

Major League System

Chapter 401 - 401: Taking Care of Business (1)

Riku who had been focused on running this entire time did not see the play in the outfield. Yet his quick reflexes allowed him to react to the audible call of Masayuki on first base.

He promptly put on the brakes, kicking up dirt and debris a few feet away from 3rd base.

"Tch, how annoying." Riku said, before backpedaling.

What should have been an easy run was stopped in its tracks by the giant outfielder. Not only did Riku not convert the run, Masayuki was forced to stop at 1st base.

"This might be tricky..." Ken stated, crossing his arms.

However, it wasn't like they weren't expecting this situation, especially after the in-depth film session yesterday. With the giant Jeb in the outfield and the small Nikko dictating the infield, this was the backbone of Australia's defense.

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

"Hit a big one Hiroki!"

The Japanese dugout shouted, pumping up the Greek God. They were in a great position to draw first blood and get some runs on the board early.

Hiroki gripped his bat tightly, getting ready for the first pitch. For some reason he didn't feel any nerves, only the drive to hit the ball and convert for his team.

PAH

"Strike"

The first ball flew into the glove of the catcher, a slider. Hiroki was patient as he kept an eye on it, as if burning it into his mind. This was something that he'd improved at tremendously while on the team.

This was a result of being amongst top tier players. It wasn't just him either, this World Cup campaign had served to improve everyone in the team.

PAH

"Ball."

Another pitch came flying past, this time a fastball on the inside. Yet Hiroki didn't even flinch, allowing it to pass with a sense of indifference. It was as if he knew the result before the ball even left the pitcher's hand.

His cool head seemed to frustrate the Australian catcher a little. There was nothing more annoying than a batter who wasn't reactive in the batters box.

'I better not waste anymore pitches.' He thought.

He called for a tricky ball on the inside, with a similar course as the previous pitch, hoping to get an easy strike. When the count was at 2 strikes, it was more likely for the batter to do something rash.

However...

WHOOOOSH

DOOONG

The sound of the metal bat reverberated through the arena, followed by a cheer from the crowd. They watched the ball sail into the air and into the center outfield.

Everyone's eyes were glued to the giant Jeb who had stopped the previous ball with relative ease. He was like the last line of defense who could pull his team out of the fire.

Once again, the big guy planted his feet and leaped upwards, using his long limbs to reach into the sky. The whole arena was silent as they witnessed the sight, holding their breath for the final outcome.

'Please go over!' Ken prayed inwardly.

Yet the Australian team were not as fortunate this time.

The ball sailed over the outstretched glove of Jeb and it didn't appear to be close. It continued on its way and sailed over the wall for a home run.

"Y-YEAH!"

After a tense moment, the Japanese team broke out into cheers. They'd successfully drawn first blood in the very first inning with a 3-run home run, taking a commanding lead.

Hiroki slowed his running pace down after seeing the ball clear both the giant and the back wall. He let out a sigh of relief before a grin crept onto his face.

Both Riku and Masayuki were waiting for him at home plate as he made his way around the bases.

"Nice hit!"

The two bombarded him with high fives and back slaps. Even the Captain was all full of smiles and praises as they returned to the dugout.

Daichi was up to bat next. After Hiroki's home run, it put significantly less pressure on the rest of the team, though that didn't mean he would hold back at all.

In fact, on his very first ball...

DOOOONG

Nikko's shoulders drooped as he watched the monster hit easily clear the back wall and enter the stands. His short frame looked even smaller as he felt despair begin to creep into him.

Even though it was only the first inning, they were already down 4 runs with no outs. He hadn't felt this constricted since their game against the United States in the group stages.

He was forced to watch Daichi leisurely jog around the bases on his way back to home plate, yet there was nothing that he could do. His teammates also seemed to be losing hope, faced with such a good team.

"Oi! Raise your heads, it ain't over yet." He shouted.

They were at a crossroads in that moment and needed someone to pull them out of their spiraling decline of morale.

Ken watched on as the small guy shouted animatedly. At first there was no reaction, but it wasn't long before his words began to take an effect. It was clear that his voice had a lot of pull in the team.

Yet this had nothing to do with Ken.

"Nice hit bro." Ken said with a grin, sending Daichi some knuckles on the way past.

"Hehe thanks. You gonna go for broke?" He replied in question.

"Of course, let's end this early. I've still got some homework to complete."

"Haha bet."

"Batting 5th, Right outfield, Ken."

As Ken stepped into the batters box, he could see that the Australian team was fired up. Nikko's words seemed to ignite a fire in them, filling them with fighting spirit.

Ken almost felt a little bad, especially since he planned on snuffing out what little motivation they could dredge up.

However, one should never take pity on one's opponents, not in baseball.

The pitcher performed his quick wind up, sending a two-seam fastball which broke inside. Yet Ken's eyes never left the ball, not even as it met his bat.

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

Chapter 402 - 402: Taking Care of Business (2)

DOOOOONG

Shock and pain crossed the Australian players faces as they tracked the ball through the air.

"LEFT!" Jeb yelled out, but the player was already running towards the back wall.

But it was all for naught.

The ball rocketed into the stands, leaving no room for doubt in anyone's mind. It was a single home run, once again.

Ken jogged around the bases, hearing the cheer of the crowd and the Japanese dugout. With his home run, the score was now 5-0 in their favor with Australia yet to get an out against them.

This was the start of what would be a statement to the remaining teams in the World Cup.

Japan were here to win it all.

In the locker room after the game, Ken let out a big stretch, sitting upon the comfy couch provided. He looked relaxed and carefree, not something one would expect after just participating in a baseball match.

"Well that was over fast." Aki stated, digging in his nose.

Masayuki flashed him a scowl, "We could have scored more if you didn't get 2 double-plays."

"Eh... Hehe~"

Aki felt a little embarrassed, but he quickly shook it off. After all, he was one of the most shameless in the team.

"I think 17 runs in 5 innings was enough right?" Daichi added with a smile.

Riku strolled into the room with a towel around his neck, wearing his trademark grin.

"Yeah, I was starting to feel a bit bad for them honestly. After all, they only got 1 run in return~." He said, though his expression seemed to be at odds with his words.

"But still, that giant and the shorty... They were good players." Hiroki piped in, giving some respect to their opponent.

Remembering the solo home run that the 6'7 guy hit, the players went silent. It truly was one of the biggest they'd seen at Rodgers stadium, at least in comparison to their own.

"Alright guys, let's get ready to head off. Lunch is at 12 and then you'll have some free time until our next film session at 5pm."

Chris walked into the lockers, alerting the players. After the game, he once again chatted with his old friend, Australia's coach.

"Yes sir!"

The players were in a great mood as they packed up their things. Not only did they get to finish the game early, most of them performed rather well. There was also the allure of some free time, something that was scarce usually.

"Hey, want to go to the gym later?" Ken asked Daichi on their way to the bus.

"Yes!"

Hiroki's ears perked up, answering before Daichi got the chance. He looked way too energetic for what Ken was actually asking.

"You good man?" Daichi asked in puzzlement.

"Ah... Yeah, just the lack of training is making me feel restless." He replied.

Ken and Daichi nodded. Since their schedule was so jam packed, the only training they did was mental training in their film sessions and some light exercises.

Adding on that Hiroki was basically stuck in place on 1st base, it was understandable that he was getting restless. If one took into account that Hiroki trained like a mad man, this made even more sense.

"Alright, but let's have lunch first. I've also gotta do some homework afterwards." Ken responded.

The team returned to the hotel and had lunch. As if a reward for their dominating victory, rice was on the menu.

"Oh my goodness, I've missed you so much." Riku announced, hugging his rice bowl like a lost lover.

"It tastes just like home..." Kuro said, a tear rolling down his face.

Ken thought it was a little strange that a US hotel would serve such things, but once he saw Miho arrive at the table with a grin on her face, he could more or less guess something.

"Did you do this?" He asked, motioning to the food in front of him.

"Fufu~ how could you tell?" She looked rather pleased with herself, especially after seeing Daichi's surprised expression.

"Really Miho? I love you!"

Daichi dove into his rice, shoveling into his mouth without a care in the world. He didn't see the wide eyes and shocked expressions of everyone around him.

Coach Takashi who had just walked into the dining room, suddenly saw his Granddaughter with her face flushed red. He froze in place and stared at the scene with wide eyes.

Ken's gaze happened to cross the coach's almost causing him to choke on his food. Until he left a few moments later, suddenly acting as if he hadn't seen anything.

"Dude what did you just say?" Hiroki whispered to Daichi.

"What? I was just saying thanks for the rice." Completely oblivious, Daichi looked at Hiroki with an innocent expression.

Ken gestured towards Miho who was fidgeting, her face still red as a tomato.

Daichi looked over, only to be confused.

'Wait... why is she blushing? What did I say?'

"W-Well, enjoy your meal. I've got some things to do now." Miho stammered before running off in a flash.

Daichi turned to his brother, like a drowning man asking to be saved.

"What did I say?"

"Well..."

...

"WHAT!?"

Daichi stood up from the table, his expression filled with horror. If the patrons weren't already used to the Japanese team's antics, they might have been surprised.

"Shhh, chill out man. You're drawing attention to yourself." Ken said, trying to calm down his brother.

However, the guy listlessly floated down onto his chair, losing his appetite.

"My life is over..."

Daichi looked as if his whole world had come crumbling down upon him, truly a sad sight.

Both Ken and Hiroki looked at each other, only now finding the situation amusing.

"It's okay man. I mean, Miho didn't seem exactly upset when you said those words." Hiroki said, flashing Daichi a thumbs up.

Hearing this, Daichi's face morphed a few times before remembering the blushing face of Miho. Her cuteness doing wonders for his mood.

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

Chapter 403 - 403: Late Night (1)

Later that night, the players returned to their rooms after dinner. The film session was rather short since they had played Cuba just a few days ago, it was more focused on analyzing where they could improve.

Kei was announced as the starting pitcher tomorrow and he was keen to get some retribution for his last performance against them. The coach seemed to trust him to make the adjustments alongside Daichi.

This was likely because Kei's standard of pitching had improved considerably during the last few games.

Chris was busy finalizing his notes and packing up the equipment, his usual routine before heading to bed. He heard the sound of the meeting room door open and looked over in surprise.

"Coach? Did you forget something?" He asked quizzically.

Coach Takashi looked a little pensive, wearing an expression that Chris had never seen before on his face. It was as if he was worried about something.

"No no, I was just hoping to have a chat with you about something." He stated before walking towards him.

"Ah sure no problem." Chris replied, however inwardly he was feeling a little anxious.

'Oh no, what is this about?' he cried inwardly.

Chris unconsciously straightened up, his expression strained. Unlike Ken, he did not have a convenient Poker Face skill. In fact, he often wore his emotions on his sleeve.

However, Coach Takashi didn't seem to notice.

"Take a seat." He said, gesturing to the chair behind Chris.

"Sure."

Chris had no choice but to comply, sitting down while fidgeting a little. He looked like a man who had been arrested and was about to receive an interrogation.

Coach Takashi was silent for a little while, like he was trying to find the right words to say. He let out a deep sigh, a prelude to the heavy conversation that was about to ensue.

This only made Chris feel even more anxious. He gripped the arm rests of his seat and almost confessed all of his crimes in the next moment, perhaps the punishment would be lesser if he admitted them right away.

"I wanted to have a chat about my Granddaughter Miho."

Gulp~

The next words was something that hit close to home, and also the one thing that he didn't want to talk about. After all, he had given his son Daichi the go ahead to pursue Miho wholeheartedly once they arrived in America.

While he thought that Daichi was being stealthy enough with his pursuits, it seemed to have not escaped the sharp eyes of the Head Coach.

'Is this the end then?' He thought in his heart.

Chris let out a deep sigh, seemingly accepting his fate.

'Well, the son should not bear the sins of the father... As long as those two can keep playing, we'll find another way.'

Just as he was about to open his mouth, Coach Takashi spoke up, his tone sounding weary.

"I know we haven't known each other long, but I consider you as a trustworthy man. You're a great assistant coach and damn good father, I can tell by the way you've raised your boys."

'Eh?'

Hearing the word trustworthy made him feel guilty, but the latter sentence gave him a warm feeling. He hadn't expected these words, so he chose to swallow back his earlier confessions.

Perhaps the Head Coach was not here to talk about Daichi and Miho.

"Thank you sir, I appreciate your words. Both Ken and Daichi have made me proud to be their father." These words were genuine, coming from the bottom of his heart.

"Mmm. Which is why I need your help." He said succinctly.

"Yes?" Chris tilted his head in question at the unexpected declaration.

Coach Takashi seemed a little reluctant to say these next words, but he eventually made up his mind.

"I want to set up Miho with a good man, do you think you could have a few words with your son? I have a feeling that she likes him, but she's always been stubborn."

"Huh?"

Chris's jaw dropped in response. Out of all the conversations he thought they'd be having tonight, this wasn't even on the list. He looked at the Head Coach incredulously, as if he didn't believe his words.

Seeing his reaction, Coach Takashi cleared his throat.

"If it's too much to ask then forget we had this conversation."

"A-Ah no it's fine." Chris said hurriedly.

Wasn't this the perfect opportunity for Daichi? There was no way that he was going to let this go, not when he had such a chance.

As he looked at Hajime Takashi the world renowned coach, he no longer saw the General-like figure he was used to. The person staring back at him was a doting Grandfather who cared about his family more than anything else.

Chris felt a smile forming on his face as he saw another side of the coach. It was times like this that he knew he'd made the right decision to leave his lucrative job in favor of his family.

"Don't worry Coach, I'll have a chat to him and put a good word in for Miho. Who knows, maybe they've just been waiting for a moment just like this."

"Mmm, thank you Chris. I knew you'd understand." The coach said, a rare warm smile appearing on his features.

Chris let out a sigh, resisting the urge to pinch himself to confirm this conversation was a real one. He wouldn't be surprised if he suddenly woke up in bed at this moment.

"Well, I better finish packing up and head to bed. We still have that early meeting tomorrow morning."

"Sure, no problem. Sorry for bothering you." Coach Takashi stated, getting up from his chair. He seemed to have grown younger after such a conversation, perhaps due to the weight off his shoulders.

The Head Coach walked over to the door and opened it before stopping.

"Let me know what Ken says about the arrangement, we might be able to convince him with some extra pitching time." He said with a laugh.

'K-KEN!?'

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

Chapter 404 - 404: Late Night (2)

"Achoo~"

Ken sneezed loudly, feeling his whole body get shaken from the action.

"Damn dude, cover your mouth." Hiroki complained, wiping some of the debris from his shirt.

"You better not be getting sick bro..." Daichi warned.

"Don't worry I'm not, someone must be talking about me." Ken replied, waving off any of the claims of his health.

The three were watching the games played today, their nightly ritual.

Cuba played against Canada right after their game today and came out on top. Both Jorge and Manuel once again lit up the scoreboards with 3 home runs between them, showing just how dangerous they were in the batters box.

Gustavo was their pitcher, yet he seemed to be playing considerably better than he did in their previous game. Were it not for the game finishing in the 7th inning, he probably could have gotten a shutout.

"Man, I can't believe we're playing against Cuba again tomorrow." Daichi lamented.

He still had flashbacks of Jorge and Manuel walking all over them. Of course it was dulled by the impact Ken had in the closing innings of the match.

No one rebuked him since they knew it would be a tough game.

"Do you think Kei is up to the task?" Ken asked curiously.

"Yeah for sure." Daichi responded confidently.

"Apparently he had a fever when he pitched against Cuba the first time..."

"What!? Why didn't he tell anyone?" Both Ken and Hiroki almost sprang to their feet in shock. How could someone be so reckless?

Daichi shook his head and let out a sigh.

"Coach Takashi knew about it."

"Eh?"

"That seems a little... irresponsible?"

They had been real close to losing the game, yet the Head Coach still insisted letting Kei pitch. If Ken hadn't have come in to save the day, they would have had their first defeat back then.

Daichi nodded, "Just remember, the coach is one of those old school ones."

"Mmm..."

The two fell deep into thought. Now that they took the time to think about it, it was always Chris who would go into detail during the film sessions, using analytics and data to dissect the game.

Whereas the Head Coach would relay the important information and give pep talks. It seemed so obvious now, yet the fact it took them this long to realize meant that they had been pulling it off seamlessly.

"Well hopefully he performs better than last time." Hiroki said succinctly.

Ken placed his hand on the guys shoulder and shook his head, "It's not just him that needs to perform better. We couldn't even get a hit from that submarine pitcher until the final inning."

At these words, both Daichi and Hiroki nodded.

"It won't be the same tomorrow. Now that I've seen his pitches, I'm confident we can take him on." Daichi answered.

"Please standby for the United States National Anthem."

While they were chatting, the next game appeared on the screen. It was the United States vs Mexico match which finished only an hour or so ago.

Since it was not live...

Ken fast-forwarded the opening parts, stopping just as Mexico was about to pitch to the opening batter of the US.

If they watched the whole thing, there was no way they'd be able to go to sleep at a respectable time after all.

DONG

The first ball was hit accurately into the outfield, allowing for the runner to make his run to 2nd base. The guy was lean yet athletic with olive skin, but most of all, his legs were fast.

This was Santiago Williams, one of the players Ken was wary of. On top of being a speedster, he was almost omniscient in the outfield. As long as the ball was going to land somewhere in his area, 9 times out of 10 he would catch it.

If that wasn't enough, the guy was even a switch-hitter.

'Wouldn't it be nice to have such God-given talents...!' Ken lamented inwardly.

However, it wasn't like he could complain. After all, he was the only player who had a system, at least that he knew of.

He continued to watch the screen, letting out a whistle of appreciation as the next batter hit another ball into the outfield. Santiago touched home plate to secure the run and the US went ahead on the scoreboard.

The 3rd batter also secured a hit, this time only getting 1 base for his efforts.

"Batting 4th, Catcher, Leo."

Both Daichi and Ken sucked in a cold breath of air at the specimen that appeared on the screen. The guy had ash blond hair and green eyes with a square jaw, looking as if he had just appeared out of a modeling magazine.

If one took a look at his body, they could see the rippling muscles beneath the tight uniform. It was enough to make any guy jealous, or any woman swoon if they got to witness it in person.

While Ken and Daichi were seething internally, Hiroki was looking on in appreciation.

"Mmm, it looks like he works out a bit." He stated nonchalantly.

This prompted the two to channel some of their ill will to Hiroki. While they were busy being jealous, he was appreciating a fellow Greek God, carefully scrutinizing his muscles.

Ken couldn't help but shake his head in disgust.

DOOOONG

The three snapped their heads in the direction of the screen, only to see the ball fly into the stands. The ball was hit with such a force that the outfielders barely moved from their spots.

"That guy is dangerous." Daichi said, his face solemn.

The camera focused on the guy making his way around the bases, his expression showing no hints of surprise or excitement. It was as if what had happened was already a foregone conclusion.

Hiroki strained his eyes, his appreciation disappearing, replaced with a defiant look that crept onto his features.

"I could take him..."

Ken frowned, not understanding what he was on about.

"What do you mean by that?"

"In an aesthetics competition." He replied seriously.

"What..."

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

Chapter 405 - 405: Joshibi High (1)

The sound of an alarm broke through the silence, its droning causing a figure to toss and turn in bed in annoyance.

"Just a few more minutes mom." A husky voice called out.

Yet there was no reply, nor did the alarm stop.

The figure sat up in a huff, looking like a bear who had just emerged from hibernation. Her hair was frizzy and out of place and she seemed confused, yet there was an obvious sign of annoyance on her features.

With practiced movements, her hand chopped down on the digital alarm, killing the sound and possibly doing some damage to its internal structure.

There was a moment of indecision as Ai decided whether she would lay back down or get out of bed. She looked at the clock which said 5am and had a heated internal debate.

In the end, her conscience won out and she got up off the bed with a sigh.

If this was her own home, she would have been woken up by the sound of her father's rap music in the mornings. Yet as she was now living alone in an apartment in Tokyo, she had to rely on an alarm.

Ai let out a sigh, feeling a little lonely. It had been almost 2 weeks since she'd moved away from home to chase her dream at a new school, yet it seemed far longer.

After putting the kettle on, she quickly took a shower and began to get ready. Thanks to being in close proximity to Joshibi High, she had plenty of time to prepare herself.

Yet she had a different reason for setting her alarm so early.

She felt like a new woman after showering and taking the first sip of coffee. Ai wore a towel on her head as she opened up her laptop and clicked on a bookmarked link.

The logo of the U18 World Cup website popped up onto her screen. With familiarity, she clicked on Japan and found the most recent game from Japan.

"It's still playing?" She muttered in question.

The feed was live, showing a blond delinquent upon the mound getting ready to deliver a pitch. He looked scary, as if he wanted to hurt someone.

Yet in the next moment he sent a ball towards the catchers glove.

DONG

"Oh no!"

Ai almost spilled her coffee as she saw the big guy smack the ball into the outfield. Yet her eyes lit up when the camera panned to the fielder.

"Ken!"

Her face instinctively moved closer to the laptop in order to try and see him, yet due to the camera following the ball, he was a little out of shot.

"Oh my goodness." She exclaimed in shock.

Ken scaled the back wall in a single leap, stretching out his arm and plucked the ball out of the air in one fluid motion. His athleticism was off the charts as he corrected his body and landed safely.

"Out! Game set!"

"Huh?"

Ai was surprised at the call, yet as she turned her attention to the top right corner of the stream, she saw the score.

Japan - 13

Cuba - 2

"Whoa! I can't believe it. This is the second time in the World Cup that Ken has robbed a home run from an opponent. Perhaps he truly has a future in the outfield."

A male voice commented, his excitement palpable.

"Yes, what a way to finish the game. Japan steamroll Cuba in only 5 innings, a completely different result than what we were all expecting." A female voice added.

"This was very surprising considering their last game was so close. What do you think the defining factor was this time Miya?"

"Well firstly, Kei looks like a completely different pitcher in this game. He only gave up a single home run in the 3rd inning to Jorge Lopez. Secondly, the Japanese batters finally got used to the unorthodox Submarine pitcher Antonio."

Ai barely even listened to the commentators, her attention on Ken who had just been bombarded by his teammates. His face was filled with smiles, as if he'd just secured the gold for Japan.

Her face turned a little red, almost as if she was embarrassed for staring too long at him. She focused on his lips, remembering their last encounter before she moved to Tokyo.

The embarrassment seemed to be too much as she turned away from the screen.

Ai let out a sigh a moment later and checked the time. It wasn't long past 5am, but she already knew the result of the match. She couldn't watch the highlights either since it usually took a few hours before getting uploaded on the site.

"Maybe I should work on my project." She muttered with slight reluctance.

Since Joshibi High was an art and design school, it meant that they explored many different aspects of the industry. While Ai was mainly interested in fashion, she needed to branch out into other fields while enrolled.

Ai moved her laptop and brought out an A3 notebook, flipping to the most recent page. After looking at her sketches, she couldn't help but feel hopeless.

"The angle is all wrong..."

The sketch in question was of Koshien stadium, yet not as any regular spectator would see it. It was drawn from the perspective of someone sitting in the dugout, looking out onto the field.

This scene reminded her of one of her happiest moments in life. Watching Yokohama compete and win the nationals earlier in the year, all the while chatting to Ken and the other managers.

Taking an eraser, she got rid of some of the outlines and tried to fix them up. Then without taking notice of time, she began to redraw a lot of it.

At first it was difficult, but eventually she began to become immersed in the feeling. It was as if she was replaying the scene in her head. Ai could even hear the chatter of the team and the roar of the crowd, cheering on their squads.

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

Chapter 406 - 406: Joshibi High (2)

BUZZ BUZZ

"Eh?"

Ai turned to her phone and saw she had a message. S

"We won our game against Cuba. Hope you also win... In class that is. Message me after you finish school."

Ai's expression softened as she saw Ken's message, yet there was a hint of amusement. It was a typical straightforward message from him, something she'd grown to expect of him.

"Ah! What time is it?"

She quickly stood up and looked on her phone.

"7:30!? Crap."

Ai still had her towel wrapped around her hair and had not properly gotten ready, too sidetracked with her project. School would begin in 30 minutes.

After hurrying like a madwoman, she managed to get everything ready and head out the door in under 10 minutes. Since the school was only a 10 minute walk away, she should have enough time.

She was dressed in her white summer uniform with a red ribbon tied neatly around her collar. The skirt was a typical red and white pleated skirt, tying together what was a typical looking uniform for Japanese High School girls.

Ai managed to get to school in time, placing her shoes in the locker near the front entrance. As she opened the locker, a letter fell out, causing her expression to darken.

'Not again...'

Just as she was about to pick it up from the floor and tear it into pieces, someone swooped in and collected it.

"Ah man, not again." The male voice spoke up, his tone sounding displeased.

Yet instead of being thankful, Ai's face darkened even further.

"I can't believe the nerve of some people. They should know that you're clearly not interested in guys who would do such things." He said, sounding earnest.

Ai raised her head and saw the person she least wanted to see at this moment.

Katsuya Adachi, one of the most popular teens in the first year of High School. His styled hair and almost flawless features made him look like one of those idols one would see on the TV.

He had begun his modeling career in middle school yet he had not let the fame get to his head. He was well mannered and a gentleman, or at least that's how he portrayed himself to everyone.

"Wow is that Katsuya and Ai together?"

"Are they a couple?"

Ai heard these words and felt like throwing a fit in anger. Thankfully she managed to calm herself down, looking up at the model-like face of the man next to her.

"Thanks Katsuya. I'll be going to class now since its already late."

She was abrupt, yet Ai made sure that her words were respectful. She didn't want the school to turn against her for treating their popular kid wrongly.

Katsuya merely flashed her a smile, "No problem, see ya round'."

He kept the smile on his face until she had disappeared around the corner, upon which a bored expression replaced it. Katsuya waved the letter in his hand, fanning his face.

'Still playing hard to get are we? We'll see how long that lasts.' He thought inwardly.

Then without any fanfare, he ripped open the letter and read its contents.

"Yuhei Uchida huh? Trying to steal my girl..." He muttered, a vicious expression flashing onto his features for a moment.

"Oi, go teach that guy a lesson." Katsuya said aloud, seemingly to no one in particular.

"Hehe, another toad wanting to eat swan meat." A creepy tone replied from the other side of the locker, grabbing the letter in Katsuya's hand.

After the figure left, Katsuya let out a small sigh which was drowned out by the ringing of the bell.

"Oops, I better get to class." He said, his face once again morphing into the charming one he usually wore around the school.

Meanwhile, Ai had already sat down in class and began to unpack her things. She was flanked by a girl with bangs, her large assets practically bursting out of her uniform.

"Aiiii-chan~ how is your project going?" She asked with a smile.

Ai's face turned up in a smile after hearing the girls voice. This was Rie Aikawa, one of her new friends that she'd met since coming to the school.

She was a bit of an airhead, but Rie was sincere and seemed like a good friend.

"Haaahhh, I did some more work on it this morning but it still doesn't seem right." Ai replied truthfully.

"Oh? I'm sure its not that bad. I'll give you some pointers later if you want?" She asked, the care evident in her tone.

"Ahhh thank goodness. You're the best Rie."

In truth, despite being an airhead, Rie was a genius when it came to drawing. Her landscape drawings were impeccable, yet that wasn't even her strong suit. She was really into character design and portraits.

One look at her talent was enough to make anyone give up trying, yet she was super humble.

"Hehe~ I know. Oh, I almost forgot... Comiket is coming up soon, I could really use your help with my outfit." Rie added.

Ai's eyes lit up, this was totally her strong suit.

"Sure! Let's do some tonight."

In addition to being great at the arts, Rie loved to dress up as characters at Comic events. In short, she was a cosplayer.

With her abundant assets, she was a popular and coveted cosplayer. Even receiving money to attend events, all of which she spent on more materials to create other outfits.

As the two chatted, the bell went off and the teacher walked in a few moments later. This prompted the class representative to spring into action.

"Rise!"

"Bow."

This was a common thing in Japanese High Schools, showing the teacher respect at the beginning of class. Even in public schools this was drilled into the children at a young age.

"You may be seated." The teachers deep voice rang out, prompting everyone to follow his instructions.

"Alright, I'll now take the roll, answer if your name is called."

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

Chapter 407 - 407: Eve of the Clash (1)

"Yo Katsu!"

In a dark and smoky bar, a guy wearing a leather jacket and sporting a soul patch yelled out. He was flanked by two women who continued to run their hands up and down his body. One in a red dress, and the other in blue.

He was rather handsome and had a bad boy vibe to him, though it looked like he could afford to shower more.

"Sup Kiyō."

Katsuya responded, throwing his bag onto one of the nearby seats. He was still dressed in his uniform, though it was now unbuttoned, revealing his black undershirt.

He leisurely took a seat at the booth, leaning back.

"What's wrong with you? Still haven't won over that beauty yet?" the guy named Kiyoshi asked, a smile plastered onto his face.

Yet Katsuya didn't react.

"Got a smoke?"

"Hehe, you only smoke when you're annoyed." He replied before nudging the woman on his left.

As if knowing what to do, the woman in the skimpy red dress reached into his pocket and pulled out a pack of smokes before making her way over to Katsuya.

She took out a smoke and placed it in his mouth gently, retrieving a lighter from the table and setting it alight. Katsuya barely even acknowledged her, puffing until clouds of smoke began to come out of the cigarette.

"Ruby, why don't you help make Katsu feel better." Kiyō said with a wicked grin.

At these words, Ruby's eyes lit up in excitement. Katsuya was a million times better than the stinky man she was forced to worship over there.

However...

"Tch, piss off. Like I'd allow some used goods to touch me." He spat out, looking at her with disgust.

Ruby was by no means ugly. She had curves in all the right places, giving off a youthful yet mature charm that would make any salary man drool at her attention. But the teen in front of her saw no such allure.

While the words hurt her pride, she did well to conceal it.

"Aww come on man. She gives great you-know-what's." He said with a wink.

Ruby almost shuddered at those words, feeling a bad taste in her mouth. Just thinking of what she had been forced to do almost caused her to cry on the spot.

Ever since Kiyoshi had taken a liking to her, she'd been stuck. The hostess company she worked for gave her up on a silver platter, as if they were scared.

She couldn't leave because nowhere else would hire her because of his influence. Well, it wasn't exactly his influence, it was who he was involved with.

Before she could return to his side, the door to the bar opened with a loud bang, causing everyone to sit up in shock.

A bulky man walked in, his arms covered in colorful tattoos. He had a suave appearance with slicked back hair and a simple mustache which fit his face perfectly. Were it not for his outfit and tattoos, one might mistake him for an executive.

Once Kiyoshi and Katsuya saw this man, they relaxed considerably, whereas Ruby and the other girl tensed up.

"Get out." He said simply, the deep tone containing an unveiled threat of violence.

Ruby was frozen in fear as she stared at the man with horror.

"HE SAID GET OUT!"

Kiyoshi grabbed Ruby and threw her onto the floor, sending a kick her way not even a second later, eliciting a yelp of pain from her. The other woman beside him quickly moved, picking up Ruby from the ground and draping her arm over her shoulder.

They rushed to get out of the bar as quickly as possible. In the process of walking past the suave looking man, the woman in the blue dress grazed against his arm.

Unbeknownst to the women, the man's face flashed with a vicious expression.

He turned and watched them scurry out the door, waiting a few moments.

"Akira."

"Yes boss!"

Another man dressed in a black suit rushed in at the call of the man, only to see him beckon him closer.

"The one in the blue dress... Make sure she disappears." He said in a lowered voice.

"Understood."

With that, he quickly left the bar, not turning back.

"Kiyoshi, what did I say about bringing your filthy bitches in here?" He stated, yet his tone was much more gentle, as if he was reprimanding his child.

"Hehe, sorry father." Kiyoshi said, his face looking slightly embarrassed.

"Haaahh. Why can't you be more like your brother?" He asked, letting out a deep sigh.

As he turned to Katsuya, the man's face finally changed, looking at him in question.

"You're smoking... What's wrong?" His deep voice sounded concerned.

"Hehe, Katsu is still chasing that girl at school but she rejected him~" Kiyoshi replied in a playful tone.

"Shut up Kiyo, at least I have standards." He rebutted, taking a deep breath of smoke into his lungs.

Before the two could continue to squabble, their father put an end to it.

"Kiyoshi, get this place cleaned up, we have guests coming around tomorrow night."

"Eh? Really?" Only now did Kiyo begin to show some signs of nerves.

If it was the usual suspects, his father wouldn't care how the place looked. This could only mean that some important people would likely be in attendance.

He quickly left the room, looking for some lackeys to help him clean the joint up for the arrival.

Once he'd left, Katsuya's father walked over to the booth and took a seat next to him. His wide shoulders taking up a lot of space.

"Are you really having girl trouble?" He asked, his tone softening.

Katsuya blew out another puff of smoke before nodding. There usually wasn't a woman who he couldn't get, yet Ai seemed to be out of reach. All of his usual tricks were failing miserably, leading to his depression.

"Well, if you can't earn what you want, why not just take it with both hands?" The man said, a small smile forming on his face.

Judging by how he had said it so casually, it was clear that this was not an uncommon occurrence.

"Not yet... There's still time." Katsuya stated, putting the cigarette out in the ash tray.

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

Chapter 408 - 408: Eve of the Clash (2)

In the meeting room in the hotel, the Japanese players sat and patiently waited for the coaches to begin the film session. They had just defeated Cuba earlier today in merely 5 innings, showing just how dominant the team was when in form.

Yet none of the players looked complacent, and it was for a good reason.

"Well done today everyone, we played up to our true capabilities in the match." Coach Takashi stated with his hands behind his back as he addressed the players.

"But, it is now in the past. We need to continue striving to improve, especially against our next opponent."

He looked around the room, seeing the determined expressions of the youth in front of him before nodding in satisfaction.

"As you know, we're up against the US next. I don't need to tell you that this will be our toughest challenge yet. Tonight's film session will be rather long, so please do your best to take on the information."

With that, the Head Coach moved to the side, clearing room for Chris to step in. Afterwards, he turned his gaze to Ken, sending a wink his way.

'W-What the heck?'

Ken's expression was one of utter confusion. Why the hell did the Head Coach send him a wink? It was especially confusing since there was no context apparent.

Now that he thought about it, Coach Takashi had been treating him weirdly since this morning. He would compliment him after returning to the dugout, even if all he did was sit in the outfield with no action.

While this was happening, Chris's mouth had opened, yet no words had come out. He had happened to look at the Coach winking in Ken's direction and instantly forgot what he was going to say.

The father and son happened to lock gazes a moment later, as if it was fate.

Unfortunately neither of them was a telepath, so the conversation would have to wait for later. Yet judging by his father's expression, Ken could tell that it was not something that he would like.

"Ahem... let's get down to business." Chris stated, finally able to compose himself. He shuffled through a few of the pages in his hands before gesturing to the guy behind the laptop.

4 players appeared on the big screen behind him, each wearing their US baseball uniforms.

On the left was a bulky guy with a beard who looked like he belonged amongst a field of trees with an axe in his hand. Ken wouldn't have been surprised if he saw the guy wearing a flannelet shirt.

The next was someone that Ken recognized, the one most likely to overthrow Hiroki's position as the Greek God. Leo Cameron.

Next to him was Santiago Williams the lead off hitter they'd watched the night before. Finally, it was Ryan Smith, the proclaimed best High School pitcher in America.

Chris began to go into detail about the 4 players behind him. These were people that they needed to pay special attention to, since they were the best on the team.

Usually there were only 1 or 2 of these superstars on a National Team, yet the US had 4 that stood out. That wasn't to say that their other players were bad, just that these guys were the cream of the crop.

"Firstly, the 3rd baseman Samuel Colt. I don't think I need to tell you, but his main strength is batting. If he was in his last year of high school, he'd be ranked higher in the prospect list than both the Lopez brothers."

After making the comparison, the Japanese players became serious. They knew just how dangerous the Lopez twins were, especially Jorge.

"Next is Santiago Williams. He excels in not only the outfield, but is a genuine sprinter who had the chance to join the National track team yet opted for baseball instead. He's also a switch hitter."

Once again the Japanese player's expressions darkened, if it were even possible in the first place. Yet it just kept getting worse.

"Leo Cameron, by far the best catcher in the country. Not only is he methodical in his leads, he also has a killer right arm and is not afraid to walk a player if he deems it as the correct move. Rather than thinking of him as a person, he acts more like a super computer."

At the mention of this guy, Hiroki's face turned into one of defiance and unwillingness to back down. His fighting spirit was burning, causing those around him to look at him with confusion.

Ken couldn't help but facepalm, knowing exactly what Hiroki was thinking about. After seeing his physique through the laptop screen, the guy had been working out non-stop wherever he could.

While it was good that he was fired up, Ken almost threw the guy out of his room after hearing him working out on the floor while he was trying to sleep.

"And probably the scariest of them all... Ryan Smith."

Chris paused, allowing the room to settle.

"The number 1 High School pitcher in the country, some even say the world." He added, his gaze landing on Ken briefly.

Yet instead of being solemn, some of the Japanese players didn't take the declaration too well.

"That's mighty arrogant to suggest."

"Yeah, is the title one that he gave himself?" Riku chimed in.

"He wasn't even in the World cup 2 years ago. How good could he be?" Masayuki asked, his tone sounding genuinely annoyed.

Ken would have added his own 2 cents, however he knew just how crazy the pitching maniac was from his previous life. Of course he didn't think that he would lose against Ryan, especially with his system.

Yet that wasn't something to be proud of in and of itself.

"Now now, it's not just him who believes it. It's the entirety of the US population." Chris stated, seeming rather amused at the reactions of the team.

It was good that they weren't intimidated by such a title.

"Alright, enough about individuals. Let's go over some film."

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

Chapter 409 - 409: Exposed Feelings (1)

Ken and the others left the meeting room almost 2 hours later, their stomach's protesting loudly. Since the film session was a long one, it was already 7pm, an hour past dinner time.

A lot of the players looked drained, yet Ken was not one of them. In fact, his face was turned up in a satisfied smile.

Daichi looked over at his brother in question, "Why do you look so happy?"

"Yeah, you're starting to creep me out." Kuro who was nearby said.

Ken sent him a quick death stare, not wanting to hear such words from him of all people.

"It's nothing, I just feel like I've improved a lot." He responded simply.

"Pfft, no way its that. Kenny probably got a naughty text from his girlfriend~" Riku replied, sending him a nudge.

Except no one laughed at Riku's joke, instead they sent jealous looks at Ken.

"Let's see it."

"Like I would show you even if I did get one of those." Ken said dismissively.

"Tch, stingy" Aki muttered.

Ken looked at him incredulously, resisting the urge to punch him in the stomach once again.

"I wonder what's on the menu tonight." Hiroki said, changing the subject.

"Probably cheeseburgers or something again."

The whole team shuddered, feeling their appetites shrink.

Thankfully, Miho seemed to have worked her magic once more, delivering fresh rice and a Japanese style curry which filled both the hearts and stomachs of the players.

"Ah, this dish makes me miss Japan." Aki said, tears flowing down his face.

It wasn't just him who had this sentiment.

"Tell me straight, how did you convince the cooks this time?" Ken asked Miho who had joined their table for dinner.

Daichi stared at her with sparkling eyes, as if waiting for a response.

"W-Well... It turned out the other patrons enjoyed the food so much that the hotel has let me plan the menu for the rest of our stay. They even said that they'll pay me." She looked slightly embarrassed, but her eyes kept moving to Daichi to see his reaction. S

"Whoa! You're amazing Miho."

"Mmm, talk about fortunate."

Both Hiroki and Ken mirrored Daichi's sentiments. Having access to Japanese dishes while in a foreign country was something that they all enjoyed. Not to mention the food wasn't as heavy as American food.

While in the middle of eating, Chris slid onto the spare chair at their table, his expression barely hiding his anxiety.

"H-Hey Dad, are you okay?" Daichi asked, feeling a little concerned.

"Who me? Ahaha, of course... of course." He replied, his voice trailed off at the end.

The man looked like he was in a hostage situation.

Ken noticed that he kept glancing to his left, so Ken stealthily followed his father's gaze, only to see Coach Takashi sitting down with a few other staff members.

'Hmm? This has something to do with the Head Coach?'

He paused, trying to think of some reasons. The obvious one would be that the Head Coach had found out about Daichi pursuing Miho, but that didn't explain Coach Takashi's behavior.

Seeing as how both Miho and Hiroki was present, it seemed now was not the right time to discuss such a thing.

"Hey, why don't we go and see mom after dinner?" Ken asked, sending a cryptic gaze to both his father and brother.

Thankfully, the two were thinking straight and answered correctly.

"Okay sounds good to me."

"G-Great idea! I bet she's feeling a bit lonely, ha ha." Chris stammered.

Yet their plans were thwarted by a feminine voice in the next moment.

"Oh, can I tag along? I've heard so much about Yuki" Miho said, her expression pure and innocent.

"Err."

There was a pause filled with awkward silence as the trio tried to come up with an excuse.

However, Ken broke it in the next moment.

"Sure. I'm sure she'd like to meet you too."

Both Chris and Daichi looked at him quizzically, as if to ask what the hell he was doing. Yet Ken merely shook his head.

Since Miho was likely involved in whatever Chris was anxious about, then it made sense to have her on their side. She was also the closest to the Head Coach, which means she could provide cover.

As long as they worked together, they could navigate whatever troubles were coming their way.

After dinner, the four left the dining area and walked out of the hotel. The last vestiges of light were still painting the clouds, but the city was about to turn dark.

They walked a little while to a secluded area between the hotel and the next complex.

"Alright what is it?" Ken asked, his tone serious.

"Eh? Weren't we going to see your mom?" Miho asked.

Daichi had an apologetic look on his face as he answered. "Sorry Miho that was a lie. We needed an excuse to meet up together which was why we said that."

Miho looked a little disappointed, but it was quickly overshadowed by curiosity.

"So why did you let me come along?"

This time Daichi turned to Ken, as if wanting to know the answer himself.

Ken placed his hand on Daichi's shoulder, a mysterious expression on his face.

"Because the reason why Dad is anxious, likely has something to do with you two."

"Eh?"

"Don't tell me..." Daichi's face paled and he quickly looked to his father for confirmation.

However, Chris looked like he'd swallowed a watermelon as he shook his head.

"It's much worse..."

"Worse!?" This time it was Ken's turn to be surprised.

The only person more confused in this group was Miho, who wished someone would spill the damn beans already.

"Coach Takashi asked me to set Miho up with my son..."

At these words, Miho's face reddened considerably, her gaze flashing towards Daichi. She didn't miss the genuine smile that began to creep onto his features.

"That's good news thou—"

Chris cut off Ken, his next words causing a stir.

"He was talking about you, Ken."

"EH!?"

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

Chapter 410 - 410: Exposed Feelings (2)

Miho paled at these words, her face showing complete and utter shock written all over it. Ken might have even been offended by her reaction if he wasn't so shocked himself.

"Ah! That's why the Head Coach winked at me earlier..."

"W-What are we going to do." Daichi seemed to be the most affected by the news, his expression looking crushed.

"I... I don't know." Chris replied.

Ken was deep in thought for a while. He could tell that Miho had not wanted to bring up her love affairs to her Grandfather, otherwise she would have already. But perhaps that was because she was thinking about Daichi's situation.

"Miho, why don't you tell Coach that you and Daichi are dating?" He asked simply.

"Eh?"

Both Daichi and Miho looked at him with shock, as if they were too innocent little lambs who had just been told to do something nefarious.

"D-D-Dating?"

Miho's face was now as red as a tomato, lighting up the dark alley more than the streetlights which had yet to turn on.

Even Daichi seemed coy at the mention of those words, leading Chris and Ken to look at him incredulously.

"What? You guys aren't dating?"

They were practically in a relationship already, but it seemed like it hadn't been outwardly said just yet.

'Man... I thought I was bad at these things.' Ken thought inwardly.

No truer statement could have been said in that moment.

Chris cleared his throat, trying to fix the awkward atmosphere. Since he had the most experience out of everyone, he felt that it was time that he put his expertise to use.

"Ahem. Try to reign in your embarrassment for a moment and let's be sincere."

He looked at both Miho and Daichi, his gaze seemingly staring into their souls.

"Daichi, both Ken and I know that you like Miho. She's all you have ever talked about since we returned from the National Team tryouts."

Daichi felt his face heat up, his gaze quickly flickering to Miho only to see her staring back at him with wide eyes. She was shocked after finding out how he felt even from the beginning.

If she was honest, she hadn't taken much notice of him back then, treating Daichi as if he was some regular baseball player. One that ate too many carbohydrates at that.

However, since they began to chat via messages, her opinion had changed rather fast. He was caring and genuinely interested in what she had to say, a far cry from all the other guys she met.

Yet that wasn't saying much since she'd never really had a relationship before.

Before she could think anymore, Chris continued, breaking her train of thought.

"But it doesn't mean anything if we're the only ones who know about it. You need to tell Miho yourself, otherwise she might not think that you're interested." He said with a soft tone.

Listening to his father's words, Daichi felt a pang in his heart. He had never experienced a situation like this before with a girl, so he didn't know how to court a woman, nor progress in their relationship.

It was only after hearing this from Chris that he finally gathered up the courage.

He turned to Miho and boldly grabbed her hands. They were soft and a little cold, but they felt nice.

"M-Miho..."

"Y-Yes." Miho almost jumped in fright, but she managed to settle down. She could tell that the guy in front of her was doing his best, which made it a little easier to keep her emotions in check.

"I... I like you. A lot." He stammered.

Ken's face fell, feeling his entire being cringe. He wanted nothing more than to shove his head under a pillow and suffocate himself in that moment.

Thankfully, Daichi continued his words, avoiding the moment turning even more awkward.

"Like they said, ever since I first met you, I've liked you. Whenever we talk, I get butterflies in my stomach. I might be a little thick headed, but I do know one thing..."

Miho managed to keep her composure on the surface, but inwardly her heart was beating out of her chest. The added embarrassment of being in front of Ken and Chris was also not helping her cause.

But she did her best to focus on the man in front of her.

"I want you to be my girlfriend." He said firmly.

For the first time since the conversation began, Daichi had a serious expression on his face, one filled with passion and drive.

Miho suddenly felt 3 sets of eyes on her, inspecting her intently. Part of her wanted to run and hide away, but when she thought of how Daichi would feel, she thought it would be too cruel.

So instead, she straightened her back and looked directly into Daichi's eyes.

"I w-want to be your girlfriend too."

The moment she said her real feelings, her face heated up once more. Instead of running away, she moved forward and buried her face into Daichi's chest, wrapping him into a hug.

"Eh?"

Daichi was shocked, yet he instinctively reciprocated, closing his arms around her.

He stared forward blankly, only to see the two wild grins on Ken and his father's face. They sent him thumbs up while silently dancing in triumph. It was as if they were mimes, putting on a performance for just him.

After a few long moments, Chris cleared his throat and tried to get everyone's attention.

Miho pulled back instantly, though there was a smile on her face.

"Okay, now that we got that out of the way. We still need to figure out a plan for the Head Coach." Chris said, bringing everyone back on track.

The trio nodded, though only 1 in attendance was truly listening with all of his attention.

Ken briefly looked at the new couple and could see that they were still holding hands. He was happy for his brother, yet part of him wished that he'd had his father's help for his relationship.

'The guy really knows his stuff...'

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

Chapter 411 - 411: Academic Trait (1)

Ken returned to his room a while later, feeling exhausted. He had left Daichi and Miho alone after they had finally decided to get into a relationship, not wanting to get between them.

'I hope they don't end up chatting all night. We play the US tomorrow after all.' He thought inwardly, opening his room door.

Upon entering, the first thing he saw was Hiroki fast asleep on Daichi's bed. It was likely that he thought Daichi might not react as violently as Ken upon finding him in his bed.

Ken let out a sigh and checked the time. It was currently 9pm, but their wasn't until 1pm tomorrow. The coach wouldn't care if they slept in as long as they were ready at the appointed time.

He quickly got through his nightly routine before hopping into bed. Since Hiroki was already asleep, it was the perfect time to open the system, something he'd been wanting to do all day.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 4 (77,880/100,000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 16

TALENT ASSESSMENT: SS

POTENTIAL: SS+

MAJOR POINTS: 77,880

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS (1 notification)

-SYSTEM SHOP

-LOTTERY (Locked)

-IMAGE TRAINING

-IDENTIFY

-TRAINING PLAN

-MENTOR

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: SS

>Pitching: SS+

>Fielding: B

>Game Intelligence: B

>Mental: SS

>Skills: 20

>Traits: 1

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. SS)

Balance and Coordination: SS+

Agility: SS-

Strength: SS

Stamina: SS+

Seeing the flashing icon next to his missions caused Ken's face to break out into a grin. He already knew what it was, but that didn't kill his excitement at all.

#NEW MISSION: U18 Baseball World Cup

*Task 1: Get onto base 15 times [12/15]

*Task 2: Hit 8 home runs [8/8]

*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 two times [2/2] [Completed]

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 [Claim Reward]

"Kekeke, come to me..."

Ken's bad habit appeared once more after ogling his prize. His words were similar to a line from a third-rate villain from a bad movie.

Yet he didn't care, clicking the Claim Reward button with an expectant grin.

[Congratulations, user has completed the hidden task: Thief in the Outfield]

Hidden Task: Rob a home run two times.

*Rewards: Academic Trait

Ken raised his eyebrow at the systems naming convention, but quickly focused on the most important point.

'Let's see what this trait is...'

>Skills: 20

>Traits: 2 (new)

He clicked on the traits menu and was met with another system window. He pressed the new Academic trait and was suddenly bombarded with text.

Trait: Academic

Description: The Academic trait grants user exceptional intellectual abilities and a keen aptitude for learning and understanding complex concepts quickly. This trait makes the user an adept student, not just in the classroom but also in analyzing and strategizing for baseball.

With the Academic trait, user can absorb and apply knowledge effectively, enhancing both his athletic and academic pursuits.

Effects:

Enhanced Learning: User can grasp new concepts and skills rapidly, reducing the time needed to learn and master new techniques or strategies.

Strategic Thinking: User's ability to analyze and understand game strategies is heightened, allowing him to make smarter plays and outthink opponents on the field.

Memory Recall: Improved memory helps user remember detailed information about opponents, game scenarios, and techniques, which they can recall at crucial moments.

Focus and Concentration: Increased mental focus allows user to maintain high levels of concentration during both academic studies and intense game situations.

Academic Performance: User's performance in his academic studies is significantly improved.

"Oh. My. Goodness..."

Ken read through the list of effects for his new trait with tremendous speed. It took him all of a few seconds to completely digest the new information which he understood was a result from the trait itself.

"This... this is cheating." He mumbled, half in shock.

Originally he had tried to convince himself that having his system wasn't exactly cheating. Some players had God-given talents that far surpassed him, so he believed that the system was just his way of catching up.

Yet as his brain now operated like a top of the line PC, he could consciously admit that it was cheating.

He closed his eyes, pouring over memories which were once forgotten. He could recall things in vivid detail, as if he was experiencing the moment once more.

Ken seemed to drift off to sleep as he watched memories of his life as if it were a movie.

A memory that he did not want to replay, jumped to the forefront of his mind.

He could feel his heart beating wildly, doing its best to pump adrenaline into his system and counteract the effects of the drug. He could feel the cold floor of his apartment after toppling to the ground.

The hopelessness of his plight as he dug into his bag and saw he'd taken the wrong pills.

Then came the merciless regret which threatened to overwhelm him, sucking him down into the deep abyss.

"Haaah Haaah Haaah"

Ken quickly sat up in his bed, gasping for air, his whole body matted with sweat as the blanket stuck to his body.

"W-What's wrong!?"

Hiroki quickly jumped out of bed, turning the nearest lamp on. His face still looked half asleep, but he seemed alert. As he turned his attention to Ken, he saw his pale face and sweat covered body.

"Ken what happened?"

"J-Just a bad dream." He responded, trying to catch his breath.

His heart was still beating wildly in his chest as he did his best to calm down.

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

Chapter 412 - 412: Academic Trait (2)

Just then, the sound of the door opening entered their ears as Daichi entered the room. His face was wearing a dumb smile, making him look like a young kid.

However, upon seeing both Ken and Hiroki staring back at him, his face grew puzzled.

"Why are you too still awake? It's already midnight."

"Ken just had a bad dream and woke up now. Why are you only coming back now?" Hiroki responded.

Daichi's face quickly reverted back to his dumb smile as he was about to tell his tale.

"That's enough, we have an important game tomorrow. Quickly go to bed, you can tell us in the morning." Ken interjected, bringing the other two back to reality.

The look he gave Daichi was enough to make him drop his head. He'd been told more than a few times to come back at a reasonable time, yet here he was at midnight trying to sneak into the room.

"Y-Yes sir."

Daichi moved to his bed, letting out a frown after seeing that the covers were already messed up.

He flashed Hiroki an irritated look before slumping into bed and turning the lamp off, leaving the guy standing awkwardly.

'Damn it.' Hiroki cursed inwardly.

The next morning, Ken woke up feeling refreshed. He had drifted off to sleep last night after using his new memory recall abilities, something that he regretted. He had already decided never to do this again since he couldn't control what memories he saw with his subconscious.

The scene he'd experienced, or re-experienced in this case, was his death in his previous life. It was so vivid, that Ken felt like he had died once more, leading to him waking up in such a state before Daichi arrived.

He had been a little worried going back to sleep, but after using Mika's sleep protocol, there was no such issues afterwards.

It was currently 7am and he was down at breakfast with Hiroki. They had let Daichi sleep for a while longer, wanting him to be fresh for the game.

"What are you doing until the game? Did you want to come work out with me?" Hiroki asked as he plowed into the omelet in front of him.

Ken shook his head, "I've got other plans this morning."

"Hmm?" Hiroki lifted his head with a mouthful of omelet, sending him a questioning gaze.

"Don't worry about it and eat your food. I'll catch up with you before we leave." Ken stated before standing up and leaving the dining area.

He made his way to the meeting room, leaving his friend behind who still wore a confused expression.

Ken knocked a few times on the door before entering. Coach Takashi and his father were the only ones in the room, likely setting up for the coach's morning meeting.

"Ah, Ken my boy. What can we do for you?" The Head Coach asked, his tone almost too jolly for this early in the morning.

It was clear by this interaction that he was still under the impression his father was going to talk to him about Miho. Ken stuck to the plan, feigning ignorance.

"How much tape of the US team do you have?" He asked, mainly directing the question to his father.

"Hmm? We've got all of their games from the World Cup so far." Chris replied, though he seemed a little confused.

"Do you have a copy? I want to do a bit more research."

"Oho. I never picked you for one of those types." Coach Takashi said, his hand instinctively reach up to his goatee and stroking it.

Ignoring the Head Coach, he waited for his father's reply.

"Ah sure... We have a backup hard drive." He said, before heading to the desk and pulling out a USB external hard drive.

He moved forward and placed it in Ken's hand, though he still seemed rather perplexed at his actions. It wasn't like his son to be doing things like this.

'Has Daichi rubbed off on him?' Chris thought in his heart.

"Thanks Coach." Ken replied with a grin, giving the Head Coach a nod on his way past.

Once Ken left, Coach Takashi sent a look of approval to Chris. He seemed to be please with Ken's behavior, improving his overall opinion of the boy.

Chris was forced to smile, feeling awkward at the interaction. If they hadn't come up with a plan the night before, he might have nervously spilled the beans in that moment.

Unaware, or at least unconcerned with his father's plight. Ken went back upstairs with the hard drive. He still had one of the staff's laptops and would be spending the rest of his morning going over tape.

With the new Academic trait, he was sure that this was the most efficient use of time. S

Upon entering his room, Daichi was still fast asleep on the bed, a smile planted on his face. It was rather obvious that he was having a good dream.

Ken grabbed the laptop and hopped onto the single couch in the corner of the room. He put some earphones in and plugged in the hard drive before skimming through the files.

"Alright, let's see how effective this new trait is." He mumbled.

He then spent the next 3 and a half hours pouring over all of the film. He had noticed rather early on that he had more capacity, so he ended up playing 2 clips at once on different sides of the screen.

Yet he didn't stop there.

Ken managed to watch 3 games at once, yet could still comprehend what was going on in each of them. He focused most of his attention on the 4 players who his father had brought up last night.

"Leo Cameron, Santiago Williams, Samuel Colt, Ryan Smith."

He said their names out loud, as if to burn them into his mind. As long as he could ingrain their play-styles in his head, finding a way to beat the US would be at hand.

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

Chapter 413 - 413: Interaction (1)

The Japanese team alighted from the bus, walking into the familiar tunnels on their way to the locker rooms. Since they were the 2nd game of the day, they happened to pass the Mexican team who were just leaving.

The two teams were silent, yet some of the Mexican players had smirks on their faces. They knew that the Japanese would have a tough opponent today and it looked like they were waiting for their failure.

After all, Japan had gone undefeated so far in the World Cup, just like the United States.

Some people believed that this game was a sneak peak at what would eventually become the finals match in a few days time.

"Buena suerte"

"Gracias"

Surprisingly it was Kuro who answered, bowing slightly to the player who had said something in his native language.

"Eh?"

The Japanese players were burning with curiosity. Did Kuro know how to speak Spanish? How? Or perhaps the better question was, why?

Yet they managed to hold their curiosity until they entered the locker room.

"Kuro, I didn't know you could speak Spanish?" Aki was incredibly impressed. Since the language taught in school were generally English, it meant that he would have had to study it on his own.

It wasn't just him, everyone looked at him with a sense of respect.

"I don't."

At least until he opened his mouth.

"What?"

"I only know one word, thank you." He responded nonchalantly.

What were once looks of respect, quickly turned to disdain and annoyance. Ken quickly lost interest and began to go over the information he'd learned this morning.

"Damn it man! Here I thought you were actually really smart, but you were just trying to act cool." Aki said with frustration, scratching his head roughly.

"So you don't even know what he said? But you thanked him anyway?" Hiroki added, feeling exasperated.

Kuro got a little defensive, "I-It's all a mental game... If they said something bad then me saying thank you might cause them to think about their actions a little more. Have you heard of the saying, kill them with kindness?"

"Idiot..."

Everyone quickly ignored the guy and focused on getting ready for the game. Talking to him was just a waste of time since they didn't understand what went on inside of his mushroom head.

"So, have you managed to figure out anything?" Daichi asked Ken beside him.

When he had woken up this morning he'd been surprised to see Ken in the room in front of the laptop. He was even more surprised after seeing he had 3 games going simultaneously on the screen.

Ken didn't answer right away, as if he was still deep in thought. In reality, he was using his memory recall to pour over what he'd watched this morning.

"I have some ideas, but it depends on a few factors."

"Oh? Please tell." Daichi raised his eyebrow, feeling his interest pique.

He was usually the one who did plenty of research on their opposition, though he'd been a little distracted lately. Just thinking about the reason for that distraction caused his heart to skip a beat.

"Well first off..."

Ken began to whisper to Daichi for a while. Daichi's face morphed a few times, but in the end he was shocked.

"Is that true?"

Ken nodded. He was rather confident in what he'd learned, especially since it was the effect of his knew Academic trait.

Daichi looked thoughtful for a while, but he decided to trust his brother. Sure enough, he'd never let him down before, at least when it came to baseball.

"Alright, I'll do as you say then."

"Good. There's also something else, but only if a certain someone is pitching today." Ken said, a smile reaching the corner of his lips.

"Hmm? Do you mean Ryan?"

"Hiroki... come here." Ken waved his friend over.

"Eh?" Hiroki saw Ken's vicious expression and instantly felt wary. If it wasn't for Daichi next to the guy, he might have just found an excuse to ignore him.

Eventually he worked up the courage to make his way over.

"Alright, keep this to yourself. If everyone starts using this information then it could become a problem." Ken stated, his face turning serious.

"Okay?"

A few minutes later, both Hiroki and Daichi sat back at the same time, their minds in turmoil. What Ken told them was almost too hard to believe, especially when it involved these powerhouses.

"Like I said, keep it to yourselves. We don't want them making adjustments because the whole team are in on it." Ken said succinctly.

"Alright, let's head out."

Coach Takashi spoke up, his words resonating around the locker room. He seemed composed and confident, enough to motivate the rest of the team.

With that, the team left the locker room and began their march down the tunnels.

The first thing that stuck out was the increase in crowd size. Before they even went out onto the field, they could hear the cheers of the crowd enter their ears.

As they walked out into the midday sun, Ken looked at the other side of the field where the US team happened to be.

He caught a pair of eyes locked onto him already.

It was Ryan Smith, looking at him as if he'd just encountered his fated enemy.

Ken flashed him a disdainful look before averting his gaze, yet inwardly he was cackling. He could already imagine the angry expression on the guy's face right now.

Ryan grit his teeth, feeling rage chip away at his self control.

'Arrogant brat... I'll crush you!'

Never before had he been treated in such a way by anyone, at least not after his talents had bloomed. He had always been told that he was a genius, a child prodigy in baseball.

Yet this foreigner had come to his own country and slighted him.

'Just you wait...!' Ryan thought, balling his hands into fists.

Caught up in his mental warfare, Ken didn't notice another gaze that was focused on him.

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

Chapter 414 - 414: Interaction (2)

A tall man with gray hair and a straight back who wore the US team jersey was staring at him from afar. His usual stern features had softened, almost as if he was looking at a dear friend.

"Coach, we're about to start the warm ups." The US assistant coach called out, breaking him out of his reverie.

"Mmm, you go start. I want to chat to someone quickly." Coach Williams said, his tone not allowing any rebuttal.

With that, he walked across the field with his hands behind his back. His eyes were focused on another figure who was about the same height as him.

Chris happened to turn around and see the figure coming towards him. His expression flickered for a moment, showing a mix of emotions before he straightened his back.

"Chris... It's good to see you again."

Mark's tone was softer than usual, and filled with emotion. He paused for a moment, eventually holding out his hand for a handshake.

Chris looked down at the hand, by the frustrated look on his face it seemed that he didn't want to shake hands with the man in front of him.

Just as it seemed he was going to leave the older man hanging, Chris moved his hand to the side and stepped forward, bringing his arms around and pulling Mark into a hug.

Mark's body tensed up for a moment before he softened, reciprocating the gesture.

"I missed you... Dad."

"Yeah... me too." Mark replied, his tone wavering.

The two each in their different National colors, hugged each other as if no one was watching.

Daichi's jaw dropped as he happened to turn around and see the interaction. No words came out of his mouth but he quickly began to nudge Ken next to him, his gaze still fixed on the two.

"What is it?" Ken said in annoyance.

However, he turned around in the next moment and mirrored his brother's expression.

Suddenly, his mind began to race, instantly pulling up some old memories.

As they were playing in front of him, he finally understood why the US coach had looked so familiar to him.

"Grandpa?" He muttered in shock.

Before he knew it, his legs began to move on their own. It didn't take long before he was standing in front of the two who had now stepped back and were facing each other once more.

As if feeling his presence, Mark moved his gaze to the teen just a couple of feet away.

His eyes began to moisten, yet there was some hesitation in his movements.

"Is that you Grandpa?" Ken asked.

At the word Grandpa, Mark felt a sharp pain in his heart. He hadn't heard that word in far too long and it brought up memories that were near and dear to his heart.

"Y-Yes."

He didn't know what to say. It had been so long since he'd seen his Grandson that he wasn't sure what to do.

Before the awkwardness could set in, Ken moved forward and hugged his Grandfather. Though he hadn't met the man in such a long time, his father always had good things to say about the man in front of him.

If the hug from his own son wasn't shock enough, receiving one from Ken was too much for him to handle. Tears quickly poured down his face as he embraced the young man in his arms.

All of the hardships in his life seemed like nothing the moment his Grandson hugged him.

Chris watched on with an smile, his heart feeling full. By the time the two separated all of them were feeling raw emotions flowing freely.

"You've gotten bigger..." Mark said, wiping his eyes with the back of his sleeve.

Ken smiled at him warmly, but his expression changed a moment later.

"Oh wait a sec." He turned around and saw Daichi standing awkwardly a few meters away. He looked a little uncomfortable, something that was understandable.

He quickly waved his brother to come over, only to see him hesitate.

Mark raised his eyebrow in question, but he remained silent.

After a few moments, Ken let out a small sigh and grabbed Daichi by the arm, dragging him over. While Daichi was stronger than Ken, he didn't resist, allowing himself to be pulled over to the other two.

"This is my brother Daichi. Daichi, this is Grandpa." He said simply.

"Hmm?" Mark's gaze moved to Chris in question, not sure of what to make of the statement.

Chris nodded, "We adopted Daichi into our family. You now have a new Grandson." He replied with a smile.

Mark was a little shocked, but a grin formed on his face.

"Welcome to the family Daichi." He said simply, putting his hand on Daichi's head and ruffling his hair gently.

Ken quickly translated, causing Daichi's expression to shift slightly.

"Mmm, thanks... Grandpa."

He had never had a Grandfather before, so saying the words felt rather foreign. Though a part of him felt extremely happy to meet his new family member.

After a few moments, Mark straightened his back and composed himself.

"It's good to see you guys, but we won't be going easy on you." He said, flashing them a smile.

Ken couldn't help but let out a little chuckle, seeing the shift in his attitude.

"Same here."

Although a little reluctant to leave, Mark eventually turned around and made his way back over to the US side of the field, his mood much improved.

Chris watched his retreating figure and felt a bittersweet sensation rise up in the back of his throat. He remembered the last conversation he had with the man around half a year ago and felt a lump in his throat.

Ken happened to see the expression on his father's face and seemed confused.

"Dad, what's wrong?" He asked out of concern.

"N-Nothing, don't worry. It's just been a while you know." He said, quickly turning around and heading towards the warm ups.

"Hurry up you two, the game starts in about 20 minutes."

Ken frowned, there was something his father was not telling him.

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

Chapter 415 - 415: Begin (1)

On the other side of the field, the US team were already in the midst of going through their drills. Ryan happened to look over and see Coach Williams making his way over to the Japanese staff.

"What's he doing?" He muttered.

Yet in the next moment his eyes widened in shock. He saw the Japanese coach come in for a hug and the two men embraced.

"Who is that over there?"

The large figure of Samuel Colt, the 3rd baseman appeared next to Ryan, his voice full of confusion.

However, Ryan was too surprised to respond, not that he had any clue to begin with.

"Ryan, what are you doing?" One of the coach's yelled. It was only when he didn't receive a response that he turned to what the teen was looking at.

Even he was stunned at the scene taking place.

Soon enough, the entire US team had noticed what was happening and turned their attention to the scene with Coach Williams.

They saw Ken walk over and give the coach a hug, shocking them to the core once again. Ryan especially felt shocked and betrayed at the action for some reason.

Most of the team only knew the Coach as a ruthless old man who would demand nothing less than perfection. To see him hugging a member of the opposite team was tantamount to treason.

Yet no matter how curious they were, the moment Coach Williams came walking back towards their side of the field, everyone went back to minding their own business.

Everyone except Ryan and another figure.

Santiago Williams jogged over to the coach, his expression filled with excitement.

"Is that them?" He asked, his actions making him look like a puppy.

Mark nodded, a small smile gracing his lips. He reached up and ruffled the teen's hair before replying.

"Just be patient, I'll introduce you to them later."

"Okay!" Santiago replied, filled with happiness. He quickly turned back the other way and joined in on the drills once more.

"Who are those people to you?" Ryan asked, his tone sounding accusatory.

Coach William's raised his eyebrow in response, clearly dissatisfied with the way he was being talked to.

"I don't think that's any of your business Ryan." He said succinctly.

With his tall frame at 6'5, Mark was more than a few inches taller than the teen. He looked down at him with a serious expression, completely opposite the look he just gave Santiago.

Ryan swallowed his complaints, quickly relinquishing his attitude. He had been too hasty, almost forgetting what kind of coach the man was in front of him.

"You're right sir, I apologize."

Afterwards, he turned around and was about to head over to the drills. Yet Mark called out to him.

"You're starting today... Don't hold back."

Ryan froze in place, his mouth turning up into a smile.

"I won't..." He said with a deep tone.

'Just you bastard's wait, I won't let you get a single hit.'

On the other side of the field, Ken wore a grin as he went through some outfield drills. He hadn't expected to see his Grandfather today, nor did he expect him to be the U18 United States Head Coach.

It seemed that baseball ran deep in his family, much more than he knew.

His eyes moved to Daichi, only to see the guy hard at work with Satoshi. Originally he was a little worried that such a thing might effect him mentally, but it seemed like the guy was even more fired up than before.

After around 15 minutes, they were called onto the field for the National anthems.

When The Star-Spangled Banner began to play, everybody in the audience got to their feet and began to sing. Since there was around 5000 people present, their voices were audible from the field.

Of course when the Japanese National Anthem came on, no one in the crowd apart from Ken's mother and a few other fans joined in.

For some reason, Ken decided that he was going to sing it at the top of his lungs.

He wasn't exactly a great singer, but he did his best. He suddenly wished that Shiro was here to lead them in singing.

The other players were a bit taken aback by Ken's volume, but they quickly caught on, raising their voices loudly as if to shout out their pride for their country.

"May Japan's Reign, last for ten thousand years. Until the pebbles, grow into boulders, lush with moss."

Ken heard a high and angelic voice ring out to his left, almost throwing him off completely. As he turned, he saw Kuro with his eyes closed, singing comfortably at the alto range.

"May Japan's Reign, last for ten thousand years. Until the pebbles, grow into boulders, lush with moss."

As the anthem came to an end, there was silence in the arena for a few moments. Unexpectedly the crowd cheered, raining down applause onto the field for the Japanese player's passionate performance of their National Anthem.

A feeling of unity spread across the team as they stood side by side. Each one of them wearing the pride of their country on their backs as they came up against the titan in the United States.

Coach Takashi wore a look of approval on his face, appreciating the moment. Ken's antics hadn't escaped his gaze.

'Truly a good match for my Granddaughter...!' He thought inwardly, stroking his goatee.

After the crowd had calmed down, Masayuki and Leo went up to the umpire to participate in the coin toss.

Standing next to the model-like Leo, anyone would feel inferior. Whether it was physique or demeanor, the guy looked like a marble sculpture, unaffected by the rabble around him.

Masayuki might have lost in the looks and aura department, but he would not lose out in fighting spirit. Unconsciously, he tensed up his muscles, trying to appear bigger than he usually was.

Players from both teams let out a laugh at the scene as the umpire flipped the coin.

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

Chapter 416 - 416: Begin (2)

"Heads. Japan, you choose."

"We'll bat first." Masayuki said confidently.

"Alright, Japan has won the coin toss and elected to bat first. United States, please take the field." The umpire announced, making some hand gestures.

"Let's do this!"

Masayuki was fired up as he returned to the dugout alongside everyone.

Both Riku and Masayuki put on their helmet and grabbed their bats, ready to roll. Yet they waited for Coach Takashi to step forward like he always did before every game.

The Head Coach addressed his players, his expression solemn.

"The day has finally come where we face our toughest opponent yet." His tone was serious as he moved his gaze amongst the players.

"But, now is not the time to be nervous or have reservations. We're going to hit them hard and fast from the very beginning. We'll need to give everything we've got if we want to beat this team, and I mean everything."

The players nodded along in agreement.

"Remember the game plan. Steer clear from the center outfield and look for opportunities to get on base. As long as we can play our brand of baseball, it won't be a matter of IF we can win, but WHEN we will win."

"Yeah!"

"Alright bring it in everyone." Chris said, walking into the middle of the dugout and raising his hand high.

"Victory on 3!"

1

2

3

"VICTORY!"

The team was filled with adrenaline after the pep talk. They shouted out words of encouragement to Riku who was stepping up to bat.

"Get on base Riku!"

"You can do it!"

"Just hit the ball!"

Everyone turned to Aki who had said the last phrase, each thinking the same thing.

'Is this guy an idiot?'

Yet Aki didn't seem to care as he continued to shout out obvious instructions like "Don't get struck out" and "Don't hit a grounder."

Riku ignored the stupid instructions yelled at him, his gaze focused on the pitcher.

It was at the same time that the trio of Ken, Hiroki and Daichi saw Ryan on the mound. Grins formed on their faces as they looked at each other.

"Be cool guys." Ken warned, though he was also filled with excitement.

Riku shuffled his feet, limbering up his body with a few dance moves as he made his way over to the batters box. He could hear a few jeers and laughs from the crowd, but that did nothing to groove.

"Batting 1st, Left outfield, Riku."

The US catcher Leo watched on with a stone-like expression as Riku approached the box.

"Such foolishness..." He stated, loud enough for anyone in the vicinity to hear.

He shook his head, quickly ignoring Riku and squatting his perfect body into position. He turned his attention to Ryan upon the mound and gave the signal, not even waiting for a response.

To him, pitchers were tools. If a pitcher didn't listen to him, they were merely a useless tool that didn't deserve to be on the field.

Ryan was well aware of Leo's disposition, especially since they played on the same High School team. In fact, Leo had never let him down ever since he'd taken the Ace position, therefore he trusted him wholeheartedly.

He lifted his leg close to his body before stepping out with force. The moment his foot planted, his right arm came flying past like a whip, sending the ball firing towards the outside of the strike zone.

Riku's eyes were focused solely on the ball as it rocketed towards him.

'That's outside the zone.' He concluded, not even bothering to swing.

PAH

"Strike."

"Eh?"

"Damn... 98mph." Daichi said, his face turning a little serious.

"The kid is fast, but not faster than me." Ken replied, sounding like an old man.

"Kid!? He's older than you." Hiroki sounded incredulous as he pointed out this crucial piece of information.

Riku's eyes widened as he turned to the umpire with a questioning gaze. He had watched the ball go into the catchers glove the whole way, there was no doubt in his mind that it was a ball.

However, he quickly composed himself. There was no point in causing a fuss, this situation was not entirely uncommon, especially when there was a skilled catcher behind the plate.

He had no doubts that Leo had framed the ball perfectly, making it seem like it was still in the strike zone.

Riku cracked his neck, moving his head from side to side. He would need to swing on anything that looked like it was going to be close to the zone.

Seeing that Riku had easily accepted the decision, Leo nodded inwardly.

'Seems like the Japanese team might be difficult to break.' He thought.

However, now that he'd implanted the fear of getting struck out by balls outside of the strike zone, it was now time to move onto the next phase.

Leo sent the signal to Ryan who nodded in response.

The next ball seemed a little slower than the last one, yet it was on a similar course.

'Not this time!' Riku shouted inwardly.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike!"

'Cutter?'

Riku felt a hint of frustration, mixed in with awe. The cutter had broken so late that he hadn't even noticed that it wasn't a fastball until it was too late.

He turned his attention to Leo whose expression was as stone-like as ever.

'This guy is tough...'

While others had lauded Ryan Smith as a great prodigy, Riku could already tell that the biggest threat in this game would come from the calm and collected catcher behind him.

The idea of stretching out his strike zone before sending a wicked cutter that bordered on the edge of the zone was ingenious. Even if he had managed to hit the ball, it would have likely been driven into the foul zone.

Riku felt a little out of his depth for the first time in the World Cup, but that didn't deter him at all. He faced Ryan once more, gripping his bat tightly.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout!"

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

Chapter 417 - 417: Missed Chance (1)

Ryan let out a scornful laugh after seeing the smile disappear from Riku's face moments after being struck out. In his eyes, the guy was struggling futilely, with no hope of succeeding.

'I'll show you the difference in our abilities.' He thought, spitting on the ground as he turned around.

"Tch, don't get cocky." Riku muttered, feeling the disdain directed at him from the mound.

For the first time, the usually happy-go-lucky Riku was pissed off. He'd represented the Japanese National Team since middle school, and he'd encounter people like Ryan a few times.

Cocky assholes that look down upon their opponents, at least until they bit back.

As Riku walked back to the dugout, he eyed the new arrivals that had only joined the National Team this year before feeling a small smile creep onto his lips once more.

'I can't wait to see his expression when these guys put him in his place.' He thought in his heart.

"Don't mind, get them next inning." Masayuki said simply, cracking his neck.

"Batting 2nd, Center outfield, Masayuki."

The announcer called his name, prompting him to get into position. He fixed his form before glancing at the catcher briefly. The guy didn't acknowledge him, merely focusing on the mound.

In truth, Masayuki was wary of this guy. A big part of their film session was focused on Leo, the catcher. He was like an emotionless robot, always calling for the most effective plays and executing swiftly.

He shook his head, turning to Ryan on the mound. This guy was another player they'd researched. He was capable of throwing 98-100mph bombs with excellent control.

If Masayuki hadn't met Ken, he might just be impressed.

Before he could think any further, the ball came flying from Ryan's fingertips on an inside course.

PAH

"Strike."

"Hehe, bet he couldn't even see that pitch." Ryan muttered to himself. Though no one could hear his words, his body language outed his arrogant attitude.

Instead of being shocked, Masayuki stood still for a few moments before a grin crept onto his face.

"Hahaha Ken's faster." He said aloud.

Of course no one in the vicinity could understand him, but Ryan could tell that it was nothing good. He narrowed his eyes, taking the gesture as a challenge.

'Let's see if you're still smiling in a few moments.'

Leo calmly assessed the situation as if he were a mere bystander. He crouched down once more and made the call, quickly getting into position.

The next ball came just as fast as the last one, this time outside and away.

WHOOOOSH

DING

Masayuki managed to get his bat to make contact with the ball, yet it screamed along the ground, straight over to the player on 1st base.

He still ran just in case the 1st baseman misfielded it.

However, this was the world stage. None of the players on the field were amateurs, especially on the US team who had such a large talent pool to choose from.

Davion easily scooped up the ball and placed his foot on the base, completing the second out for the United States.

The crowd cheered, sending their applause to the players on the field. With only 2 at bats they were already keeping the lethal Japanese team quiet.

While the ball may have gone straight to the fielder, Leo was slightly taken aback that Masayuki was able to hit the pitch. He believed the ball was sharp enough to evade the bat, yet he still hit it.

Ryan on the other hand gnashed his teeth.

He wanted to crush the Japanese players spirits with 3 consecutive strikeouts, gaining the mental advantage before they came up to bat.

Yet things didn't always go to plan. He quickly adjusted, rolling his shoulders a few times before taking his spot back on the mound.

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

Hiroki was next up to bat. He'd been given clear instructions how to proceed, yet it wasn't from the coach. He flashed a glance back to the dugout briefly, sending a nod to Daichi and Ken at the entrance.

They sent back a thumbs up, giving him the all clear.

He glanced at Leo, one of the only guys that he'd felt threatened by. Leo's symmetrical and toned muscles could be seen through his tight shirt, showing just how well built the man was.

Leo glanced at Hiroki for a brief moment, his gaze moving up and down over him. Yet in the next moment he let out a small scoff before ignoring him completely.

'Huh!?'

Hiroki was livid. He could tell that the guy had just dismissed him mentally, scoffing at this body that he'd worked so hard for.

Insulting his body was like insulting his soul, it was unforgivable.

Seemingly blowing hot air out of his nose, Hiroki stepped into the batters box, tapping the tip of his bat onto home plate and squaring his shoulders. A look of determination appeared on his face as he lifted his head and faced Ryan.

'I'll force you to acknowledge me.' He said inwardly, gripping his bat tightly.

His eyes were focused, as if he was waiting for something.

Ryan began his wind up, whipping his arm out and sending the ball slinging towards the plate. The ball was fast.

Hiroki's face lit up before he twisted his body. His muscles groaned, stretching tightly as they transferred the strength from his core to the swinging bat.

WHOOOOSH

DONG

Ryan's expression morphed into one of shock as he followed the balls trajectory.

It flew high through the air, into the outfield.

'Damn it!'

Hiroki cursed inwardly as he saw the ball heading towards the center outfield, the one place where he wasn't meant to hit the ball. He was already running towards first base, yet he could see the one that some referred to as the ball magnet.

A fast figure bounded through the field as he chased down the ball in the air.

In one amazing display of athleticism, he leapt into the air and plucked the ball in one fluid motion.

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

Chapter 418 - 418: Missed Chance (2)

Hiroki's eyes widened in shock. He slowed down his run and eventually stood in place, staring at the guy in the outfield.

"Tch. I missed a good opportunity." He muttered in annoyance before heading off the field.

"Out! 3 outs, changeover."

"Argh so close!"

The Japanese players called out, believing it was just unlucky. Yet Daichi and Ken sent him a frown, as if they were admonishing him for something.

Hiroki lowered his head, as if admitting his wrongdoing.

"S-Sorry." He said a little timidly.

Ken let out a sigh before patting him on the back, "Just be careful next time."

Daichi shook his head, but echoed Ken's sentiments.

Riku and Masayuki happened to catch the entire interaction, which left them feeling confused. They looked at each other, as if trying to understand what they just witnessed.

Yet neither knew anything.

However, now was not the time to expound on such a thing. They now had to try and defend against the US team who were known for their relentless batting prowess.

Daichi grabbed his gear and walked beside Satoshi on their way to their positions.

"Satoshi, we're gonna go hard from the beginning. Do you think you can keep up?" He asked, doing his best not to sound condescending.

Satoshi raised his eyebrow in question, turning his head to Daichi.

He was about to retort in annoyance, but he saw the determined expression on the guys face and thought otherwise. Instead, a grin crept onto his features.

'He's fired up...' He thought inwardly.

"Psh, who do you think I am?" Satoshi retorted, nudging Daichi with his fist.

Daichi paused, before he grinned in response. It wasn't often that Satoshi lost the serious expression on his face, yet it suited him.

"I'll take that as a yes then." Daichi responded, heading over to home plate.

He received no response.

"Looks like we might be a bit busy today boys~" Riku said as he limbered up his muscles.

"Don't say something so depressing." Masayuki replied, sending him an annoyed glance.

"I wouldn't be so sure about that."

Both Riku and Masayuki turned to Ken, their expressions showing confusion.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Better yet... What do you know and aren't telling us?" Masayuki added.

"Fufufu, just wait and see."

Ken was like one of those annoying characters in Anime who would act all mysterious. They thought they were being smart, yet everyone who watched just wanted to punch them in the face.

Masayuki's expression mirrored his annoyance, causing Ken to instinctively back away a few paces.

"Anyway, I'll chat to you guys soon." Ken said, taking the opportunity to get away from the other two.

Just as well that the game was about to restart, otherwise Masayuki might have tracked him down and forced the explanation out of his mouth.

Ken settled into position and began to stretch a bit. While he had warmed up before the game, it was good to keep the blood circulating throughout his body since there was a lot of stopping and starting in baseball.

He glanced at Hiroki who was on 1st base and shook his head slightly.

They had a good opportunity to take advantage of their game plan in the first inning. It was very possible that they could have gotten some runs on the board early and had the US team on the back foot from the beginning.

The strategy he'd come up with was far more likely to work well in the earlier innings. This was especially the case since he now knew his Grandfather was the opposing coach.

'It's fine... Even if we only get a couple of runs, Daichi should be able to hold them down.'

Such was the faith he had in both his brother, and the plan his new Academic trait had helped him conceive.

"Batting 1st, Center outfield, Santiago."

As the olive skin teen walked up to the batters box, Daichi could feel his intense gaze trained on him the entire time. However, there was no malice or ill will contained within the gaze.

Daichi turned his head only to see the guy smiling brightly.

He looked like a Golden Retriever who had just met another friend.

"Ko neechee wa." Santiago said, his pronunciation terrible.

At first Daichi thought the guy might be mocking him, yet the genuine smile and happy look on his face made him quickly dismiss this thought.

Daichi felt a little awkward, so he responded in English.

"H-Hello"

In the next moment, Santiago looked like he was about to jump from joy. If he had a tail, it would be definitely wagging at mach 3 speed.

"Santiago, take your position." The plate umpire said.

"Ah yes, sorry!" He replied, quickly stepping into the batters box.

He had been so caught up seeing Daichi that he almost lost his cool.

Daichi tried to shake the weird interaction out of his mind, quickly squatting into position and getting ready to make the sign to Satoshi.

Yet it was then that he suddenly felt an overwhelming aura explode from Santiago who was standing in front of him. The friendly Golden Retriever was replaced by the figure of a bloodthirsty Jaguar.

It was as if anything that came into his range would be attacked at lightning speed, with intent to kill.

Daichi gulped, trying to compose himself. He had faced batters like this before, but none close to this level.

It took him a few moments to get used to the feeling, but Daichi eventually calmed down completely. There were still more monsters in this US batting line up, so he couldn't afford to falter here.

Not if they wanted to hoist the World Cup above their head at the end of all this.

Daichi's expression turned serious as he sent the signal to Satoshi. He needed the guy to be on point from the very beginning, otherwise it would be all for naught.

Satoshi nodded, his serious face once again adorned on his features.

He lifted his leg and sent his arm past his head like a whip, sending the ball out like a venomous snake as it bared its fangs towards the batter.

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

Chapter 419 - 419: Too Fast (1)

The Jaguar lowered its stance, anticipating the ball's course and speed. Its dangerous eyes narrowed in on the target before it pounced into action.

Santiago's swing was stealthy, yet filled with power. It seemed to glide through the air at first before accelerating swiftly into the strike zone.

WHOOOSH

DONG

The ball was struck as it entered the danger zone, producing a crisp sound. The lack of vibration from the bat indicated that it was hit away from the center, yet the ball still flew into the outfield.

"Right!"

Ken was already bounding forwards as Masayuki called out his position. He had expected the ball to not make it past the infield, but he was surprised that it carried so far.

It was a testament to the power that Santiago had that he was able to hit it this far despite not making the best contact with the ball.

Ken's legs were pumping as he sprinted towards the ball. He could already see that Santiago was halfway to first base, which meant if he didn't catch it there was a good chance of the guy being safe.

The ball was hit flat and with pace, meaning there was very little room for error by the time Ken caught up.

Without over thinking it, Ken dived through the air, barely slowing down from his full sprint. He thrust his glove underneath where he believed the ball would land.

Tap~

His glove was a fraction off, causing the ball to bounce in the palm of his glove rather than the webbing. As he closed his hand to try to grasp the ball, it looked as if it was going to pop out and roll onto the ground.

Yet by some miracle, it stayed in place, almost as if there was a sticky substance on his glove.

Ken's eyes had watched the whole thing and let out a sigh of relief as he came to a stop on the ground. The impact of his body hitting the ground made him a little sore, but he quickly shook it off.

He stood up and showed the umpire closest to him the ball.

"Out!"

"Nice catch!"

Masayuki ran over a few moments later, patting Ken on the back. He understood that if Ken was even a second too late with his reaction speed, that ball would have been an easy base hit.

Ken flashed him a grin, "I never had a doubt."

Santiago saw the catch from Ken but instead of getting disappointed, his features flashed with joy.

"Wow! Good catch!" He said, sending Ken two thumbs-up.

With that, he returned back to the US dugout, leaving both Ken and Masayuki with confused expressions on their faces.

"That guy is rather friendly..." Ken remarked.

"Is he... okay?"

Daichi pumped his fist after they called the first out. From how far the ball had been hit, he instantly knew that he had underestimated Santiago.

He was in shock a little earlier, but thankfully Ken managed to track down the ball and secure their first out.

Daichi took in a deep breath through his nose and out his mouth, adjusting his mentality. None of the US players lacked talent. Even with his game plan from Ken, he needed to stay alert and be flexible.

'Let's keep this momentum going...' He said inwardly.

"Don't worry about it." Coach Williams said, patting Santiago on the back affectionately as he entered the dugout.

Yet Santiago didn't seem like someone who had just gotten out, if anything he looked rather happy. He gave the coach a thumbs up and returned to the bench without a word.

Ken's Grandfather narrowed his eyes and stared at Ken in the outfield, his expression turning impressed.

"Looks like you've adjusted well into the outfield... But that's not where you belong..."
He muttered.

"Batting 2nd, Short stop, Ayden Carney."

A teen with bright blond hair entered the batters box, his short physique seemed to pale in comparison to Santiago who came before him. Yet his eye's were narrow, giving the impression that he was sneaky.

Daichi crouched down and made the sign for a two-seam fastball towards the inside to which Satoshi nodded. He had learned to trust the freshman catcher throughout their World Cup run.

After his wind up, the ball came rocketing out at around 90mph. At first it looked like it was going right down the middle, yet just before it came in range, it broke inside.

WHOOOSH

DING

"Crap."

Aiden panicked for a moment before dropping his bat and hightailing it towards first base. The bat hadn't even landed on the ground before Satoshi swooped into action.

With one fluid movement, he picked the ball up with his right hand and sent an accurate throw into Hiroki's outstretched glove.

"Out."

Ayden stood no chance of making it to base safely, promptly being called out halfway to his destination.

Unlike Santiago, his expression was full of gloom. He knew as soon as he hit the ball that it was garbage.

"How did I fall for that?" He muttered in annoyance.

"It's okay Ayden, I'll avenge you."

The deep tone caused him to raise his head, only to see the large Sam in front of him.

"Y-Yeah, thanks Sammy."

"Batting 3rd, 3rd base, Sam"

The announcer cut the two's conversation short, prompting the teen to step into the batters box. His frame was large with wide shoulders and a full faced beard which could be seen sticking out from his helmet.

Daichi looked up at the large figure and couldn't help but feel a little intimidated by his size. Despite being only 6 foot tall, the guy was easily 110kg, his figure packed with dense muscles and a wide waist.

If he wasn't wearing a baseball uniform, Sam would look like one of those worker's you'd see on a farm or even out chopping trees with an Axe.

This guy was another one that posed a threat to their game plan.

Daichi squatted down and made a signal before placing his glove out, right above the strike zone.

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

Chapter 420 - 420: Too Fast (2)

The umpire's eyes widened a little in confusion, but he quickly dismissed his concerns. As long as they weren't purposefully aiming for the batter, he didn't care.

Satoshi however, felt really odd. It wasn't that he couldn't throw such a pitch, just that it seemed wasteful. However, he eventually nodded and got into position to throw.

He performed his wind up and threw exactly to where Daichi was asking. Yet what happened next caused him to almost yelp in shock.

WHOOOOOOSH

DING!

The big guy had swung for the hills, looking as if he wanted to chop a tree down with murderous intent. Just the sound of the bat swinging through the air was loud enough for him to hear it on the mound.

The ball was thrust high into the air above the umpires head. As a seasoned umpire, he quickly moved out of the way, making sure not to impede the catcher from having a chance at getting to the ball.

With practiced ease, Daichi flung off his catchers mask and tracked down the ball in the air. There was quite a lot of spin on the ball, yet it soon dropped safely into Daichi's glove.

"3 outs, changeover!"

The umpire was incredulous as he yelled out the call. This was the first time that he'd seen the US in the World Cup finish an inning after only facing 3 balls from a pitcher.

One might think it was the pitcher who was creating such opportunities, however he knew better. Daichi was the one making the calls from behind the plate, dictating the proceedings with an expert eye.

"Formidable..." He muttered.

Samuel was stunned, still standing in the batters box. He took a while to process what had happened, trying to understand where he went wrong.

He turned his gaze to Daichi who was already heading off to the dugout and narrowed his eyes.

'I need to be careful next time.' Sam said in his heart.

It wasn't just the US team that were shocked. Since most of the crowd were rooting for their home team, their faces were either confused or solemn.

Throughout the entire World Cup, that was their shortest inning by far, even when compared to the end of the batting lineup.

"Damn, nice work guys!" Aki was pumped as he called out to Satoshi and Daichi on his way back in.

"Yeah, that only lasted for a few minutes."

"How did you do it?" Kuro asked, his expression still gloomy in the midday sun.

"What are you guys talking about?" Daichi replied, in the midst of taking off his gear.

He had to be quick considering he'd be the first one up to bat.

Everyone turned to Satoshi a moment later, as if expecting him to fill them all in on what had happened.

Satoshi raised both his hands and stepped back.

"Don't ask me, I just followed his leads." He said, gesturing to Daichi.

Before they could follow up with him, Daichi stepped onto the field with his helmet and gloves on, promptly ignoring them.

"What is up with him?" Riku asked, his gaze moving to Ken.

"Come to think of it, both you and Daichi have been acting rather suspicious. What is it that you aren't telling us?"

Masayuki stepped forward and questioned Ken who was in the midst of getting ready for his own at-bat.

Ken grinned, respecting the intuition of his Captain. However, he kind of enjoyed being one of the few who knew the game plan.

While he could tell them that he'd come up with a strategy for every batter and even Ryan the pitcher, he decided not to. There was a limited window for the latter strategy to work, and it would only become shorter if the whole team used it.

Therefore he walked up to Masayuki and placed his hand on his shoulder.

"Don't worry Captain, we've got it under control."

With that, he walked past the rest of the team.

Instead of being assured, Masayuki was frustrated.

"Damn cocky freshman..." He muttered, loudly enough for those in the vicinity to hear.

Hiroki heard this and quickly slunk his way over to the bench, trying not to draw attention to himself.

With his burning curiosity, Masayuki approached Chris the assistant coach in hopes of answers. He figured that if anyone were to know the brother's tactics, their father would be a top contender.

"Coach, do you know what type of tactics Daichi is using to strike out these guys?" He was rather upfront, not wanting to beat around the bush.

"Hmm? Tactics?" Chris pondered, briefly looking over to Coach Takashi for confirmation.

"Didn't Ken ask for the hard drive with all the US games on it?" The Head Coach replied after a while.

"Ah! That's right. He asked me this morning for that, then he disappeared until it was time to leave."

"Huh?"

Masayuki seemed a little taken aback. He knew that Daichi liked to go through film and do research, but not Ken.

Even so, if he figured something out, wouldn't it have been beneficial to tell the team? Or at least tell the coach's in such a situation?

Masayuki pondered for a while, placing his hand on his chin in thought. That was when a distinct noise broke him out of his reverie.

DOOOOONG

He quickly swung his head around, only to see Daichi sprinting towards first base with his head down.

'Where's the ball?'

His eyes narrowed as he tried to find the ball, yet it proved difficult with all the jumping and shouting coming from the others in the dugout.

It was only when the right outfielder sent the ball back towards the infield that Masayuki was able to track down the ball. By then, Daichi had already slid onto 2nd base, safe and sound.

"Nice one Daichi!"

"So close to a Home run!"

Ken who was still on the side of the field, saw Ryan's expression and couldn't help but feel a mocking smile creep onto his face.

'He's probably too arrogant to notice.' Ken snickered inwardly.

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