."



"Man... Am I just an A-hole?" Ken muttered after reading the wholesome message from his mother.

He quickly typed back, doing his best to hold onto his fraying patience.

After finishing, he let out a sigh.

BUZZ BUZZ

"W-WHAT THE HELL!?" He yelled in a tiny whisper, feeling his frustration mount once again.

He grumbled and opened his phone once more.

"Complete the survey for your chance to win a share in ¥1,000,000."

"..."

Without any fanfare, Ken switched off his phone and resisted the urge to throw it across the room.

'No more interruptions...'

He quickly opened up the system window and let out a cry of joy after seeing the brand new mission pop up.

#NEW MISSION: U18 Baseball World Cup

\*Task 1: Get onto base 15 times

\*Task 2: Hit 8 home runs

\*Task 3: Do not drop a single catch

\*Task 4: Advance to Super Round

\*Task 5: Finish top 2 in Super Round

\*Task 6: Win the World Cup

\*Task 7: Win player of the Tournament

\*Hidden Task: ???

REWARDS:

- >Task 1 rewards - 5,000 Major points
- >Task 2 rewards - 5,000 Major points
- >Task 3 rewards - 7,000 Major points + Fielding Boost
- >Task 4 rewards - 10,000 Major points + Skill Selection ticket
- >Task 5 rewards - 15,000 Major points + Potential Booster
- >Task 6 rewards - 25,000 Major points + SSS-Grade Physicality Elixir
- >Task 7 rewards - 25,000 Major points + SSS-Grade Mental Elixir
- >Hidden Task rewards - Trait: Academic

'The wait was worth it...' Ken thought as he ran his eyes over the new mission laid out before him.

Not only was the mission tailored to his role on the team, the rewards were out of this world. Ken had never seen an SSS-Grade Elixir, not even in the system shop which he rarely used.

The Potential Booster was something that he'd received before as a reward from the Gold Lottery wheel, yet he still needed more. He wasn't like Hiroki and Daichi who could catapult themselves directly into the next realm.

"Hehehe."

Ken couldn't help but grin and laugh with joy. The system knew just what to do to get him motivated before a big tournament.

Only after re-reading the tasks and rewards a few more times did he ask Mika to enact the sleep protocol. If he wanted to perform well tomorrow, he would need some good rest.

\*\*\*

The next day, the team promptly arrived at Rodgers stadium at the appointed time. Unlike yesterday, there were some spectators gathering outside, yet at one glance it was obvious that it wasn't many.

There were three games being played today, South Korea vs Japan, Cuba vs Dominican Republic and Chinese Taipei vs Canada.

Of those games, Japan and South Korea were playing first at 10am.

"Will this game be broadcast on TV?" Aki asked, as the team made their way to the locker rooms.

"I heard that it will just be streamed online until the finals."

"Eh? No way. Even Koshien is broadcast on National TV."

"Hehehe, what did I tell you before? Don't expect a large audience." Coach Takashi said from the front of the pack. He seemed rather pleased with himself.

Aki raised an eyebrow in confusion.

"Isn't America the home of baseball? Why isn't it as popular here as it is back home?"

His concerns were genuine.

Baseball used to be referred to as America's favorite pastime, yet the sport had been declining with the rise of both the NFL and NBA.

In fact, out of the top 50 most viewed sport events in America in the past year, baseball games only made the list 3 times. Overshadowed by even College Basketball games.

Therefore the Japanese players expectations of the home country of baseball began to waver.

Yet everything was quickly forgotten as the players finally arrived in the state of the art locker rooms.

"Whoa..."

Gasps were heard from the players as they took a look around. Each of the locker rooms on display were shiny and had their own light source, complete with drawers and wooden cupboards.

The chairs looked luxurious and the open floor was complete with a few decadent looking leather couches.

Suddenly, those who were having second thoughts about their dream to play baseball in America swiftly changed their minds.

"I could get used to this." Ken muttered.

S

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

## Chapter 354 - 354: First Pitch (2)

\*\*\*

"Alright everyone, settle down please. We've only got 20 or so minutes until we need to be on the field."

The South Korean team swiftly drew their attention towards the coach, respect clear in their eyes.

The Head Coach An Hyun was a man in his early 40's and sported a vibrant head of hair with high cheek bones and intelligent brown eyes. He looked like a retired actor who would have been rather dashing in his younger days.

"As I said, we need to be careful of their freshman pitcher Ken Takagi. He is the biggest threat to our playing style." He stated with a serious expression.

"Eh? Ya really think so coach?" A young figure with a scar on his nose commented, seeming a little unconvinced.

Seeing who it was that spoke, Coach Hyun rolled his eyes. He should have guessed that this guy would speak up in this moment.

"Dam... shut up dude." One of his fellow players whispered and nudged him.

"Dam, I want you to try and get under his skin this match. As long as you can disrupt their rhythm, we'll be able to open up our game."

Yet instead of getting angry, Coach Hyun gave Dam a special mission, much to the surprise of the South Korean players.

"Hehehe, It'll be too easy for me." He responded nonchalantly.

If Dam was good at anything, it was being annoying. Everyone on the team could vouch for his abilities.

"Okay good. Let's finish up here and go do some warm-ups. The game is set to start soon."

With that, the sleek Coach Hyun and his team finished getting ready and went onto the field to where the Japanese team were already present.

Dam scoured his opponents and looked for his target. His eyes settled upon a tall guy with blond hair who looked just as intimidating as himself.

"So that's their Ace in the hole eh?"

As they locked gazes, Dam let out a wide grin and grabbed his crotch, giving a rude gesture to Kei who he'd mistaken as Ken.

Seeing this, Kei blinked a few times in confusion, even turning to see if there was anyone behind him.

"What the hell is with that guy?"

"He must like you Kei, why don't you wave back." Aki let out a peel of laughter, having seen the whole interaction. He gave the tall delinquent a nudge with his elbow, as if to hint at something.

It was then that Kei's expression darkened.

Despite not speaking the same language, the gesture was universally known to be rude, therefore it pissed him off.

'Let's see if you're smiling when my 95mph fastball flies by your chin you bastard.' He thought, grinding his teeth.

The South Korean players didn't even react after seeing Dam act in such a way. After all, they'd probably seen him do it many times in the past.

Soon enough, both teams were too busy completing their warm up drills to pay attention to the tension between the two players.

Around 20 minutes later, the horn sounded for the game to commence.

Both the coach and the captains shook their counterpart's hands and the coin was tossed, resulting in Japan taking the first batting rights.

"Japan win the toss and elect to bat. South Korea, please take the field."

With that, the first match of the U18 World Cup was about to begin.

The Japanese team shuffled into the dugout and wished the two lead off batters some good luck. Both Riku and Masayuki seemed like it was just another day at the office, as they headed onto the field with their equipment.

Riku held the bat over his head and began to tilt from side to side, loosening up his muscles.

"I'll be hitting pretty early in the count. I think we can get some early runs against these guys." He said with his trademark smile adorning his features.

Masayuki seemed unfazed as he looked at the pitcher warming up.

"Just focus on getting onto base, we don't need any flashy plays." He said seriously.

"Yes Captain~"

After warming up, Riku began to shuffle his hips from side to side and groove his feet. The South Korean players who looked over, couldn't help but double take.

"Is he dancing?"

"Hahahaha! What a weirdo." Dam shouted out from first base, holding his sides in amusement.

Masayuki didn't seem bothered. In fact, only the newer members of the National Team seemed slightly embarrassed from Riku's antics.

For those who knew him, they were aware of his peculiar ritual of dancing before a game. Most of the time he would do it in the locker room, but only when he was fired up would he do so on the field.

"Let's get it." Riku said with a grin.

"Batting first, Left outfield, Riku." The voice announced over the stadium speakers.

Since there were not many people in attendance, his applause was almost non-existent. However, that didn't deter him in the slightest.

"Play ball!"

There was something about an American umpire calling the start of the game that sent shivers down one's spine. This was particularly the case for foreign countries like Japan who weren't native English speakers.

Riku stared at the Korean pitcher with his trademark smile still plastered on his face. His bat was waving around in small circular motions as he waited for the first pitch of the World Cup.

The pitcher nodded slightly before turning his body. He lifted his left leg and pushed forward, sending the ball whipping out of his fingertips in one fluid motion.

"Thanks. For. The. MEAL!"

DOONG

Riku picked the pitch perfectly, sending the barrel of his bat sweeping towards the center of the ball swiftly and accurately.

With practiced ease, he flung the bat onto the ground and sped off with blistering speed towards first base.

The ball sailed over the short stops head and into the outfield, bouncing along the ground a few times before the left outfielder managed to arrive at the ball.

But it was too late. Riku easily made his way to 2nd base by the time the ball was recovered.

Riku sent a grin to Masayuki on the field, as if he was waiting for praise.

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

## **Chapter 355 - 355: First Blood (1)**

"Nice work Riku!"

The Japanese bench celebrated, clapping in response to the picture perfect base hit.

Since there were only around 800-1000 members in the crowd, there wasn't much reception or ambiance. However, no one seemed to care at this point.

"I didn't know Riku was so good. After all, didn't his team lose to you in the finals?" Aki asked Ken as he scratched his shaved head.

Both Hiroki and Ken looked at Aki as if he was an idiot.

"Did you not watch the finals or something?"

"Eh, not really." He responded half-heartedly.

Hiroki was the one who chose to respond, sending a glare to Aki. "Riku's team might have lost, but he hit every ball that we threw at him. He was the only reason that the scores were so close by the end."

Ken nodded. He had been in the dugout for the whole match and every time Riku was in the batters box, his blood pressure would soar.

"If they had another batter with even half the skill of Riku, we would have been relegated to 2nd place." Ken admitted.

"Ah, I see." Aki picked his nose, having lost interest in the conversation.

Hiroki's eyebrow twitched, yet he received a pat on the shoulder from Ken who showed his condolences. Ken felt even sorrier for his friend, knowing that he and Aki were roommates.

"Do you think they'll let me switch rooms?" Hiroki muttered to Ken pleadingly.

Ken shook his head, "Sorry man, probably not."

"Haaaah." Hiroki let out a big sigh.

"Wait, shouldn't you be warming up?" Ken said after a moment.

"A-Ah crap."

It was only now that he noticed a pair of eyes drilling into his back.

"C-Coming!"

Hiroki quickly ran over and grabbed his helmet and bat, only to be chastised lightly by Chris.

"Get your head in the game Hiroki."

"Yes sir!"

Seeing the interaction between the two, Ken held back a laugh.

'I should probably tell Daichi to get ready as well.'" Ken thought as he searched around for his brother.

It was then that he noticed a pair chatting away on the edge of the bench, as if no one else was present.

'T-That hound dog!' He cursed inwardly.

When he saw both Miho and Daichi deep in conversation, Ken almost blew his top. Yes he had mentioned this was the best time to talk to her, but not in the first damn inning.

He briefly looked at the Head Coach to see if he had noticed, only to let out a sigh of relief in the next moment. The coach had his eyes locked onto the field for the moment.



Without wasting any time, Ken scuttled over to Daichi and placed his hand on his shoulder.

"Hey. Bro... Maybe you should go get ready." As he said this, he dug his fingers deeper into the teens shoulder.

Daichi paled seeing the scary expression of his big bro.

DONG!

Their silent conversation was cut short as the sound of the metal bat smacking the ball resonated on the field.

Masayuki managed to thread a hit along the ground, directly into the outfield. Thanks to the right outfielder being closer infield, Riku was forced to stop on 3rd base.

"Nice hit Captain!"

As Daichi made his way onto the field, Masayuki settled into place on first base, his eyes on the two freshman. He found it a little funny that their 3 most dangerous batters were all debuting at the National level.

Not to mention that 2 of them were brothers and the other was on the same High School team. Despite this, he didn't feel any less confident in their abilities.

"Oi, ya basturd."

Masayuki frowned as he turned to the source of the broken Japanese words behind him.

He saw a player with a scar on his nose glaring at him with his tongue sticking out. It was clear at a glance that the guy was trying to get a rise out of him, however he'd experienced much worse trash talking throughout his years.

"Are those the only Japanese words you know?" Masayuki replied with a grin, before completely ignoring him.

"Heh. I secksu you Mom, basturd."

"PFFT"

Masayuki could barely make out the terrible pronunciation of Japanese, yet it's contents made him almost burst out into laughter.

DING!

"Ah crap!"

While he was distracted, Hiroki had hit a grounder towards the pitcher.

In no time, the pitcher threw the ball to 2nd base who then completed a throw to first.

"Out"

"Out!"

"Argh double play..."

Ken held his head in his hands as he saw their great position quickly get reversed. Hiroki was probably the one most affected by the bad play as he made his way slowly back to the dugout with a grave expression.

"Don't mind." Chris said, patting the teen on the back.

However, when Masayuki descended the stairs, Coach Takashi spoke up.

"I don't know what you were doing on first base, but don't let it happen again."

His words were stern and fierce, causing some confusion to the other players. However, Masayuki accepted these words and responded with a yes sir.

"What was that about?" Ken asked as the captain approached.

"Ugh." Masayuki groaned in response, feeling a little frustrated with himself.

Instead of answering Ken, he turned to the players and spoke up.

"If you ever get to 1st base this game... Ignore the 1st baseman. That's all I'll say."

After saying so, he returned to the bench and sat down, clearly disappointed.

Ken whipped his head around to the player on 1st base and instantly recognized the guy who had flipped him off yesterday when he was on the bus.

'Is that guy the kind of person who tries to get under your skin?' Ken thought, eyeing him warily.

Meanwhile, Daichi had already made his way into the batters box. Unlike Hiroki who had seemed frazzled earlier, he was full of fighting spirit.

"Batting 4th, Catcher, Daichi."

"Looks like he's fired up." Chris said as he let out a short whistle of appreciation.

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

## Chapter 356 - 356: First Blood (2)

'I need to look cool in front of Miho...' Daichi thought, gripping his bat tightly.

He watched the pitcher wind up and send the ball towards the plate. The ball was around 145km/h and was outside the strike zone. Though he could still definitely hit it, Daichi didn't even flinch as it went through to the catcher.

"Ball"

From what he'd seen, the pitcher had only thrown fastballs so far. But thanks to his father's extensive research, the team was already aware of his pitching arsenal.

"2 outs! Keep it coming Park!"

The Korean team shouted words of support from the infield towards the pitcher. Of course no one on the Japanese team could understand them.

On the mound, Park nodded towards the catcher and performed his wind up once again, sending a slider that broke away from Daichi.

Daichi's eyes lit up, he'd been catching the exact same pitch from Ken for the past couple of weeks therefore he had complete confidence in following its trajectory.

WHOOOSH

DOOOONG

The entire South Korean team paled as the ball was smacked with authority. They followed its flight path as it soared through the air, destined to be lost in the sea of empty seats.

"NICE DAICHI!~"

Ken couldn't hold back his cheers as his brother absolutely nailed the slower curveball. He knew that Rodgers stadium had a larger field than Koshien, particularly in the center field which measured 120m (400 feet).

Yet Daichi was able to clear the wall with ease before making his way around the bases.

As he passed first base, he heard a few grumbles from the 1st baseman, though he couldn't understand the words. Yet he was too busy performing his victory lap to care.

Riku jogged to home plate before casually stepping on it and waiting to the side.

Daichi felt ecstatic at his home run, his gaze moving to the dugout every now and then during his run. This didn't escape Ken's sharp eyes as he let out an exasperated sigh.

'Ah man... I really hope this doesn't blow up in our faces.' Ken thought with exasperation.

"Nice hit rookie!" Riku said with a wide grin, offering up a high five.

"Thanks!"

Daichi stepped onto home plate and accepted the high five before he made his way back to the dugout. Chris was just as ecstatic as Daichi, however he was forced to hide it inside.

"Ahem, nice work Daichi. Let's keep it up." Chris said with a barely hidden grin.

A rain of high fives and praise fell upon the teen as he walked back into the dugout. Yet there was only one person that he wanted to see in that moment.

Miho couldn't help but giggle seeing the obvious expression on Daichi's face. He was like a golden retriever who was looking for a few pats after fetching the ball.

She flashed him a smile and a thumbs up, instantly causing a smile to appear on his face.

Ken held up a hand for a high five, but was left hanging as Daichi walked straight past him towards Miho.

Ken's eye twitched in annoyance before he quickly lashed out and grabbed his brother from behind.

"Oi ya bastard, keep an eye on your surroundings."

"Eh? Ah Ken, what are you doing?" Daichi was surprised to see Ken, but was even more confused as to why he was being manhandled.

It was then that he turned around and saw the Head Coach smiling at him.

Daichi felt his heart jump up to his throat as he quickly collected himself. After giving a small wave to the coach, he settled in next to Ken and felt a cold sweat run down his back.

"That was close..." He muttered.

"Keep your eyes on the prize bro..." Ken replied and let out a sigh.

"You can't go and do a flashy play and expect to not receive some attention in the dugout afterwards. Let's be smart about this."

"Mmm." Daichi nodded, his expression turning thoughtful.

Ken frowned. He could already tell what this idiot was thinking, so he quickly nudged him and clarified.

"You better not be thinking about coasting for the rest of the game so you can fly under the radar. If I see you slacking, I'll tell the coach about you and Miho myself."

A look of horror appeared on his brother's face as he stared at him with incredulity.

"Y-You wouldn't."

"If you think I'm kidding, call my bluff..." Ken said matter-of-factly.

"Ken what are you doing? You're batting after Ichiro." Chris called out, a frown on his face.

"C-Coming!"

Ken flashed a "I meant what I said" look towards Daichi before grabbing his helmet and bat and heading onto the field.

The game was currently 2-0 in favor of Japan with 2 outs and no runners on base.

Ichiro was up to bat and had already faced 2 balls with a count of 1-1.

DING

"Foul"

The guy seemed unperturbed after fouling the ball. He rolled his shoulders and got back into position for the next pitch.

Ichiro was probably one of the quietest players on the team, but he was a serious baseball nut. If Ken had to describe him, he would probably refer to him as the Baseball Hermit.

The guy lived and breathed baseball and could even be seen scrolling through play by plays for both the Major League and NPB games.

As the next ball came flying towards him, Ichiro twisted his body and swung through, yet only managed to hit the bottom of the ball.

"Alright, mine!"

The ball floated into the air between first base and the right outfielder. Without any fanfare, the ball was easily caught by the outfielder, bringing an end to the inning.

"3 outs, changeover!"

Ken frowned a little. This was the problem when facing a pitcher with many breaking balls. Ichiro had swung thinking that the pitch was a curveball, but it was in fact a splitter.

In that way he had hit far too low on the ball, not managing to get enough distance.

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

## **Chapter 357 - 357: Robbery (1)**

As the Korean team made their way off the field, Coach Hyun breathed out a sigh of relief. They were originally on the back foot, but managed to force a double play and avoid the worst case scenario.

Of course conceding a 2-run home run was not within his plans, but it could have been a lot worse.

"Alright guys, remember what I told you. Be patient and try to pick your shots, we'll have more opportunities the longer the game goes on."

Coach Hyun's eyes traveled to the Ace of Japan's team and narrowed his eyes. He knew that they were going to have a hard time scoring runs against the sniper, but he had faith in his team.

Ken put on his glove and hat before slowly walking onto the field. He soon broke out into a jog and glanced at the mound briefly before running into the right outfield.

It felt quite odd running past the mound.

"Eh?"

Coach Hyun blinked a few times after seeing Ken run into the outfield, astonishment evident on his face. He slowly turned to the player on the mound and almost couldn't believe his eyes.

"Why is their Ace in the outfield? Are they underestimating us?"

His gaze moved to Coach Takashi on the opposing side of the field, but the guy didn't even spare him a glance.

"No, this seems like an intentional move" He muttered to himself.

With a flash, he quickly called back his two lead off batters and said a few words to them, pointing at the right outfield. The two were a bit confused, but still nodded.

After that, Coach Hyun relayed the same message and more to the rest of his team. The way he quickly pivoted his strategy spoke of just how intuitive the South Korean Head Coach was.

Satoshi began his warm up pitches from atop the mound, quickly settling into his rhythm. His sharp eyes looked intensely at Daichi throughout, making him feel a little uncomfortable.

'Man, this guy sure has an intense face.' Daichi said inwardly.

Even in practice, the guy was always giving the same intense stare. There was a sense of intimidation happening even to him, who was on the same team.

After finishing his warm-ups, Satoshi nodded to the umpire.

"Batting 1st, 3rd base, Du."

Du Rim who was walking into the batters box suddenly looked around in confusion. Since it was an American reading out the names, the pronunciation was terrible, making him unsure if his name was actually called.

It wasn't just the Korean team that had this issue. The announcer had already butchered the pronunciation of majority of the Japanese players at the top of the inning.

Daichi squatted into position and called for a ball on the outside to begin with. He wanted to put pressure on the Korean team, but Satoshi was known to be a slow starter.

As long as he could get the pitch count up a little, the guy should get into his rhythm.

Satoshi entered his wind up and threw out a fastball as directed. The ball lacked a little spin, but the speed and trajectory seemed okay.

DONG

Yet the flat ball was picked off right away and sent directly into the right outfield. Ken who was on high alert, had already started running forwards the moment he heard the ball connect.

In a fraction of a second, he was able to identify the balls angle and trajectory, thanks to his upgraded mental capacity.

"Eh?"

Coach Hyun's eyes bulged as he saw Ken seemingly enter hyper speed and track down the ball which should have been an easy single.

Pah

Ken dove forwards and stretched out his long arm, just barely catching the ball before it had hit the ground. He stood up to his feet and showed the closest umpire the ball within his glove.

"Out!"

"Looks like we made the right decision huh coach?" Coach Takashi said with a wild grin. His hand running through his goatee.

"Y-Yeah." Chris was stumped as he watched his son return back to his position in the outfield. Generally, one wouldn't see such a level of play from a regular outfielder, let alone someone who was playing it for the first time.

It wasn't that what Ken did was amazing or anything, just that it took a lot of balls and self confidence to do.

If he had missed the ball, or misjudged the trajectory and let it soar over his head, the runner would most definitely have had a free ride to at least 2nd base.



"Nice one Ken!"

Masayuki ran over and smacked him on the back.

Ken cringed a little from the pain but he still wore a smile.

"I'll just say this, remember that there is no one behind you to pick up for your mistakes. This isn't like being on the mound, we're the last line of defense."

It was clear by his words that Masayuki was a perfect fit for the captaincy. He managed to both give praise and constructive criticism within the same breath, leaving Ken more receptive to his calls.

"But... He hasn't played outfield before right?" Coach Hyun stammered, feeling some of his earlier excitement falter.

"Batting 2nd, Left outfield, Youngjae."

Hearing the butchering of his name, Youngjae cringed slightly before stepping into the batters box. He had seen the earlier play from Ken and looked at the coach for confirmation on what to do.

After receiving no meaningful response, he looked back at the pitcher and decided to proceed with the original plan. Instantly, he felt the intimidating gaze of Satoshi on the mound and gulped.

WHOOSH

"Strike"

Daichi nodded, even though it was only the second pitch, he could feel that it was sharp.

'Perhaps he's better when it's an actual game.' He thought before throwing the ball back to the mound.

Crouching down, Daichi called for another ball on the outside, this time a two-seam fastball. Once this one went through, he'd call for a cutter and beat the batter.

Or at least that was the plan.

DOOONG

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

## Chapter 358 - 358: Robbery (2)

Youngjae was stunned as he connected with the ball with the center of his bat. For some reason the ball had felt slow and he was able to smack it with some force.

"Right deep!"

Masayuki yelled out to Ken in the right outfield, but Ken had already started moving before his words came out. He dashed towards the back wall with his eyes locked upon the baseball.

Time seemed to slow down as his mind furiously worked to measure the distance of both the wall in front of him and the approaching ball.

'It's going over...'

It only took a second for Ken to understand that the ball was going to be a home run. However, he did not slow his speed at all, tracking it with all of his focus.

"L-Look out!"

Seeing that Ken was still staring at the ball, Masayuki shouted out in panic. If he were to run full force into the wall, the least damage he could expect would be a concussion.

At the last moment, Ken took his eyes off the ball and leaped from the ground, placing his foot upon the wall and kicking upwards, propelling himself into the air.

His neck then snapped towards the ball before he shot his arm into the air. Thanks to his long limbs and added height, he was able to easily reach above the wall.

\*DING\*

Ken landed on the turf before falling onto his backside, clinging the glove to his body.

Silence pervaded the pitch for a while until Ken stood up and showed the contents of his glove.

"Out!"

"W-WHOA!"

"No way!"

The play was enough to get the 1,000 people in attendance to shout out and cheer, followed by the Japanese fielders.

Masayuki felt his heart blaring in his chest as he witnessed the play. He wondered how someone who had just been moved to the outfield was able to have such a high level of spatial awareness.

Daichi was stunned. The pitch Satoshi sent his way was a meatball with hardly any spin. If it wasn't for the heroics of his brother robbing the home run, they would have lost a lot of momentum.

"Are you sure your son has never played the outfield before?" Coach Takashi asked, his tone sounding rather suspicious.

"I... I don't think so?" Chris answered, though the evidence seemed to point otherwise.

"Dude, that was sick." Masayuki said with a grin.

Meanwhile, Daichi had called a quick time out and headed over to the mound. He was a little worried with how Satoshi had been pitching up to that moment.

"Hey man, are you all good? The last ball was far too easy."

"Yeah my bad, I lost some grip on that one." Satoshi answered. He was already rolling the rosin bag around on his hand in order to get his grip sorted.

Daichi frowned a little, especially since he'd heard a similar excuse from Yatsuo only a few weeks ago.

"Are you sure you're not injured or anything?" He asked.

"Eh?" Satoshi looked at him quizzically before scoffing.

He made a shooing motion at Daichi before ignoring him completely.

'Ah... Maybe I pissed him off.'

Instead of responding, Daichi did as he was told and went back to home plate. Maybe he was a little harsh with his accusation, after all he was questioning their Ace's pitching abilities.

As he returned, he saw Satoshi's gaze had turned even sharper, if that was even possible.

Coach Hyun felt a wave of annoyance flow through him after being denied the home run. It wasn't often that his team hit big, so to lose such an opportunity definitely did not feel good.

He made a few signs to the next batter Dong, who had already stepped into the batters box. They essentially translated to, stop hitting it to the right outfield.

Dong nodded in response before turning his attention back to the game.

Daichi still felt a little uncomfortable from his earlier interaction with Satoshi, but he quickly composed himself.

'Let's waste a few pitches while he warms up more.' He thought, placing his glove on the outside.

However, the stern looking Satoshi was having none of it. He touched his cap and shook his head, showing that he didn't like the lead.

Usually, Daichi would be annoyed when pitchers didn't follow his lead. But this time he made an exception.

'If it's another meatball though, I'll be pissed.' He thought.

Eventually, the two settled on a cutter to the inside, hoping to either jam the batter, or make him hit a grounder.

Satoshi let out a deep breath and performed his wind up, sending the ball whipping from his fingertips.

Daichi's eyes widened, but a grin soon followed. The ball was spinning wildly and almost looked alive.

Dong's eyes never left the ball as he tried to track it. He planted his foot and twisted his body before swinging through. Unfortunately for him, the ball broke inside at the last moment, hitting close to the handle.

DING

A jarring sound came over the field. While it was music to Japan's ears, the South Korean team paled.

The ball shot across the ground towards Aki who was at short stop.

"Thank you very much!" He said with a grin.

With practiced ease, he scooped the ball up and sent an accurate and quick throw to Hiroki's outstretched glove on 1st base. The batter was easily outpaced as Japan picked up their 3rd out in only 4 pitches.

"3 outs, changeover!"

Thus the score was still 2-0 in favor of Japan after 3 quick outs.

Ken waltzed off the field from his position in the outfield, only to be mobbed by Masayuki who slung his arm over his shoulders.

"Damn man, here I thought I was going to have to carry you in the outfield. Hahaha."

"Haha..." Ken let out a small laugh, but inwardly he was happy. If Masayuki who had played outfield his whole career said such a thing, then it meant he was doing something right.

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

## **Chapter 359 - 359: Dominant Performance (1)**

Ken arrived in the dugout, only to quickly walk back onto the field with his bat and helmet equipped. He was the first at bat for the top of the 2nd inning.

"Batting 6th, Right outfield, Ken"

He was one of the lucky ones who didn't face their name being pronounced incorrectly by the announcer, yet Ken didn't care.

As he stepped into the batters box, Ken felt a sense of excitement wash through him. While there weren't as many spectators as Koshien and the atmosphere made it feel like a casual pick up game, this was not the case.

He was playing for Japan, something he'd dreamed of for many years.

'Time to put my stamp on the match.' He thought with a grin.

Ken wanted to leave his mark in this World Cup, to spread his name to the American clubs and let them know he was coming. He didn't know when, but it would be some time in the future.

WHOOOSH

DOOOONG!

Perhaps it was because Ken was fired up, or maybe the pitcher had thrown a bad ball. But either way, the result was the same.

Ken managed to hit the ball dead center of the bat and skyrocket the ball through center field. The center fielder ran for a little while before giving up, unless he grew 10 feet tall in that instant, he wouldn't be able to touch the ball.

The Korean pitcher watched on in despair as the ball sailed over the back wall for a solo home run.

"NICE!"

The Japanese dugout went crazy after witnessing the powerful hit. Since the distance to the back wall was 400ft, it was obvious what kind of strength was required to make such a hit.

Daichi pumped his fist in response, celebrating quickly before sneakily sitting next to Miho. He had used the distraction to fly under the radar and move in.

Coach Hyun could only smile wryly as he watched the first year run around the bases.

'This is going to be tough.' He said inwardly.

Ken finally stepped on home plate and received another round of applause for his solo effort. In only the first 2 innings, he'd shown just what kind of value he brought to the team.

"Nice hit Ken." Hiroki said, though he was feeling a little sorry for himself.

Out of the trio, he was the only one who had yet to perform in the batters box. Not only that, his bad hit resulted in a double-play, cutting short their momentum.

Seeing this, Ken let out a hollow chuckle.

"The game has just started man, don't worry about it." He said, patting him on the back.

Afterwards, he went and sat on the bench away from everyone, choosing to ignore Daichi's guilty look as he walked passed him and Miho.

'I heard a notification when I got that catch, time to check it out.'

Ken scrolled through his notifications but didn't see anything which caused him to frown. He quickly opened up his World Cup mission and looked through to see if there were any changes.

## #NEW MISSION: U18 Baseball World Cup

- \*Task 1: Get onto base 15 times
- \*Task 2: Hit 8 home runs [1/8]
- \*Task 3: Do not drop a single catch
- \*Task 4: Advance to Super Round
- \*Task 5: Finish top 2 in Super Round
- \*Task 6: Win the World Cup
- \*Task 7: Win player of the Tournament
- \*Hidden Task: Rob a home run 2 times [1/2]

### REWARDS:

- >Task 1 rewards - 5,000 Major points
- >Task 2 rewards - 5,000 Major points
- >Task 3 rewards - 7,000 Major points + Fielding Boost
- >Task 4 rewards - 10,000 Major points + Skill Selection ticket
- >Task 5 rewards - 15,000 Major points + Potential Booster
- >Task 6 rewards - 25,000 Major points + SSS-Grade Physicality Elixir
- >Task 7 rewards - 25,000 Major points + SSS-Grade Mental Elixir
- >Hidden Task rewards - Trait: Academic

Ken's eyes lit up as he saw that the Hidden Task had now been revealed.

'Rob a home run?' He tilted his head with a little confusion.

Since he did not play in the outfield, he was a little unfamiliar with the term. But he was quickly able to pick up what it meant.

'So I just need to catch the ball that would have gone over for a home run otherwise?'

While it might sound easy enough, it wasn't often that such a scenario would happen. In fact, he was quite lucky that he was able to pull off the feat on his very first try.

In fact, Ken couldn't believe that he had to pull it off two times during the world cup. Just performing the task 1 time should have been enough as far as he was concerned, yet the system did not think so.

'This Academic trait better be worth it...' He thought inwardly.

However, if it was anything like his Dauntless trait, he knew that he would not be disappointed.

Japan continued its dominance in the game, not giving Korea the space to play their small ball. Daichi's leads were brutal as he ensured that each pitch was difficult to hit and always kept them guessing.

While batting, they showcased how dominant they could be while on offense.

Apart from Satoshi who had a Designated Hitter, everyone on the team managed to hit decently well against the Korean pitcher.

By the time it was all said and done, Japan lead the scoreboard 15-0.

Daichi had hit his home run in the first inning and 2 doubles in the 3rd and 4th. Ken hit two home runs while Hiroki managed to redeem himself with a couple of base hits and a triple.

Satoshi pitched the entire game, quickly getting into his rhythm at the start of the 2nd inning. Apart from a couple of wild pitches every now and then which resulted in Korea getting on base, Japan never looked in danger.

"Strike 3! Out."

"Game, Japan."

"Yes! Let's go!"

A wave of applause from the scarce spectators sounded out, cheering on the young Japanese team.

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



## Chapter 360 - 360: Dominant Performance (2)

Though the score was blown out, the players had shown them an entertaining enough match with some big home runs.

Dam who was on the field getting ready to bat next, threw his helmet onto the ground in frustration. Not only had he failed to make an impression in this match, he felt stifled.

Every time that he tried to trash talk the runners for Japan, they would burst out into laughter. He had put quite a bit of research into insulting things to say before the match.

Usually when he trashed talked in Korea, he could get under everyone's skin. Yet for some reason, his words did nothing.

Coach Hyun and Coach Takashi shook hands briefly, saying a few courteous words in English that neither of them fully understood.

"Good job."

"Good luck."

Afterwards, both teams bowed at each other and left the field.

Since the game had finished earlier than expected, they were able to stay in the lockers for a little longer, even being allowed to use the showering facilities.

"I've made up my mind, I'm going to play in the Majors." Hiroki said, basking under the hot water from the shower. The water ran down his chiseled abs, which would have been quite the sight for any woman if they had have been present.

"Hah! You think you have what it takes to join the majors? You're 100 years too early for that youngster."

"We're the same age..." Hiroki replied to the annoying voice he recognized as Aki, his current roommate.

"Tch, I'm far older than you, at least mentally."

"Sure, you have the mind of a decrepit 100 year old." Riku quipped from a few stalls over.

"Hahaha!"

The room burst into laughter, leaving Aki red-faced and embarrassed.

Team morale was high as everyone got ready and returned to the locker room.

"Well done everyone. We managed to execute all of our strategies to perfection while neutralizing the Korean small ball." Chris said with a grin.

Coach Takashi spoke up next, though he was not smiling.

"Let's not get complacent. You all did well today, but we still have 4 more games left in the group stages. This is just the start of our World Cup dominance."

"Yes sir!"

This time it wasn't just Ken that responded, the whole team seemed to be on the same wavelength as they called out as such.

"Very good. We're heading back to the hotel now for some lunch, but you'll also be free to use the facilities until 6pm tonight. Just be careful not to do anything stupid."

A few players eyes widened at these words. The hotel had a large swimming pool, a gym, even a recreational room with pool tables and ping pong for guests. This would be the first opportunity they would have to use it.

While Ken would have been happier exploring the city, it wasn't too much of a downgrade to have access to such things.

So the team made their way back to the hotel and got some lunch.

"Hey, we're gonna head up to the pool after this. Did you guys want to come?"

Aki asked the trio of Daichi, Ken and Hiroki.

"Yeah, I'm sure it'll be fun." Ken said after a while. Hiroki also nodded since he didn't have anything better to do.

"Ah, just one moment." Daichi pulled out his phone and typed something out before hitting send, leaving the others to stare at him blankly.

After a full minute, he pulled out his phone and let out a smile.

"Yep, I'll come as well."

"..."

"Did you need to ask your Mom or something?" Aki blurted out, only to receive some laughter in response from the other two.

Despite sharing the same Mother, Ken thought it was hilarious. Obviously he knew who Daichi was messaging, yet that didn't stop him from laughing.

A while later, everyone got ready and arrived at the swimming pool. It was an Olympic sized pool, complete with lanes for racing.

Many of the players had only done swimming in school, therefore they just settled by playing around. This was probably the first time that the team had done something together that didn't revolve around baseball.

Since they were only teenagers still, it was rather beneficial to have times like this. After all, who could consistently be under pressure without showing a few cracks?

"Hey guys."

The sound of a female cut through the male voices, causing everyone present to turn their head in its direction.

The woman was wearing a dazzling white bikini with a sarong wrapped around her waist. Her midriff was on full display, as were her assets which seemingly gleamed in the afternoon sun.

"Who is that!?"

A few murmurs rang out from the players, as they were caught off guard by the mysterious woman.

Even Ken had trouble recognizing the woman in front of him, yet Daichi quickly ran up to her and stood in front, blocking the players view.

He glared at them like a dog would when protecting their property.

"Take your eyes off Miho!" He said, almost sounding like a bark.

"EH!? That's Miho?" A few players shuddered before quickly losing interest. They had no death wish going after the Head Coach's Granddaughter.

"Ah, here I thought a beauty had graced our presence, but it was only Miho~" Riku said with flair, receiving a few laughs in response.

Miho heard his voice and felt her eye twitch in response. However, she saw Daichi and instantly forgot about the annoying guy.

"Wow, you look amazing." Daichi said, his eyes shining.

"Okay, let's go." Ken said, feeling second hand embarrassment creeping up.

He quickly swam to the other side of the pool in order to get away from the cringe-fest.

'Is this what people would feel like around me and Ai?' He thought, yet he shook his head in the next moment.

'I'm never awkward around Ai, right?'

Of course Ken was delusional. People often viewed their own relationships through rose tinted glasses, therefore he did not know that he was much worse than his brother.

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