

Major League System

Chapter 41 - 41: Unexpected Event (1)

Ken overran the base for a few meters while he tried to slow down his speed.

"Safe!"

He turned around and heard the umpire's decision, filling him with unadulterated joy.

"Yes!" Ken pumped his fist in triumph, making his way back to the first base. This feeling was something that he had long forgotten, the sense of achievement that could only come from succeeding when you tried your hardest.

As his body was filled with adrenaline and euphoria, he glanced over at Keisuke who was now situated on 2nd base. Keisuke was looking at him as if he had just seen a ghost.

He sent a smile back, but also made some signs indicating that he wanted to steal a base. Once again Keisuke gave him a weird look before briefly turning his attention to the coach. Seeing as there was no orders, he turned back and sent a thumbs up to Ken.

Kenta, the captain of Seiko team was up next to bat. He made his way to the batters box with an intimidating expression on his face. After positioning himself, he raised his bat and turned his attention to the pitcher.

Yoshinao seemed to be pissed off, outwardly showing his emotions. He had already put two runners on the base with only two pitches. This was not how he had wanted to start the game.

He received the ball from the catcher and tightened his grip on the ball.

'I won't let you hit the first pitch this time...!' Yoshinao said inwardly as he began to pitch the ball.

The moment he began his throwing action, he heard the sound of rushing feet behind him, throwing him off a little. The ball that was meant to be a slider to the outside, was suddenly pitched too far inwards.

Kenta held his breath as he took a big swing at the ball sliding towards him.

DONG

The ball was hit cleanly and sent into the space between 2nd and 3rd baseman at breakneck speed. Due to getting a running start, Keisuke was almost hit by the ball as he ran past, just narrowly missing his left shoulder.

The third base coach was waving Keisuke along, giving him the green light to head towards home plate. He deftly stepped on the bag and continued his sprint, easily touching home plate and pumping his fist.

Ken too continued his run, making his way to third base. It felt really weird as the moment he stepped on 2nd base, his speed dropped a little. However, he didn't have time to think about it, running with all his might towards third.

The third base coach suddenly looked panicked and made the motion to slide, giving Ken a sense of anxiety. He was only a few yards away from the plate and he decided to not hold back, diving to the ground and reaching his long arms out to touch the base.

In a fraction of a moment later, the opponents glove tapped his forearm.

"Safe!" The umpire motioned with his arms.

Ken let out a sigh of relief, getting back to his feet while still touching the base. He turned around and saw Kenta was standing on second base, his once intimidating expression now plastered with a dumb smile.

He shook his head yet let out a chuckle. His captain was always like that, scary and intimidating when it came time to bat, yet seemed harmless after he got on base.

His attention turned to Daichi who had just stepped up to the batters box, his wide shoulders taking up far too much space.

All sense of nervousness left Daichi's body as he stepped up to the plate. Seeing Ken get his chance and perform so well had motivated him intensely. There was no way he would let the team's hard work end right now.

He stared down at Yoshinao who was beginning to despair. Having given up a run in the very first innings in only 3 pitches, his confidence was at an all time low.

The catcher quickly called a time out and walked over to the mound to give him a talking to. Ken nodded, however a grin formed on his face. 'It's no use. No matter what you say to him, Daichi is gonna smack this out of the park.'

After a few moments, the catcher returned to his place, leaving Yoshinao on the mound. Judging by his expression, it seemed that the quick timeout had its benefits. He was no longer looking lost, nor in despair.

The first ball pitched low and outside which Daichi correctly ignored.

"Ball"

The next pitch was a slider, scraping the bottom of the strike zone.

"Strike."

Daichi didn't seem nervous. He had judged that even if he hit the ball, it would likely be a grounder back towards the pitcher which could result in a double play.

He waited patiently as the next two pitches were balls on the outside.

The next pitch came roaring towards him on an inside course, causing his eyes to light up. Daichi gripped his bat and swung hard, causing the sound of rushing wind to fill his ears.

DONG!

The ball was sent rocketing into the air, causing all those in attendance to watch with interest. A smile bloomed on Ken's face as the ball seemed to grow wings and fly towards the outfield and over the fence.

He jogged towards home plate and let out a chuckle, at least until he saw Daichi running with his bat still clutched in his hands. Ken resisted the urge to facepalm as the teenager jogged around the bases, holding his bat like a trophy.

Yet there was nothing he could do but hope the opposing team wouldn't be too upset. He stepped onto home base and turned around, giving Kenta a high-five once he stepped onto the plate.

Daichi finally dropped the bat at third base after the third base coach took it from him. A smile shined brilliantly on his face as he finally made it towards home plate, receiving high-fives and congratulations from Ken and Kenta.

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

Chapter 42 - 42: Unexpected Event (2)

Daichi finally dropped the bat at third base after the third base coach took it from him. A smile shined brilliantly on his face as he finally made it towards home plate, receiving high-fives and congratulations from Ken and Kenta.

However, in the next moment, the tall pitcher Yoshinao came barreling towards Daichi and pushed him back. Due to his size, Daichi was only forced back a few steps, yet he was startled.

"What the hell is wrong with you man!? Hitting a home run wasn't enough for you?"

Ken felt his blood boil as his best friend began to get abused by the opposition. He stepped in between them, his tall frame able to see eye to eye with the opposing pitcher.

"Back off man. This is his first game, he doesn't know—"

THWACK

Ken suddenly recoiled, falling to the ground as he felt a pain in the side of his head. His vision was blurry as he tried to get back to his feet, unsure of what had happened.

Bodies began to bump into him, almost forcing him back onto the ground. However, someone finally grabbed him and lifted his frame, moving him to safety.

By the time his bleary eyes recovered, he could see Daichi's worried face, looking at him with care.

"Are you okay Ken?" He asked, taking a look at the side of his face.

"Y-Yeah I'm okay." Ken responded. His attention was drawn to a lot of pushing and shoving not far away, likely the aftermath of what had just happened.

He already guessed that he'd been king hit by someone, though he didn't know who. Either way, it really sucked. As he watched the scramble, Ken already had a feeling that the punishment for this situation would not be light.

At worst they could be disqualified from participating in tournaments this year.

Finally after a few minutes, the umpires were able to break up the scrap, sending the players to their respective dugouts. He then called the two coaches over and sternly said something before leaving.

"Is the game over?" Daichi asked, taking a seat next to Ken.

"Yeah... I think so."

"Is it my fault?"

"Were you the one who threw the punch?" Ken asked with a wry smile. He had a bit of a headache from the blow, but probably not enough to be a concussion.

"No... But if I hadn't have carried the bat..." Daichi seemed to be genuinely upset that things had devolved into such a state.

"You didn't know better. It was mine and the Coaches fault for not informing you beforehand." Ken said after a while, placing his hand on Daichi's back to comfort him.

Soon enough, the Coach came over and checked on the two, his face seemed frustrated.

"Ken. Are you okay?"

"All good Coach. What's happening now?" He responded.

"The game is canceled and we will likely be in for some disciplinary actions. If I had to guess, it's likely that we'll be disqualified from the spring tournament." He said with a hint of remorse.

"But Coach, we didn't initiate the fight!" Daichi stood up, pleading his case.

"It doesn't matter who started the fight, all that matters is that it happened." Coach Yoshida replied, letting out a sigh and placing his hand on Daichi's shoulder.

"I'm sorry Daichi. This isn't your fault, it was negligence on my part not stating some of the unwritten rules in baseball. Due to your overwhelming talent, I had forgotten that you had never played in a game before."

Before Daichi could respond, the Coach stated that he would see them at practice Monday after school and headed back to the dugout.

"Kenny! Oh my goodness, are you okay?" Ken's mother ran over and began to fawn over him. She inspected the shiny bruise and lump which had begun to appear on the side of his head.

Ken's rolled his eyes but there was a small grin on his face which didn't go unnoticed by his father. Chris held back a chuckle, but he still seemed stern.

He placed his arm around Daichi and pulled him closer.

"You did well prioritizing Ken's safety and not joining the fight kid." Chris ruffled his hair, feeling a sense of pride at the teenagers actions.

Daichi who was at a loss suddenly felt a warm and fuzzy feeling in his chest. He had acted out of instinct, which just showed how much of a kind heart he really had. Being complimented for such a thing filled him with happiness.

"Let's go home and I'll get you some ice." Yuki finally said after ensuring her son was okay.

Just as Ken got to his feet, a tall man with a large belly suddenly came up to him, his face obviously filled with anger. Before Ken could react, a tall youth came out from behind him, staring at the ground and looking as if he was in trouble.

"Go on. Apologize for your shameful actions." He said in a gruff tone.

The tall pitcher Yoshinao Oyama flinched before finally saying in a remorseful tone, "I'm sorry for hitting you. I don't know what came over me, I hope you can accept my apology!"

After saying so, he bowed deeply, waiting for Ken's response.

Ken breathed a sigh of relief. He was worried that the big guy wanted to pick a fight with him and his father for what had happened on the field. Thankfully the father was just chaperoning his son to make an apology.

"It's fine, we're all young it happens to the best of us." Ken shrugged, not wanting to make a big deal out of it.

Chris smiled, happy with how his son had handled the situation.

The large man looked towards Chris and apologized himself, bowing his head. "I'm sorry for my sons actions today. You can be sure that he will be punished properly."

"My son has already forgiven him, if I were to hold a grudge I would be doing him a disservice. I hope they can compete fairly the next time they meet." Chris replied, ruffling his sons hair.

With that, the two turned around and left, but not after bowing a few more times.

"Let's head home. I'm going to make us some home made burgers for lunch." Chris said, rounding up his family.

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

Chapter 43 - 43: Announcement (1)

The smell of sizzling beef filled the air as Chris flipped the patties atop his weber barbecue in the backyard. Although he loved to cook, with his busy work schedule he didn't get to do so often.

Ken sniffed the air and lent back into his chair with a satisfied look on his face. He was currently deeply engrossed in the nostalgia this scent brought to his mind.

Even though he was currently in his middle school body, including his past life, it had been almost 8 years since he had been able to smell his fathers cooking.

Daichi who was a sheltered Japanese child had to be educated about the barbecue, or what Americans refer to as grilling.

"You'll need to know these things for when you join the Majors." Ken said, matter-of-factly.

"Ahhh, I see. Does everyone do this in America?" Daichi asked with a curious expression.

"Yes. This is a common method of cooking in the USA, there's no way you'll fit in if you don't get accustomed to such things. I hear they even grill for every meal." Ken schooled Daichi as if he was the big brother, despite never being to the states himself.

Chris who was in the middle of flipping a patty almost dropped it after hearing the boys conversation, his face turning red from trying to hold in laughter. He didn't have the heart to correct his son, especially since he didn't want to embarrass him.

Yuki smiled and nodded, as if to agree with what Ken was saying. Chris once again stifled a laugh, now understanding where Ken had probably gotten the misconception from. He was the only one who had been to the states, yet apparently he wasn't the leading authority on this topic.

"Okay okay, lunch is ready." Chris announced, bringing the tray of delicious smelling patties onto the outside table. The cheese was melted perfectly on the juicy hamburger patties, making everyones mouth water.

As the head of the family, Chris began to assemble the burgers with mayonnaise, lettuce, onion, tomato, sliced pickles and ketchup. With an expert touch, he placed the top on the hamburger and placed one in front of each of them.

Daichi stared at the meal with wonder, not sure how he was going to take a bite out of the huge burger without making a mess. Yet as his attention turned to Ken, he could see that it was unavoidable.

It looked as if Ken unhinged his entire jaw like a snake, placing his mouth over a corner of the burger and taking a large bite. Instantly, sauce and juices began running down his chin, making their way onto his shirt.

He then turned to Chris, who like Ken had also taken an unnaturally mammoth bite. Not only did the juices run down his chin, they also made their way onto his hands and ran down to his elbows.

Daichi gulped and was about to take the plunge into his burger, however he moved his gaze over to the sweet and refined Yuki. His eyes almost popped out of his sockets as he saw that the burger had already been half-eaten in the time it took everyone to take 1 bite.

To add to his shock, there was not a single bit of mess on her face, nor her hands.

"You better eat up dear, it tastes a lot better while it's still warm." She said, smiling sweetly at him.

"A-Ah yes ma'am." He replied, still feeling a sense of shock and awe at her capabilities.

He gripped the burger with both hands, his face seeming as if he was about to step in to battle.

Crunch

'YUM!'

Daichi's face lit up, his smile blossoming like a flower in the spring. It was so delicious that he did not even care that he was currently covered in all of the juices. Every bite was packed with a foreign flavor, blending together to create a party in his mouth.

Before he knew it, he had already devoured half the burger, reveling in the new taste that had taken a hold of his life in this moment.

There was only the sound of chewing for the next few minutes as the whole family was embroiled in their meals. Only Yuki who had already finished her burger began cleaning the barbecue.

It wasn't until everyone had finished eating and cleaned up with a napkin that the silence was broken.

Ken sat back in his chair, nursing his stomach which now contained the tasty lunch.

"Ahhh, Dad's hamburgers are the best." He said contentedly, turning his gaze to Daichi who also seemed to be in a great mood.

Chris laughed out loud, accepting the praise wholeheartedly.

"But Dad. I seem to remember you only cooking hamburgers for special occasions, was this because of our first game?" Ken asked in a curious tone.

"Well yes and no." Chris replied, a small smile forming on his face.

"Honey, would you mind grabbing that thing for me?" He asked his wife who had just returned from the kitchen.

A look of excitement flashed on her face as she nodded, heading up the stairs with haste that would put a galloping horse to shame. Yuki returned around a minute later with a laminated sheet of paper, resulting in a few questioning looks.

"What's that?" Ken asked brazenly.

"Now now, have some patience Kenny." Yuki reprimanded before taking her seat next to his father and hugging his arm sweetly, her face the picture of happiness.

"Ken, Daichi. We have something that we have been keeping from you for the past few days. We were hoping to announce this after you won your first game, but we didn't expect things to end as they did." Chris said, his face unreadable.

Ken's mind quickly went into overdrive, speculating what this news could be. He saw the way his mother was holding onto his father arm, yet in the next moment her left hand moved to her belly, resting gently upon it.

'WHAT!?! Is mom pregnant?' His eyes went wide in shock and fright as this thought came across his mind. They had never had another child in his previous life, so what had changed now?

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

Chapter 44 - 44: Announcement (2)

Had his actions changed everything so drastically that his parents had decided to have another baby? Was this the butterfly effect?

'Wait, isn't mom in her late 30's? Isn't that too old to have a baby?'

As Ken was having a mental crisis, pouring over all the possible implications that such a result could bring, Daichi listened patiently, waiting for the next words.

Chris grabbed the laminated piece of paper and handed it over the table to Daichi, his face finally breaking into a smile.

"This is your certificate of adoption. Welcome to the family Daichi."

Daichi felt his world pause. All the sounds in the surroundings vanished as he grasped the laminated paper in his hands which then began to shake slightly. He gazed at his two guardian angels smiling back at him.

He looked down at the paper that was shaking, reading the title.

'Certificate of Adoption. Daichi Suzuki.' He tried to read further but for some reason the text began to blur, making it extremely difficult to continue.

Ken's ridiculous notions came to a sudden stop as he heard those words, only to be replaced with pure joy and happiness. He now had a younger brother, just not in the traditional sense.

"YES! Welcome to the family Daichi!" Ken shouted with joy, jumping off his chair and embracing his new brother in a bear hug.

It was only once he felt the firm embrace of his best friend that Daichi could finally react to what was happening. He broke out into joyful tears as he hugged back, feeling the intense emotions wash over him.

Yuki couldn't help but join in on the waterworks before coming over and giving him a warm hug also. The two cried happy tears together as they embraced the moment.

Chris couldn't help but wipe a tear from the corner of his eye also, seeing his new addition to the family be welcomed so emotionally.

Ken turned his gaze to his dad and waved him over. It wouldn't be a family hug unless the head of the household joined in.

Soon enough, the four were huddled together, supporting each other emotionally and physically, painting a harmonious picture.

"Thank you... Dad, Mom, Big Bro..." Daichi managed to say between his sobs. These words only served to fan the flames of his mother and father's emotions, causing another wave of cries and hugs to erupt.

Ken smiled wildly. He had never been called big brother before, but he was starting to like the sound of it.

Daichi felt as if he was in a dream throughout the rest of the day. Overnight he had suddenly gained a new family, something that he had wished for countless times in his life. A family that loved and cared for him, not one who abused and took him for granted.

The realization that his life had changed forever didn't feel real. He was even worried that if he went to sleep that he would suddenly wake up in that lonely and abusive house once again.

So much so that he had asked Ken if he could sleep in his room tonight. Ken of course had agreed, he could already tell that Daichi's emotions were a wreck, so he was prepared to chat to his new brother all night.

However, as soon as Daichi's head hit the pillow, soft snores started to sound in the room, putting a smile on Ken's face. He must have been exhausted from everything that had happened today.

Not only did he have his first baseball game, he was also involved in a fight. Add the life altering event of being adopted into their family and it was a recipe for being emotionally and physically drained.

Ken couldn't help but shake his head and let out a small chuckle.

Now that things had come to a close for the day, Ken decided to pull up the system. He had been given a quest for the friendly game, but it had been canceled due to the fight.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 1 (90/100 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 15

TALENT ASSESSMENT: C+

POTENTIAL: D (S)

MAJOR POINTS: 90

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS (1 unread)

-SYSTEM SHOP (Locked)

-LOTTERY (Locked)

Ken opened up the missions tab, fighting back the nervousness. Due to the game not finishing, he guessed that the mission would likely be failed.

CONGRATULATIONS

You have completed mission "Get into Starting Lineup."

MISSIONS:

#NEW MISSION: Get into Starting Lineup

*Task 1: Drop no catches throughout the game (0/0 completed; Rating D)

*Task 2: Get on base or advance the runner 3 times ((1/3) completed; Rating D)

*Task 3: Impress Coach Yoshida (Rating S+)

*Task 4: Win the game (Rating B)

Overall mission rating: C+

USER HAS NOT COMPLETED ALL TASKS. HOWEVER THE SYSTEM HAS RECOGNIZED THAT THIS WAS AS A RESULT OF ACTIONS OUTSIDE OF THE USERS CONTROL. GIVEN THAT A PASSING GRADE WAS ACHIEVED, USER WILL RECEIVE DIFFERENT REWARDS.

REWARDS:

>B-grade Mental Conditioning Elixir

>10 Major points

Ken's eyes lit up yet at the same time he was filled with relief. It looked like he had been given a hand by the system in this scenario. He more than expected that the mission would have been deemed a failure considering what had happened.

Although the loss of the silver lottery ticket was not ideal, the B-grade Elixir and the 10 Major points were a lot better than nothing.

Something even more surprising was the S+ grading for impressing Coach Yoshida. It seemed that the system had a way to know the inner thoughts of the Coach who was known to be an emotional enigma.

Yet now that he thought about it, the system was an enigma in its own right. Just what kind of thing was it and how could it possibly effect and alter him and the world around him.

However, the main point was that everything it had done so far was beneficial to him, therefore he decided to throw these questions to the back of his mind. Now that he had received the rewards, he had enough Major points to upgrade the system.

'I wonder what upgrading the system to the next level will do?' He thought, hovering his finger over the button.

#SYSTEM ALERT

>The user has chosen to upgrade the system.

>100 Major points will be deducted to upgrade the system.

>System will shut down for 8 hours in which all functions will be unavailable until the upgrade has been completed.

[Would you like to commence the upgrade now?]

[YES/NO]

Ken was startled for a moment, yet he did not deliberate long. Considering it was only 9pm right now, the upgrade should be complete when he woke up for his morning run.

He selected the Yes option without hesitation.

#SYSTEM ALERT

>The user has confirmed an immediate upgrade of the system.

>100 Major points have been deducted.

SYSTEM UPGRADE INITIALIZING

SHUTTING DOWN TO INSTALL UPGRADE...

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

Chapter 45 - 45: Upgrade and Consequences (1)

Ken woke up to the sound of his door closing in the morning. He groggily took a peak onto the floor where Daichi had been sleeping on a futon last night. Seeing that he was not there, Ken looked at his alarm clock which was reading 5am.

His sleepiness quickly disappeared as he remembered that the system had been upgraded the night before and should now be available to use again.

With a hint of excitement he opened it up.

#SYSTEM ALERT

SYSTEM HAS SUCCESSFULLY UPGRADED TO LEVEL 2.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 2 (0/1000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 15

TALENT ASSESSMENT: C+

POTENTIAL: D (S)

MAJOR POINTS: 0

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS (1 unread)

-SYSTEM SHOP (Locked)

-LOTTERY (Locked)

-IMAGE TRAINING (new)

Ken was a little bit underwhelmed after seeing that his System shop and Lottery pages were still locked, yet he instantly recovered after seeing the brand new option that had been added to his menu.

"Image training..." He mumbled, opening it up curiously.

IMAGE TRAINING:

#NOTICE: USER'S CONSCIOUSNESS WILL BE TRANSPORTED INTO A SPACE CREATED BY THE SYSTEM WHERE HE CAN PRACTICE REAL GAME SCENARIOS. USER WILL BE ABLE TO TEST AND HONE SKILLS WHICH WILL TRANSLATE INTO THE OUTSIDE WORLD. ADDITIONALLY, MAJOR POINTS ARE AWARDED FOR COMPLETING ACHIEVEMENTS WITHIN THE IMAGE TRAINING.

#NOTICE: IT IS ADVISED THAT USER ENTERS THE IMAGE TRAINING WHEN HE WILL NOT BE DISTURBED.

DOES THE USER WISH TO ENTER IMAGE TRAINING?

[YES/NO]

'Holy crap!' Ken exclaimed inwardly after reading the description.

He had heard the phrase image training before, it was something that a lot of professional athletes were proprietors for. However, he was 100% sure it was not this exaggerated.

With this in his arsenal, he could experience real game scenarios in his mind all while gaining Major points. This would certainly come in handy when there were times he couldn't play baseball.

"Ugh." Ken groaned after his last point, remembering that his team would likely face some punishment in the form of disqualification. If Coach Yoshida was correct, then they would be lucky to just miss out on the spring tournament.

"As long as I can still compete in the Summer tournament..." Ken said, trying to manifest positive energy. Now that he had gotten Daichi into baseball a lot earlier, it would really hamper his development if he missed out on a whole year of competition.

Of course they could still practice together, yet it would not yield the same results.

Ken contemplated entering the Image training to check it out, but he had to get up and go for a run. He inwardly set a reminder to check it out before sleeping tonight.

Just as he was about to haul himself out of bed to begin his morning routine, the door opened. Daichi stuck his head in, checking up on him.

"Whoa, Ken are you okay?" He asked, a hint of shock in his voice.

"Yeah why?" Ken was perplexed, what kind of question was that.

"Dude, go check the mirror. You look like a panda."

"Panda?"

He quickly raced to the bathroom and stepped in front of the mirror. It seemed that the punch thrown by Yoshinao had given him a black eye, hence the panda comment.

Ken washed his face, feeling a little tenderness around his cheekbone, yet it was nothing he couldn't handle. Having lived with a debilitating shoulder injury for 8 or so years had really changed his perspective and pain tolerance.

After having a bit of a laugh with Daichi, Ken quickly got dressed and they headed downstairs. He was met with the soft sobs of his mother, who quickly wiped her face as she heard them approaching.

"Mom? What's wrong? Why are you crying so early in the morning?" Ken once again was perplexed.

"N-Nothing. Go and have your morning run." She responded, shooing him away.

"Huh?"

"Come on let's go." Daichi urged, dragging Ken to the front door.

He reluctantly went along, putting his runners on and heading out onto the street. The two began to jog, yet Ken felt as if Daichi knew something that he didn't.

"Man, what's wrong with mom this morning? Usually she's chipper after her morning coffee."

"Ah. That might be because of me." Daichi said, feeling a little guilty.

"Huh??? Didn't we just have a happy occasion yesterday? How have you made her cry already?" Ken was flabbergasted. Even when he was a turd in his previous life, he had rarely made his mother cry, yet Daichi had succeeded in a single day.

"I asked permission to change my last name..." Daichi said quietly, feeling a little embarrassed.

"Oh."

"..."

"Yeah, that checks out." Ken said simply. In truth he was a bit shocked by the revelation, yet he didn't want to make it awkward for his new little brother.

"I guess it's the next step in your evolution. Maybe when you start your old family you can change your name to Oki..."

(This is a pun in Japanese. Daichi's last name of Suzuki = Bud Tree - Takagi = Tall Tree - Oki = Big Tree)

"..."

The two jogged in silence for a moment before breaking out uproarious laughter, startling a stray cat which quickly ran off into an alley.

An hour or so later, the two arrived back at home and showered before getting dressed for school.

"Ah man, I'm so hungry." Ken complained, making his way down the stairs.

He saw his father sitting down at the dining table reading the newspaper as he usually did in the mornings that he was home. Chris turned his head, his facial expression flickering for a moment before returning to normal.

"Ken, I'm terribly sorry. We are all out of bamboo for breakfast this morning so you'll have to settle for bacon and eggs." He said with a straight face before returning to his paper.

Muffled giggles suddenly sounded from the kitchen and Daichi beside him.

Ken stood still in puzzlement for a moment, before remembering the black eye he was now sporting thanks the punch he had received yesterday, making him look like a panda.

"Ha ha." Ken let out a sarcastic laugh before heading over to the table and helping himself to some breakfast. If he was being perfectly honest, he too enjoyed the joke, yet his father didn't need anymore encouragement.

The four ate their breakfast before Ken and Daichi made their way to school.

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

Chapter 46 - 46: Upgrade and Consequences (2)

Ken noticed that he was receiving a lot of looks thanks to his newly acquired fashion accessory, yet he didn't care all that much. In essence, he was a 26 year old man, therefore he cared little about what others thought.

The classes were as mind-numbing as usual, but thankfully he had Daichi sitting next to him to ease his boredom. After what seemed to be a lifetime, the bell for class to end sounded, eliciting a big stretch from Ken in response.

If it wasn't for the fact that he knew what being a lifeless office worker was, he probably would have whined and complained about school like he had in his previous life.

The two headed off to the baseball grounds, yet there was no excitement in the air like their usually would be at this time of the year. Ken had already seen Coach Yoshida earlier that day and noted how he looked grumpier than usual.

Not long later, everyone gathered on the field in front of the Coach. His usual stern atmosphere was a little off, breathing nerves and unease into the teenagers who waited for his words.

"Well... There's no use keeping this information hidden any longer. I notified the school board about what had happened and they have decided to disqualify us from the spring tournament." The Coach said simply, keeping his face expressionless.

"What!?"

"But we didn't even start the fight!"

"This is stupid. What punishment did those Kanagawa bastards get?"

Immediately, the players erupted with anger and began to shout out in disagreement. Ken seemed a little bummed, however he had been expecting something like this. There was no way that the school would allow their representative team to be involved in fighting, even if it was a friendly match.

They would rather cut the funding of the program than lose their prestige within the prefecture. An event like this could be held over the school's head for much longer than they would be here for, it may even carry over for years to come.

"Now now. No amount of whining or bickering will change this fact, I was merely informing you of the school's decision. If it makes it easier to swallow, Kanagawa Senior team has been disqualified from both the spring and summer tournaments this year." The Coach continued.

This information seemed to quell much of the backlash, however there were still a few boys who were upset with the decision.

Ken's eyes lit up, "Coach, are you saying that we'll still be able to compete in the summer tournament?"

The Coach nodded. "Since we did not initiate the fight and no one here threw any punches, the school decided that losing the spring tournament would be punishment enough. Consider yourselves lucky."

Hearing that they would still get to play baseball this year, the team rejoiced.

"However, to help you all understand the consequences of fighting, I volunteered for us to do community service for the next 6 weeks." Coach Yoshida said matter-of-factly.

"Community service?"

"Every Saturday, we'll be helping out the community. Trash collecting, cooking meals for the homeless, anything and everything."

A collective groan rang out between the players, however it quickly died down when they saw their coach's expression.

"I trust no one has any objections?" His face seemed apathetic, however there was a danger within his eyes that was almost daring someone to speak out of line.

"No Coach!" Everyone replied, no matter how they felt on the inside.

"Good. Now everyone go and do 15 laps around the field." Coach Yoshida made a shooing motion and retrieved his clipboard once more.

This time, no one uttered a word, quickly getting into formation and beginning their laps.

While he may seem harsh on the outside, Coach Yoshida really cared about his team. Originally, the school board had decided to disqualify them from both tournaments, seemingly already spending the years funding on other clubs in their heads.

It was only thanks to the Coach's pleading and suggestion of the community service that he was able to salvage the Summer tournament for his team. Of course he would never say this aloud as it risked undoing his strict coach facade that he had worked so hard to put into place.

He watched on as the youths ran the full 6km distance, taking note of the usual 3 who did not seem out of breath by the end.

"Okay, pitchers and catchers please go warm up in the bullpen. The rest of you start playing catch." The Coach barked out his orders, waiting for some of the team to get off the floor and head to their designated areas.

"Daichi, come here for a moment."

Ken raised his eyebrow in question, yet he still urged Daichi to go by himself.

Daichi seemed a little confused but agreed, heading towards the coach. Ken was too far away to listen to what was being said, but he saw the shocked and confused expression on his face and felt his curiosity thicken.

"Ken! Come here too." The Coach waved him over after a minute or so.

"What's up Coach?"

The Coach had a bit of a frown on his face, as if he wasn't sure why he needed to involve Ken in the discussion.

"I've suggested that Daichi try and learn the catcher position, based on his amazing reflexes and powerful arm. However, he said that he won't make the decision without your input for some reason."

"I'm not sure why, but as a former Ace pitcher, you should understand that Daichi has the talents to move into such a position." The Coach finished, looking almost pleadingly at Ken.

Ken's eyes lit up. He had been wondering how he would get Daichi into his best position before high school, but it seemed as if Coach Yoshida was already way ahead of him.

"Daichi! You should do it for sure!" Ken all but jumped and down in his excitement, startling Daichi.

"Remember, dad also contemplated training you in the catcher position but told us to hold off. Now that we have all this time before the summer tournament, it's the perfect opportunity to learn." He continued, grabbing Daichi by the shoulders.

"A-Ah, I almost forgot that's what dad said. Well, if Ken says so then I'll do as you say Coach." He responded after a moment.

"Great! Let's head over to where the pitchers are warming up." The Coach said with a beaming smile.

'Wait... Did Daichi just call Ken's father dad also?' He thought while walking away.

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

Chapter 47 - 47: Image Training (1)

Ken laid in bed after the days proceedings, yet instead of being tired he was itching to try out the new Image training option within the system. He had waited patiently throughout the day for this very moment.

#NOTICE: IT IS ADVISED THAT USER ENTERS THE IMAGE TRAINING WHEN HE WILL NOT BE DISTURBED.

DOES THE USER WISH TO ENTER IMAGE TRAINING?

[YES/NO]

Ken clicked yes without hesitation, yet he was met with another notice.

USERS MENTAL CAPABILITIES HAVE NOT MET THE CRITERIA.

REQUIRED MENTAL GRADE: C+

PLEASE COME BACK ONCE YOU HAVE MET THE MINIMUM GRADE...

Ken's mouth gaped open and he was instantly dissatisfied.

'What the hell? Why didn't you say so in the first place!' he screamed internally.

Yet before he could wallow in despair, he suddenly remembered that he had received a B-grade Mental Conditioning Elixir as a reward from an earlier mission.

"Hehehe. If it's B-grade it should be enough to bump me up 3 grades right?" He rubbed his hands together and moved through the menu and into the inventory section of the system.

[Are you sure you wish to consume: B-grade Mental Conditioning Elixir?]

[Yes/No]

Ken quickly said a prayer, hoping with all his heart that it would increase by at least 3 grades. He wasn't sure how to increase his mental grade otherwise, so this was his only shot at unlocking the new Image training feature of the system.

He clicked the Yes button and waited patiently.

DUE TO USERS INEPT MENTAL GRADE, THERE MAY BE SOME ADDITIONAL UNEXPECTED PAIN WHILE THE SYSTEM ADMINISTERS THE ELIXIR.

Seeing the bold writing flash in front of him, Ken blinked a few times, yet he steeled his heart in the next moment. He had lived a life of pain with his shoulder, so he was confident that he would be able to deal with some momentary pain.

Yet in the next moment, he felt his head throb before a splitting and agonizing headache shocked his brain. It was like someone had set off explosives in his mind, threatening to blow it to pieces.

Ken did not see, but another notification appeared on the system while he was writhing in pain on the bed.

SYSTEM HAS DETECTED ABNORMAL LEVELS OF PAIN IN THE USER.
COMMENCING MUTE FUNCTION.

Ken howled out in pain, unable to keep his mouth shut from the pure agony he was experiencing. However, it sounded like a whisper, blending in with the soothing sound of his ceiling fan.

The screams did little to help alleviate the pain that was wreaking havoc on his mind, yet he found some solace in burying his head in the pillow, albeit a small amount.

After what seemed like an eternity, Ken felt the torture receding slowly until it was gone altogether. His body was now soaked in cold sweat as he stared at the ceiling after the intense battle.

Despite it being dark, he felt as if he could see things much clearer, even picking up on the small details he would have either missed or ignored previously. The small nicks in the paint on the walls, or dust particles floating around freely.

[You have consumed: B-grade Mental Conditioning Elixir.]

[Mental grade has been increased by 6!]

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: C+

>Pitching: F (B)

>Fielding: C

>Game Intelligence: C+

>Mental: B+

>Skills: 4

"6!?" Ken shot up in fright. He had jumped 6 grades from D+ all the way to B+ and all it took was what seemed like an eternity of torture...

Although he was happy, he now grew a little warier towards the systems Elixirs. Ken could already feel that his mind was many times clearer, which included his vision and thinking capabilities.

He even had a feeling that he would be able to achieve twice the results while completing his studies. Not only this, he felt that his memories were easier to access, especially those from his past life.

"Now that that's done... It's time for Image training."

#NOTICE: IT IS ADVISED THAT USER ENTERS THE IMAGE TRAINING WHEN HE WILL NOT BE DISTURBED.

DOES THE USER WISH TO ENTER IMAGE TRAINING?

[YES/NO]

"Yes."

Ken suddenly felt his consciousness waver as he fell back onto his pillow. His surroundings were dark for a moment before light particles started to appear all around him.

In the next moment, the light particles assembled themselves into a baseball field. But this was no ordinary field, he recognized this field as the one where he had played at nationals in High School.

"Koshien..."

It was surreal to see the stage that he had yearned to return to currently empty.

PLEASE CHOOSE A SKILL TO PRACTICE.

#IMAGE TRAINING MENU:

>PITCHING (Locked)

>BATTING

>FIELDING

Ken was a little disheartened upon seeing that the pitching section was locked, however he had been expecting it. It would have been nice to at least gotten a few pitches in, even if it was just inside his mind.

However, what he needed now was skills that would allow him to become a better player and make it into the starting lineup. Now that they had almost 3 months of no baseball, Jin would likely recover from his injury and could retake the 1st base position from him.

He debated for a little while before choosing to do some batting. The biggest difference between him and Jin was there batting capabilities. While he could only bunt and effectively run between the bases, Jin was capable of hitting the ball more often than not.

#BATTING MISSIONS:

- > Hit 500 bunts successfully - 100 Major points + Bronze Lottery ticket
- > Hit 500 balls into outfield - 100 Major points + B-grade Balance and Coordination Elixir
- > Hit 1000 foul balls - 100 Major points + Silver Lottery ticket
- > Don't swing on 1000 balls - 100 Major points
- > Hit 500 Home Runs - 1000 Major points + B-grade Strength Elixir + Gold Lottery ticket

PLEASE PICK UP THE BAT AND HEAD TO THE BATTERS BOX TO BEGIN THE IMAGE TRAINING. PLEASE NOTE THAT TIME HERE IS ALIGNED WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

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

- Chapter 48 - 48: Image Training (2)

Chapter 48 - 48: Image Training (2)

"Whoa!" Ken's eyes sparkled as he looked at the missions and rewards that floated in front of his face. The 500 home run mission seemed the most glaring as it rewarded 10 times the Major points as well as a Gold Lottery ticket and B-grade Elixir.

Ken had never even used a Silver lottery ticket, so the thought of using a Gold one made his imagination run wild.

"Maybe it will give me a skill to never miss a pitch?" He thought, rubbing his hands together greedily.

Without further ado, Ken grabbed one of the bats and headed into the batters box before squaring up towards the mound.

"Wait, who is going to pitch?" He asked aloud.

A moment after he asked the question a tall Japanese man appeared on the mound, wearing the colors of the national team. Before he could even realize what was happening, a blazing fastball went straight through the strike zone, causing the dirt on the ground to fly into the air.

"Strike." The robotic voice of the umpire sounded out behind him, knocking him out of his reverie.

"T-T-Tanaka!?????" Ken's whole body felt as if it had lost strength as he stared at the Ace pitcher for the Japanese National Team. What the hell was Yu Tanaka doing in his image training facility?

Ken's attention was drawn to the signboard behind the pitcher which had the number 97 flashing in red upon it.

"97km/h? There's no way that it was that slow..."

Then it dawned on him, most professional baseball players used the imperial miles per hour system rather than kilometers per hour.

"97 miles per hour!? How the hell am I meant to hit that? That's like 155km/h..." Suddenly, the missions that once felt achievable, now seemed as if they were an unclimbable mountain.

2 more roaring pitches went straight through the middle and into the catchers glove, sucking all of the enthusiasm out of Ken's body. Just as he was about to give up, he saw a notification appear from the system.

SYSTEM HAS NOTICED THAT THE USER IS UNABLE TO HIT SUCH PITCHES.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO LOWER THE DIFFICULTY?

>MAJOR LEAGUE

>PROFESSIONAL (Current)

>AMATEUR

>HIGH SCHOOL (Recommended)

>MIDDLE SCHOOL (Stats will not be recorded towards missions in this difficulty)

>ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (Stats will not be recorded towards missions in this difficulty)

"Oh thank god!" Ken breathed a sigh of relief, seeing as he could choose his difficulty level. It would be pointless going up against such a fast pitcher at his current level. However, it filled him with even more enthusiasm for his future as baseball player.

"Let's go with High School."

The moment he selected the option, someone unexpected showed up on the mound; Himself. Or rather, himself in his previous life when he was in High School.

Looking at the older version of himself felt a little weird, however it had a positive psychological effect on Ken. His current goal was to surpass himself, both in his home life and baseball career.

Going up against his former self made seemed to make this goal tangible, filling him with fighting spirit.

"Hahaha! It's time to see what it's like on the other end of one of my pitches." Ken pointed the bat towards his previous self and let out a laugh.

Getting into position, his eyes narrowed as the pitcher performed his wind up.

WHOOSH

'Fastball down the middle! Who do you think I am?'

PAH

"Strike."

"Damn it! What the hell was that ball movement?" Ken complained.

"Again!"

PAH

"Strike"

"Again!"

"Strike"

"AGAIN!"

Ken tried and tried again to make contact with the ball, but there was something wrong. With his new mental grade, he was able to track the course of the ball, however he always seemed to be off.

This time, he decided to let the ball go, focusing his vision on the ball from when it left the pitchers fingers until it ended up in the catchers gloves.

"W-What!?"

The ball seemed to move in an odd fashion just before reaching the strike zone, changing its course ever so slightly despite being a fastball.

"Is this what all my opponents felt like during high school?" Ken mused, feeling frustrated. Now that he had seen it up close, he could now understand what was happening.

His flexible limbs and fingers allowed the ball to fling off in such a way where there was an unusual spin applied to the ball. This made its course unpredictable, especially just before the ball reached the strike zone.

But unfortunately, knowing about the quirk did not make it easier to hit the ball. Therefore he decided to just work on his bunts for a couple of hours tonight before getting some sleep.

By the end of the 2 hour session, he had managed to successfully bunt 100 times. Despite having a skill, he had only managed to convert around 50% of the pitches into bunts, the others either fouling or missing completely.

Of course he was going up against a high school pitcher who was pitching around 120km/h but still, it gave him a wake up call not to blindly rely on the system skills.

While the was a great tool to help him achieve his dream of becoming a professional baseball player, it was just that; a tool. If he didn't put in the work and utilize it correctly, then it would feel as if he had achieved nothing.

And if the system were to disappear one day, he would have learned nothing either, returning to his previous self. This was not something that he would allow happen.

As his thoughts drifted, Ken's consciousness reappeared in his room and he quickly took a look at his alarm clock which read 10:30pm.

"Looks like I need to adjust my schedule if I want to do image training every night." He mused before turning over, falling asleep only a few minutes later. It seemed that the training had taken its toll on his mind.

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

Chapter 49 - 49: Summer Tournament (1)

Time seemed to fly as the temperature steadily rose around the country and people began to see the early signs of summer appear.

Ken and Daichi continued with their schedules, even increasing their morning training loads to keep pushing their growing bodies. Over a span of two months, Daichi had grown a few centimeters, probably thanks to now receiving the proper nutrition for a growing child.

The two were still as close as ever, spurred by their desire to become professional baseball athletes in the future.

Daichi had taken to his catcher training much faster than expected, greatly surprising Coach Yoshida who had merely thought he had some potential at the position.

Ken on the other hand had been making the most of his Image training, batting against his high school self every night that he could.

Mid-terms had already been and gone with Ken making the most of his newly transformed mental grade and scoring well on the tests. English was still by far his best subject, but he had managed to improve dramatically on all of the other tests.

If he continued to post such scores, he would be able to pass the entrance exams for much better high schools than he had in his previous life.

However, the goal was to make it into Toin which was situated in Osaka. Ken had always wanted to get into the prestigious school which would give him the best opportunity to make it into the professional scene.

Like most schools they offered scholarships to students who they wanted to recruit into their baseball program, while also organizing tryouts for those with less exposure.

Therefore, Daichi and Ken agreed that they would do their best to win the Kanto Tournament and compete on the largest stage in order to get the attention of the high school scouts.

The Seiko baseball team had just finished their 10 lap warm up on their home field and were now waiting on instructions from their Coach. Unlike how they had been in the past 2 months, there was anticipation in the air.

The Coach cleared his throat and addressed his players with his usual expressionless face.

"You have all done well to continue your training while we were out of action. Since we have not had to worry about the spring tournament, I feel as if we have had an advantage that other schools have not."

"That being said, we are now about to start our Summer Tournament campaign where we will be able to see how much we have improved. In my hands right now is the fixtures for the Kanagawa prefecture."

His words elicited an excited response, making it clear that this was what the team had been waiting for for all these weeks.

Ken and Daichi shared a look filled with anticipation. This was what they had been striving towards all this time, working tirelessly day in and day out.

"We're up against Yokosuka middle school in the first bracket." The Coach said, handing the fixtures to Kenta the team captain.

"Yes! An easy team to start."

The rest of the team crowded around Kenta to get a good look at the fixtures. Ken looked over the captain's shoulder and nodded his head. Thanks to his mental upgrade, he could tell with one look that the fixture was essentially the same as his previous life.

They would need to win 3 games total in order to qualify for the Kanto prefecture tournament, followed by another 4 games to win the whole thing.

If he had been pitching, Ken might have confidence in getting through these two fixtures, but he would have to rely on Kouichi to take the reigns. As long as they could limit their opponents runs, Daichi would do the rest.

"Okay, the first game is on later this week. I'll be releasing the starting line up tomorrow so this is your last chance to impress me." The Coach spoke up, getting the attention of his players.

"Yes Coach!"

Daichi and Ken separated, but not before bumping fists. The two had rarely trained together at club practice now that Daichi had been moved to the catcher position. However, Ken was not worried.

It was for the benefit of the team if Daichi, a future professional player was moved to his prime position sooner rather than later.

With the game coming up this week, the Coach targeted some game specific scenarios rather than just honing everyone's skills. For this Ken was on first base while the Coach hit balls everywhere around the field.

Due to his sticky glove skill and his long arms, Ken was perfectly able to catch the throws sent his way from anywhere on the field. After around 10 minutes of this, the coach switched to a 1 runner on base scenario.

The goal was to go for a double play by tagging the advancing runner at 2nd before throwing it back to Ken on 1st base.

This continued before more scenarios were added into the mix. The fielding team was sharp, possibly because a fire had been lit beneath them with the approach of the summer tournament.

Coach Yoshida seemed satisfied with the training and only put an end to the training after about an hour. Despite not really moving from his base, Ken was drenched in sweat thanks to the summer sun which bared down on him.

The following day, the Coach brought everyone into one of the club classrooms. Today was the day that the starting lineup would be revealed. There were a few nervous faces, apart from the likes of Kouichi and Kenta who had no real competition for their roles.

Hikaru seemed to be sweating bullets. Ever since Daichi had been practicing to be a catcher, he had not been able to catch a breather. The prodigy seemed to be made for the position with his killer right arm and consistent leading.

Ken too was feeling nervous, casting his gaze over to Jin on the other side of the room. Jin had long recovered from his ankle sprain and had been performing well at training throughout the last couple of months.

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

Chapter 50 - 50: Summer Tournament (2)

"As we know, our next opponent is Yokosuka middle school. While they have never really had much success, we can not afford to underestimate any team at this moment. Especially since we haven't had a proper game at all this season." The Coach stated, moving his gaze over his young players.

"That being said, I will be sending out our best players for this match."

He spun the whiteboard around, revealing a list of players and their positions and batting order next to their names.

Ken felt like closing his eyes, feeling a lump crawl up to his throat.

Pitcher: Kouichi Yamada - 9

Relief Pitcher: Imai Nakamura

Catcher: Daichi Takagi - 4

Short Stop: Keisuke Chiba - 1

1st base: Ken Takagi - 2

2nd Base: Takeshi Omae - 6

3rd Base: Kenta Shouichi (captain) - 3

Left Outfield: Aki Arima - 8

Center Outfield: Tatsuya Tanaka - 5

Right Outfield: Shin Goto - 7

Reserves: Jin Hatake, Hikaru Genji, Ryo Yoda, Hisao Kobayashi, Masahiro Yuuta

Ken felt his body flood with relief after seeing his name up there on the first base. He quickly turned to Daichi who was grinning ear to ear and the two shared a great moment.

However, Ken didn't want to be rude so he kept his voice down, lest he sew discord amongst his other teammates. Thankfully, Jin didn't seem to be too upset, or at least he didn't show it outwardly.

"Just because you're on the starting line up now, doesn't mean that you will stay there. If I see anyone under performing, I'll sub you out straight away." The Coach spoke up, breathing some life into the unfortunate people who were left out.

"Alright, we're going to work on some strength and conditioning training today and then a light training tomorrow before our game on the following day."

"Yes Coach"

Finally the day arrived where Seiko would take on Yokosuka in the first match of the Summer Prefecture tournament. Despite it being a little hot, it was amazing weather for the game of baseball.

Like all the prefecture tournaments, it was a single elimination tournament meaning that 1 simple loss would result in a teams hopes and dreams being crushed.

The Summer Nationals or simple referred to as Koshien was the most prestigious event of the year in High school baseball. Every year 49 teams would be eligible to take part in the 12 day event in Osaka.

Unfortunately, they were still in middle school. So while they would not be able to taste the glory of Koshien this year, however if they could nurture a winning culture and mindset, it would set them up for success in the years to come.

After all, having the Kanto tournament flag on their resume would only help to boost their confidence and chances into enrolling at prestigious high schools like Toin.

Yokosuka chose to start off on the field, sending the enthusiastic Keisuke up to bat first. He stared at the pitcher with hungry eyes, ready for any pitch that was thrown at him.

DONG

The pitch was sent flying to the outfield for a double, coming to a stop just near the foul line. Keisuke was all smiles as he stood on 2nd base, sending a smug look to Ken who had just stepped up to the plate.

Ken felt his heart beat wildly in his chest with excitement as he took in the atmosphere. Although he had batted thousands of times with the Image training function of the system, there was much more pressure in this situation.

After all, the moment they lost a game their dreams of winning the tournament would be crushed.

The pitcher threw a wild pitch towards the outside, resulting in a ball. Ken had been able to track the trajectory of the pitch from start to finish, filling him with a large confidence boost.

After facing 120km/h balls in his image training, these 90km fastballs did not seem to pose him much issue. Now that he had seen the first pitch, he wouldn't hesitate.

Another ball came flying towards him, once again to the outside. Having seen the exact same pitch earlier, Ken's eyes narrowed before sending his bat swinging towards it with power.

DONG

The ball whistled past the first baseman's outstretched glove and headed into the right outfield. Ken burst off of home plate towards first, tilting his body slightly and powering his way to 2nd.

"Home! Home!" The catcher shouted loudly towards the outfielder who was busy collecting the ball. He was around 90 meters away which would be impossible to cover with a single throw as a middle schooler.

Therefore he threw to first base who then turned around to throw it home. Unfortunately for them, Keisuke had already placed his foot on home plate and was swaggering towards the dugout with a spring in his step.

"Nice hit!"

Ken flashed a grin at Daichi who had just called out, giving him a thumbs up in response.

The Captain Kenta Shouichi was up to bat next. Despite being a single run ahead, his face was solemn, showing an intense concentration as the pitcher began his throwing motion.

DONG

Once again the ball was smacked, yet this time the short stop had managed to pull off a miraculous catch after diving to his right.

"Out!"

Kenta's face dropped and he slowly made his way back to the dugout. Ken stifled a laugh seeing his captain's reaction. Kenta surely was someone who wore his emotions on his sleeve.

It was now Daichi's turn to step up and bat. His large shoulders and big frame made the pitcher feel a sense of unease.

There was a certain prestige that came with being the clean-up batter, almost as much as being the Ace of a team. However, while Ace's needed to consistently pitch well to impact a game, clean-up batters needed only 1 almighty swing to win.

"Ball"

"Ball"

"Ball"

Ken's jaw opened wide as he saw what was happening. It turned out that Yokosuke was going to walk Daichi in his first proper match of the season, merely because he was the 4th batter.

He didn't know whether to curse the opponents or congratulate them for making such a decision to walk an unknown player. However, he felt kind of stifled after seeing the confusion on Daichi's face.

'Swing!'

Ken mouthed from 2nd base, making the action of swinging an imaginary bat. He was hoping that Daichi would at least get some contact with the ball thanks to his amazing hand eye coordination.

As long as he could hit the ball, then he'll at least get a chance to play today.

Daichi nodded and positioned his body over the plate a little. Most of the balls had been way outside the strike zone, so he wished to be closer to it.

The next ball flew towards the outside, a few inches outside of the strike zone. Yet Daichi had somehow managed to get contact on his swing due to his body positioning and ingenious batting technique.

He had swung mostly with just his left arm, allowing the bat to reach a further distance away from his body.

DONG!

Daichi began to run towards first base, unsure of where the ball had traveled. It was only when he saw that not even the outfielders were moving that something had to be wrong.

He lifted his head and moved his gaze around, only to hear cheers from his side of the dugout.

"Nice Home run Daichi!"

"That was a home run?" Daichi felt confused, yet in the next moment he felt thrilled. He quickly checked that he was not still holding the bat in his hands before making his way around the plates.

"W-What the hell was that?" The pitcher muttered to himself.

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

Chapter 51 - 51: Coach Yoshida's Deal (1)

The Yokosuka team was outmatched from the start, failing to secure a run throughout the whole game. Seiko had continued to attack, relying on the likes of Daichi and Kenta to send the runners home.

The game was so out of hand that it ended in the 5th innings thanks to the mercy rule with a score of Seiko 13 - Yokosuka 0.

Following this game, the Takagi family celebrated with Katsudon, a meal generally eaten when wishing for or celebrating victory. The panko fried pork paired with the fragrant rice and joyous atmosphere made the victory taste even sweeter.

Of course it was only the first game of the summer tournament, but they never knew when their last game would be.

"Your mom says that you guys won your first game. Congratulations!"

Chris's voice sounded on the loud speaker of Yuki's phone. Unfortunately he was away for work once again so he would miss out on such a delicious dinner.

"It's only the first round, but it ended in the 5th innings." Ken said simply, stuffing his face with rice.

"Oh, mercy rule? Damn, nice work." He replied with enthusiasm.

"Thanks. Daichi hit a home run and 3 doubles, whereas I got a double and 2 singles."

"Great work kids." Chris sounded proud, yet he wished he could have witnessed it. Unfortunately he was not going to be home for another week thanks to a joint NPB and Majors venture.

"How was your pitching today? Did you give up any runs?"

Daichi's eyes widened and he looked at Ken with confusion and disbelief. Had he not told his parents about his shoulder injury? Why not?

Ken saw his friends reaction and felt guilty. A part of him had forgotten that he never informed his parents about his situation, he never felt that there was a right time to break this information to them.

"Ah, about that. I've decided not to pitch this year because I want to focus on the other aspects of my game." Ken said after a brief pause, hoping that there wouldn't be too much backlash.

Yuki tilted her head in confusion, leading to a brief awkward silence before Chris finally responded.

"Great! That's a fantastic idea. I always thought that you relied on your pitching too much. If you want to become a professional player, you need to have a complete game."

"See Yuki, I told you our boy has grown up. HAHAHA"

Ken's mother rolled her eyes at the rambunctious laughter that came through the phones speaker before quickly hanging up. Her attention honed in on Ken which made him feel a little nervous.

"Is that truly the reason Kenny?" She asked with a look of concern on her face.

Ken shrunk back, moving some food around in his bowl with his chopsticks. He couldn't lie straight to his mothers face, so he was trying to work up the courage to tell the truth. The problem was that he had never seen a doctor in this life, so it may not be believable.

There was also the worst case scenario that his parents would forbid him from playing if they learned that he was injured.

Yuki let out a sigh, "It's okay, you don't have to tell me. As long as you're happy and healthy that's all that matters to me." She said with a small smile.

In her mind she was worried that Ken was depressed for not making the cut as a pitcher and was forced to step down. That would mean that he fabricated the story of taking a break in order to save himself from embarrassment.

The fact that Chris was too busy laughing and praising him for his decision to take a step back was probably only adding more embarrassment and shame onto him, which was why she hung up so abruptly.

However, Ken's mood seemed to improve after her words so Yuki kept her assumptions to herself.

Daichi on the other hand shook his head. He would be giving his Big bro a talking to at some point in the future about his actions.

"Well, I'm really tired now mom so I'm going to head to bed." Ken said abruptly, feeling Daichi's stare drill into the side of his face.

Then without waiting for a reply, he put his dishes in the sink and ran up the stairs and into his room, leaving the two at the dining table.

In reality, he wanted to leave the awkward atmosphere and jump into some image training. Having participated in the game today, he could finally realize just how beneficial the image training had been to him overall.

Plus he had yet to claim any of the rewards for the missions he had completed, wanting to get a baseline for his skill level before the upgrades.

#NOTICE: IT IS ADVISED THAT USER ENTERS THE IMAGE TRAINING WHEN HE WILL NOT BE DISTURBED.

DOES THE USER WISH TO ENTER IMAGE TRAINING?

[YES/NO]

"Yes."

Ken was once again transported to the empty Koshien field. Due to coming here every night for the past 2 months, he was no longer in awe and quickly chose the batting practice.

#BATTING MISSIONS:

> Hit 500 bunts successfully - 100 Major points + Bronze Lottery ticket [COMPLETE]

Claim rewards

> Hit 500 balls into outfield - 100 Major points + B-grade Balance and Coordination Elixir [COMPLETE] *Claim rewards*

> Hit 1000 foul balls - 100 Major points + Silver Lottery ticket [COMPLETE] *Claim rewards*

> Don't swing on 1000 balls - 100 Major points [COMPLETE] *Claim rewards*

> Hit 500 Home Runs - 1000 Major points + B-grade Strength Elixir + Gold Lottery ticket (192/500)

Ken's eyes shined as he saw the shimmering claim rewards option. He had been patiently waiting for this day for months now. Without hesitation, he accepted the rewards and watched his screen fill with notifications.

[Congratulations, you have been awarded 100 Major points and 1x Bronze Lottery Ticket]

[Congratulations, you have been awarded 100 Major points and 1x B-grade Balance and Coordination Elixir]

[Congratulations, you have been awarded 100 Major points and 1x Silver Lottery ticket]

[Congratulations, you have been awarded 100 Major points]

[Are you sure you want to leave the Image Training?]

[Yes/No]

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

Chapter 52 - 52: Coach Yoshida's Deal (2)

"Yes."

His consciousness reappeared in his room once again. He didn't waste time to bring up the system window once more.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 2 (400/1000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 15

TALENT ASSESSMENT: B-

POTENTIAL: D (S+)

MAJOR POINTS: 400

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS

-SYSTEM SHOP (Locked)

-LOTTERY (Temporarily Unlocked)

-IMAGE TRAINING

Clicking the Lottery function which was now unlocked, a large wheel appeared, showcasing the rewards for the bronze lottery ticket. With great anticipation, Ken clicked the arrow which took him to the smaller wheel.

Ken was practically salivating as he looked at the wheel which was no longer locked.

[Would you like to consume a Silver Lottery ticket to spin the wheel?]

[Yes/No]

"Yes..."

A moment later, the wheel spun at breakneck speed and turning into a blur. The noise was like music to his ears as Ken watched on with bated breath.

Click Click Click

Soon enough, the wheel came to a stop on a silver tile with a picture of a bat upon it.

'A batting skill!' Ken almost jumped off his bed in excitement upon seeing it.

[Congratulations, user has drawn the "Power Hitter" skill.]

[Power Hitter: Increase strength by 3 grades when the ball is struck with the middle of the bat.]

Ken sucked in a cold breath of air through his teeth, this skill was ridiculously good. With the two C-grade Strength Elixirs he had taken, his strength was now at the B- grade. Once this skill activates, his strength would skyrocket to the A- grade.

Of course there was the drawback of the skill only activating if he hit the middle of the bat. If he wanted to utilize this skill as much as possible then he would have to increase his Balance and Coordination.

It just so happened that he had acquired a B-grade Balance and Coordination Elixir from the image training rewards a moment before. Yet before he consumed it, he still had a Bronze Lottery ticket to use.

Moving to the large wheel, he clicked the spin button and the familiar sound of the wheel spinning entered his ears.

[Congratulations, user has drawn the "Focus" skill.]

[Focus: Faze out all distractions during certain game scenarios, allowing the user to perform under pressure.]

"Oh, not bad not bad." Ken exclaimed softly. He wasn't sure exactly what game scenarios the skill was referring to, but it was likely in pivotal moments within the game. 2 outs, or 2 strikes etc.

Ken was satisfied with his haul and decided it was time to take the Elixir before heading to sleep. The next game was in a week against another easy opponent, it wouldn't be until they reached the Kanto tournament that they would face some decent competition.

[You have consumed: B-grade Balance and Coordination Elixir.]

[Balance and Coordination grade has been increased by 3!]

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: B-

>Pitching: F (B)

>Fielding: C+

>Game Intelligence: C+

>Mental: B+

>Skills: 6

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. B-)

Balance and Coordination: B+

Agility: B-

Strength: B-

Stamina: C

Ken woke up the next morning and couldn't stop staring at his upgraded stats with a big dumb smile on his face. Even though a single day had passed, his skills had leapt to another level thanks to the System.

He couldn't wait to get into the next game and show off his newfound skills.

However, Ken was bound to be disappointed. Despite being a part of the winning squad, Coach Yoshida had chosen not to start Ken against their next opponent Asano middle school.

Ken was forced to cheer on from the dugout as their team once again put on a stellar performance. Daichi continued his great form, once again hitting a home run in the 4th innings and giving Seiko a dominant 10 run lead going into what would be the final inning.

Being an adult, at least mentally, Ken had chosen not to confront the coach about his absence from the starting lineup. If he was his true middle schooler self, he had no doubt that he would be throwing a tantrum right now.

Also seeing as their team had advanced to the finals of the Kanagawa tournament, he couldn't exactly complain.

Yet when he was forced to sit out of the final game against Yamate Gakuin, Ken found it difficult to stay quiet. He was about to approach the coach during the game, but he spoke up even before Ken could say a word.

"Have you been watching this game and the last?" He asked without turning around.

Taken aback, Ken responded affirmatively, yet he had no idea why the coach would ask such a question.

"What do you think of Kouichi?"

"He's solid most of the time. But every now and then he throws a wild pitch." Ken replied truthfully. Having been thrown thousands of pitches in the image training and being a pitcher himself, he was able to easily identify Kouichi's faults and habits.

The Coach nodded. "Yes, and it gets worse as the game progresses..." he stated, still with his back turned.

Before waiting for Ken to reply, the Coach added, "You definitely can't pitch this season?"

Ken was taken aback once more, not expecting such a question. "I-I'm sorry, I cannot pitch for at least another 9 or so months." He responded, bowing his head.

"Mmm that's okay. I know it's selfish of me, but I kept you out of the lineup in order to analyze Kouichi. Imai is a good relief pitcher, but the only chance we have to win the Kanto tournament is with Kouichi's pitching."

The Coach finally turned around and faced him for the first time, his gaze locked onto Ken's. "Will you mentor Kouichi? I promise you that as long as you take it seriously, we will win."

Ken pondered for a moment. The Coach was right when he said that he was selfish, how could he ask a teenager to sacrifice their own playing time in order to help another teammate? Perhaps if this was the NPB one might be able to understand.

However, Ken had to agree with the Coach. If Kouichi did not correct his bad habits and got injured, their campaign would be dead in the water. The problem was, Ken was rather arrogant in his past life, so he had not listened to his father's teachings about his pitching form.

In the end, he decided to agree with the Coach's request.

"I will do what I can to mentor Kouichi. But you have to promise me playing time in the future." Ken stipulated, finally deciding to act like an actual teenager.

"Hahaha. I'll start you in every round of the Kanto Tournament if you do this for us." The Coach promised, feeling his mood improve.

"It's a promise!" Ken said with a smile before turning to watch the game.

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

Chapter 53 - 53: Image Training Clear (1)

Despite Kouichi's wild pitches towards the end of the game, Seiko were able to come out with the win against Yamate Gakuin with a final score of 10 to 3. Imai came in for the last 2 innings and was able to shut out the competition, giving up no runs.

It was not as evident during their past 2 games thanks to invoking the mercy rule, but Kouichi was burning out by the end of the game. Now that Coach Yoshida had drawn his attention to it, Ken could see his performance waning in the latter innings.

As the team was heading onto the bus to head back home, Ken pulled Kouichi aside and had a chat to him.

"Hey man, nice work today." He said with a smile.

Kouichi seemed a little out of it, but he still replied with his thanks. He currently had an ice pack on his right shoulder, something that helped with recovery after pitching in a game.

"Are you feeling any pain or fatigue in your shoulder when you throw?" Ken asked in a low voice, ensuring that no one would be able to pick up on their conversation.

Kouichi's eyes widened in shock, staring at Ken as if he had two heads.

"H-How did you know?"

Ken's features softened, "I know more than you think about hiding such things." He responded wistfully.

Kouichi looked extremely nervous and pleaded with Ken to not tell the coach what was going on. He had finally gotten an opportunity to showcase his abilities, even being moved up to the Ace position.

If the Coach were to find out, he would no doubt get moved to the bench in a heartbeat.

"Don't worry, the Coach asked me to help you out which means he has an idea of what's going on."

"Really?" This was the biggest shock to Kouichi. He had only begun feeling discomfort towards the end of the first game, yet the coach had already noticed.

"Yeah, so don't stress too much." Ken replied with a smile, putting the teenager at ease a little.

"It's Saturday tomorrow are you free? If so let's meet up at the school fields around 8am. What do you say?"

Kouichi pondered for a while before eventually nodding. The fact that the coach had sent Ken who was the previous Ace of the team in order to help him out spoke volumes. Not only did it highlight the trust the Coach had in Ken, but also in Kouichi himself.

"Great, I'll meet you there with Daichi." Ken gave a thumbs up before getting onto the bus and finding a seat next to his brother.

The group traveled home in high spirits after securing the win and moving onto the Kanto prefecture tournament. This was the final tournament for the 3rd years, as they would be too busy taking entrance exams for high schools to compete in the fall tournament.

Ken and Daichi arrived home to see their father waiting in the dining room. He had returned from the states this morning but was suffering from jet lag so he went straight to sleep.

"Dad! Welcome home." Both Ken and Daichi called out, receiving a smile in return.

"Well? How did the game go?" Chris asked, seemingly more interested in their baseball results than themselves.

"Hehe, we've got the nations number 1 catcher on the squad. How do you think it went?" Ken said proudly, draping his arm over Daichi's shoulders. Despite how long his arms were, he still found it difficult to reach the width of his brothers shoulders.

"We won 10 runs to 3." Daichi said simply, even though he was inwardly pleased about Ken's comments.

"Did you hear that honey? Our boys have made it through to the Kanto tournament! Hahaha." Chris tilted his head back and laughed, shouting out to his wife who was only a few feet away in the kitchen.

"Yes yes I heard. Congratulations you two." She chuckled.

"So did either of you hit a home run?" Chris asked enthusiastically.

"Ah, well... I didn't actually get to play." Ken said a little awkwardly, yet his tone changed in the next moment. "Daichi also didn't get a home run, but he got 2 triples and 3 doubles!"

Chris raised an eyebrow, yet he didn't comment on the first part so as not to rub salt in any wounds. "Nice work Daichi!" He said with a thumbs up.

"Oh I almost forgot. Are you free tomorrow Dad?" Ken asked.

"Yup! I've got the next 5 days off. Why, what's up?"

"It's about our pitcher Kouichi. Would you mind helping him out with his form and recovery regime?"

"Oh? You mean the same ones that you refused to do for the past few years?" Chris said, causing Ken to feel attacked. Yet he could only smile wryly in response.

If he had have listened to his father, he could have probably avoided the mistakes he made in his previous life altogether.

"Yes that one..." He said shamelessly. "Since I've refused to pitch this season, the Coach asked if I could mentor Kouichi. But I'd say that getting training from you would be much better than that."

A small bit of flattery at the end of his words seemed to work wonders. Chris who had been giving him a condescending look suddenly brightened and began to laugh heartily.

"Hahaha, yeah I think you're right. After all, I used to be a professional trainer." He said with a dumb smile.

Yuki who was busy cooking, could only shake her head as Ken expertly manipulated her husband into training his friend. That was the problem with Chris, he was too unguarded against simple flattery.

Daichi seemed to be taken aback from the whole thing. As the catcher on the team, he was the most aware of the wild pitches that Kouichi had been throwing, but he never knew that the Coach had asked Ken to help mentor him.

He gained another layer of respect for Ken who had selflessly agreed given the circumstances.

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

Chapter 54 - 54: Image Training Clear (2)

After dinner, everyone went their separate ways with Ken retreating to his room early like he had for the past couple of months. Thankfully his parents shrugged off this weird behavior as typical teenage actions so he didn't need to come up with an excuse.

Of course he was not doing anything suspicious, he was in fact honing his skills within the image training realm. Ever since getting the Power Hitter skill and increasing his Balance and Coordination stat, he had a much easier time hitting home runs during training.

In the two months prior, he had only managed to hit 192 home runs despite being thrown thousands upon thousands of pitches. Yet he had almost hit the remaining 308 in just these two weeks.

This gave a good indication of the impact of skills and his attributes on his ability to play baseball. While he couldn't currently measure up to the freak genius of Daichi, given enough time and patience, he felt that the system would allow him to surpass him.

This begged the question though, what was Daichi's overall stats right now according to the system? His potential would have to be at least an S+ if he had made it to the NPB with only 2 years of high school baseball under his belt.

Ken shook his head and focused. Now was the time to finish up the last of the batting missions and retrieve the juicy rewards.

DOES THE USER WISH TO ENTER IMAGE TRAINING?

[YES/NO]

"Yes."

Ken quickly picked up the bat and headed to the batters box wearing a cocky smile.

> Hit 500 Home Runs - 1000 Major points + B-grade Strength Elixir + Gold Lottery ticket (482/500)

"I'm coming for you Gold Lottery Ticket... Hehe"

DONG

DONG

"Strike"

DING

DONG

...

> Hit 500 Home Runs - 1000 Major points + B-grade Strength Elixir + Gold Lottery ticket (500/500) [Claim rewards]

After about 45 minutes of non-stop batting, Ken finally heard the sweet sound of a notification, indicating he had cleared the mission. He dropped to the ground and panted heavily.

For some reason, he still experienced fatigue in this realm. Perhaps it was to emulate the state of his consciousness, or for another reason entirely. Either way, such a thing prevented him from spending too much time inside which was a good thing.

[Congratulations, you have been awarded 1000 Major points 1x B-grade Strength Elixir and Gold Lottery ticket]

A smile blossomed on Ken's face as these words appeared in front of him. Yet they were followed by another line of text.

USER HAS COMPLETED ALL TASKS FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL DIFFICULTY. TO RECEIVE NEW MISSIONS, PLEASE INCREASE THE DIFFICULTY.

>MAJOR LEAGUE

>PROFESSIONAL

>AMATEUR (Recommended)

>HIGH SCHOOL (Current)(Stats will not be recorded towards missions in this difficulty)

>MIDDLE SCHOOL (Stats will not be recorded towards missions in this difficulty)

>ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (Stats will not be recorded towards missions in this difficulty)

Ken raised his eyebrow in surprise. He had originally thought that he would no longer receive missions for the batting training once completing these, however he was pleasantly surprised.

He decided to change the difficulty and check out the new missions.

USER HAS SELECTED AMATEUR DIFFICULTY.

Suddenly, his high school self disappeared and was replaced with someone else. Well, that was only partially correct as the figure once again looked like himself yet even older. If he had to guess the figure should be around 20 years of age.

"That's weird... My last time pitching was in the summer of my 2nd year in high school." He muttered, feeling mystified.

Before he could pondering the situation, another window popped up in front of him, detailing the new missions.

- > Hit 1000 bunts successfully - 250 Major points + Silver Lottery ticket
- > Hit 1000 balls into outfield - 250 Major points + B-grade Stamina Elixir
- > Hit 3000 foul balls - 250 Major points + Silver Lottery ticket
- > Hit 1000 sliders - 250 Major points
- > Hit 1000 curve balls - 250 Major points
- > Hit 1000 fastballs - 250 Major points
- > Hit 1000 home runs - 2000 Major points + A-grade Strength Elixir + Gold Lottery ticket

Ken couldn't help but let out a whistle of appreciation, seeing the generous mission rewards laid out in front of him. However, he didn't get ahead of himself as he had yet to see a pitch from the foreign version of himself on the mound.

"Alright, let's see what you got." He said, lifting his bat and squaring up against the pitcher.

WHOOSH

The ball flew towards the strike zone with some heat behind it, yet the course seemed predictable. Ken swung with the intention of making contact rather than sending the ball flying. However, the familiar feeling of hitting the ball did not reach his hands.

PAH

"Strike"

"Holy crap! What a curve ball..." Ken could only exclaim in appreciation. Suddenly the missions seemed a lot more difficult after seeing the first pitch.

He had never learned to throw the curve ball in his previous life, yet apparently this version of him had. The ball seemed as if it was on an easy course, yet the top spin caused it to drop just before hitting the plate.

While it wasn't as difficult to predict the course as some other breaking balls, it was tough to pick. Good pitchers were able to keep their throwing actions for fastballs and curve balls similar enough that batters would struggle to identify the type of pitch until it was too late.

Ken shook his head, now was not the time to continue his batting practice. It was time to gamble...

He quickly left the Image training realm and his consciousness reappeared back in his room. He could feel the Golden Lottery ticket burning in his pocket, even though it was not a physical object.

Without hesitating, he opened up the lottery function and spun the golden wheel.

"Here goes nothing..."

After what seemed like an age, the small wheel finally stopped and a new window popped up.

[Congratulations, you have learned the "Identify" function.]

[Identify: Allows the user to look at the stats of other baseball players, provided they are close in skill level.]

'WHAT!?'

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

Chapter 55 - 55: Mentoring (1)

Ken was filled with shock and excitement upon receiving the new ability. He had only moments before been wondering what Daichi's stats were, and here the system had delivered.

He was also meant to be tutoring Kouichi tomorrow, which meant he would be able to use this to understand where he was lacking. Ken pulled up the system and noticed that he already had enough Major points to level up once again.

#SYSTEM ALERT

>The user has chosen to upgrade the system.

>1000 Major points will be deducted to upgrade the system.

>System will shut down for 24 hours in which all functions will be unavailable until the upgrade has been completed.

[Would you like to commence the upgrade now?]

[YES/NO]

"24 hours? Wasn't it only 8 hours last time?" Ken mused, feeling a little disappointed.

If he wanted to use the new Identify ability on Kouichi tomorrow then he would have to wait and upgrade his system at another time. However it didn't matter too much, he decided to take the B-grade Strength Elixir and get some sleep.

[Are you sure you wish to consume: B-grade Strength Elixir?]

[Yes/No]

"Yes."

What followed was some of the worst cramps he had ever experienced as his muscles felt like they were tearing and repairing themselves over and over. He had expected some level of pain, but the system seemed to be extra rough today.

After almost 5 minutes of this torture, Ken finally felt the pain recede from his body, bringing with it a welcome sense of relief. Covered in sweat and panting, Ken looked as if he had just come back from running a marathon.

Thankfully the ceiling fan worked its magic and sent cool air down to alleviate some of his discomfort before Ken lost consciousness from exhaustion.

[You have consumed: B-grade Strength Elixir.]

[Strength grade has been increased by 3!]

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: B-

>Pitching: F (B)

>Fielding: C+

>Game Intelligence: C+

>Mental: B+

>Skills: 6

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. B-)

Balance and Coordination: B+

Agility: B-

Strength: A-

Stamina: C

Ken woke up the next morning to a wonderful message flashing on the system window. All drowsiness left his body as he stared at the notification with sparkling eyes.

"My first A grade attribute..." He murmured with pride.

Knock Knock

He must have been staring at the window for a long time because Daichi had come knocking on his door to wake him up for their morning run. Ken quickly got out of bed and got ready, his heart filled with anticipation.

The two greeted their parents as usual and headed out the door to start the run. However, Ken activated his system to try out the new feature.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 2 (1400/1000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 15

TALENT ASSESSMENT: B-

POTENTIAL: D (S+)

MAJOR POINTS: 1400

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS

-SYSTEM SHOP (Locked)

-LOTTERY (Locked)

-IMAGE TRAINING

-IDENTIFY

He clicked on the Identify option and a wall of text appeared.

TO USE IDENTIFY ON THIS TARGET WILL COST 50 MAJOR POINTS DUE TO THE DISPARITY IN ABILITIES. WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONTINUE?

[YES/NO]

'Disparity in abilities?' Ken balked, feeling a little insulted by such a statement. However, he still chose to accept.

NAME: Daichi Takagi

AGE: 15

TALENT ASSESSMENT: A-

POTENTIAL: SSS

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: A-

>Pitching: C

>Fielding: A

>Game Intelligence: C

>Mental: A+

DAICHI TAKAGI'S DATA HAS BEEN ADDED TO THE COMPENDIUM.

Ken felt his world crumble around him as Daichi's stats were revealed. He was so shocked that he stood in place with his jaw wide open, staring at the freak genius running beside him.

"What's wrong?" Daichi stopped after noticing that Ken was no longer running beside him, yet all he received were mumblings in response before he continued on the run.

'How can he be so overwhelmingly talented?' Ken complained inwardly. But he soon fixed his attitude.

He should be happy that his brother was talented, especially since they had made a pact to become professionals and even make it to the Majors one day. Ken was confident that he would be able to bridge the gap between them with his .

But until then Daichi would prove to be a goal, or perhaps even a rival on his path towards becoming a professional baseball player.

Daichi shrugged off the weird atmosphere and continued the run. Ken had been a little odd lately, but it was not enough to cause concern, not yet at least.

The two completed their morning training and headed back home to eat and get ready. Chris drove them to the school field and they met up with Kouichi who had come alone.

He was a little nervous when he saw the unfamiliar tall man that came along with Ken and Daichi, but after hearing an explanation and seeing the uncanny resemblance to Ken he eventually calmed down.

"Kouichi, what pitches can you do?" Chris asked after the introductions.

"At the moment I can pitch a fastball and forkball." He replied.

Chris's face showed visible shock when the word forkball was mentioned. His expression changed a few times before a look of understanding crept onto his face.

"Go warm up your arm with Daichi, I want to see your pitch." He said after a moment before stepping back and bringing Ken with him.

"How often does Kouichi use his forkball?" Chris asked in English, not wanting the other two to understand their conversation.

Ken raised an eyebrow in question, however he also responded in English. "I'd say he throws it at least 5-10 times per innings on average."

"Hmm. Not good." Chris shook his head, feeling a headache coming on. "Let's first see how he pitches it."

Once Kouichi's shoulder was warm, Chris asked him to throw a few fastballs before finally finishing on the forkball.

The ball flew towards Daichi's open glove before dipping right before it entered the zone.

"Okay, I've seen enough."

"Huh?" Kouichi was a little confused, he had only thrown around 5 pitches so far. Was that enough to get an idea of what he was doing wrong?

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

Chapter 56 - 56: Mentoring (2)

Yet before he could speak up, Chris came over and grabbed a hold of his arm, putting a small amount of pressure on Kouichi's elbow with his thumb.

"Argh!" Kouichi yelled in pain, not expecting such a thing.

"Are you trying to injure me!?" He yelled out, backing away defensively.

Chris shook his head, "I'm a professional, I would never purposefully hurt an athlete. I only put a tiny bit of pressure on your elbow, you should try it yourself to see if I'm lying."

Although wary, Kouichi eventually did as he was told and almost cried out in pain again.

"W-What's happening?" He stammered, feeling all sorts of confused.

"You need to give up on the forkball Kouichi. From what I can tell, you haven't been throwing it for long which is why you're only feeling some mild pain. Your body is not developed enough to sustain such wear and tear." Chris explained, being as straightforward as possible.

"But how will we win if I don't have a breaking ball? My pitches aren't fast enough to only use fastballs." Kouichi complained. He had tried other breaking balls, yet the forkball was the only one he could throw.

Chris let out a sigh, lamenting at how rash teenagers were these days. "Have you heard about the two-seam fastball?" He asked.

"Two-seam?" Kouichi tilted his head in confusion.

Even Ken felt the term was foreign. Having no breaking balls of his own, Ken's interest was piqued, causing him to lean a little closer.

"Show me how you hold the ball while pitching a fastball." Chris directed.

Kouichi did as he was told, holding up the ball.

"Okay, that's what we call a four-seam fastball. This grip allows for the most speed and velocity, however it is predictable and lacks movement."

Chris reached forward and turned the ball in Kouichi's hand, exposing the horseshoe shaped seam towards the front. He then took a step back and explained.

"This is a two-seam fastball. Not only can it be thrown at a similar speed, the seams and rotation causes the ball to move erratically through the air. If you use these two grips effectively, you won't need to learn a breaking ball before your body has fully developed."

Ken's eyes lit up. He had never really paid attention to the grip of the ball when he was pitching, something that did not make him very proud at this moment. This was probably the reason why some of his pitches had movement, while others were just straight and fast.

Kouichi stared at the ball for a little while, yet he didn't seem too convinced. What kind of difference would changing the position of the ball in his hand really do?

Chris could see that the teenager wouldn't accept things so easily, so he directed him to throw a pitch and see for himself.

Daichi got into position and waited for the pitch to come his way. He of course trusted his father, so he had plenty of time to follow the movement of the ball once it left Kouichi's hand catching it perfectly in his glove.

Kouichi blinked a few times after throwing the ball, not believing what had just happened. His usually dead straight fastball looked alive as it snaked through the air, filling him with happiness.

As he pitched with his right arm, he noticed that the ball slid towards the right just before reaching Daichi's glove. If he could add this pitch into his arsenal, it should be just as effective as his forkball.

"Wow! Thank you Mr. Takagi" Kouichi bounded over, the excitement palpable in his features.

Chris waved him off, yet his true feelings were plastered on his face in the form of a boastful smile.

"Now, the next part will probably be the hardest." His face turned serious as he addressed Kouichi.

The boy's expression darkened, yet he nodded. Now that Ken's father had identified what was wrong with him and even given him a new weapon to his arsenal, he had decided to follow whatever he was going to say next.

"No more pitching until the next game." Chris said flatly, yet his tone was stern.

"Oh... Sure that's fine." Kouichi replied positively.

"Ah... Ahem. Good, very good. I'll also give you a training regimen to follow which will help increase the strength and flexibility of your arms." Chris continued.

He had been so sure that Kouichi would object to his request that he had prepared many ways of convincing him. Yet it turned out that not all teenagers were rash and disobedient like a certain someone used to be.

Chris turned his gaze to Ken who shuddered unconsciously in response. A sudden feeling of guilt crept into his bones for some unknown reason, but it quickly disappeared when his father smiled at him warmly.

'What the hell? The guilt I felt from my previous life just overcame me for a moment.' Ken thought inwardly, before shaking his head and trying to remove the lingering feelings.

His father took Kouichi through the exercise regime and even had a copy that he had written the night before. Ken appreciated how thorough and professional his dad was, complimenting him inwardly.

After another hour, they finally went their separate ways.

The weekend flew by, particularly with Ken's father being home and having some time off. The trio went to the batting cages a couple of times and Chris was shocked with the sudden improvement from Ken.

Compared to the first time he had taken them this year, Ken was like a whole different person. Daichi had also improved by leaps and bounds, especially since his body had started developing properly.

The family made the most of Chris being off work, eating meals and going out together.

The days past like this until the Kanto tournament fixtures were released.

Seiko had gotten lucky and was given a bye for the first game, meaning they had made it through the first round without even having to play a game. They would play against the winner between Joto and Nogi Choritsu middle.

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

Chapter 57 - 57: 2nd Round (1)

The team alighted from the bus at the home ground for the Kanto tournament. After resting almost 2 weeks, they were raring to get on the pitch and play some baseball today.

Their opponent was Joto middle school who had blitzed through the first round against Nogi Choritsu, even keeping them scoreless in the proceedings. This was a surprise as Joto was never really known for their baseball program.

Ken sat next to Daichi in the locker room as the Coach went over the game plan and reiterated the starting line up. He tried hard to keep a neutral expression, however seeing that he had been left out once again it was tough.

Perhaps sensing his frustrations, the coach moved his gaze to him and gave him a reassuring look. Ken's spirits lifted a little seeing this, hoping that it would translate to playing time.

After a small pep talk, the team walked onto the field and greeted the opposition, bowing respectfully. Kenta and their opponents captain stayed for the toss which fell in favor of Joto who chose to field first.

Their team retreated back to the dugout and the starting batters got ready, taking practice swings while they could. Keisuke walked up to the batters box and did his usual shenanigans, pointing his bat towards the pitcher and squaring up.

The pitcher was a stocky teenager who seemed a little short to play at the position. However, when Ken saw him, a flood of memories came rushing into his mind.

'Ah damn it, this might be tough.' He said inwardly.

In his previous life during his 3rd year of middle school, this pitcher had given them the biggest headache of the Kanto tournament. He had a shameless pitching style, not afraid to hit a batter in order to send a message.

'Kotaro Ishikawa...'

They were in for a tough battle. He quickly walked over to the coach and gave his evaluation of the pitcher, all the while play had already started.

Just as the coach was about to question where he learned these things from.

"Dead ball!"

Keisuke yelled out in pain as the ball struck his hip. He winced and hopped around while trying to deal with the initial pain of the pitch.

The coach's eyes widened and he swallowed his next words, clearly Ken's worries were true. Unfortunately, there was nothing that he could do about it right now considering it was just the first time.

The umpire gave a warning to Kotaro, who apologized profusely. Yet when he turned to walk back to the mound, an imperceptible grin formed on his face, showing his true colors.

Next up in the batters box was Jin, the first baseman. The next few balls from Kotaro were nothing out of the ordinary, just fastballs with decent pace behind them.

Before he knew it Jin was behind in the count, sitting at 1-2 (1 ball, 2 strikes).

The next pitch thrown was slow, causing Jin's eyes to light up. He put strength behind his swing like he wanted to hit it out of the park.

Pah

"3 strikes, out!"

"Huh?" Jin was mystified. How could he miss a ball that was traveling so slow?

Feeling a wave of confusion overcome him, Jin walked back to the dugout like he was lost.

While others may not have seen it, the pitch that Kotaro threw was a knuckleball. The knuckleball was one of, if not the hardest breaking ball to master in baseball. It required the pitcher to throw the ball with no spin, which would cause an erratic and unpredictable course as it flew through the air.

Not only did the pitcher have to be skilled, the catcher would also need to have their wits about them.

Ken frowned. This was the real reason why they had struggled so much in the Kanto tournament of that year, the unknown pitcher with a knuckleball.

Kenta was next up. He had seen the slower ball, yet he wasn't sure what it was either. Yet instead of worrying about it, he would let his bat do the talking.

Unfortunately, he was struck out the same way. Fastballs which were just on the edge of the strike zone would bait the swings and then the knuckleball to finish the count.

"Out!"

Despite the situation, Ken almost laughed out loud thanks to the exaggerated look of disappointment on the captain's face. He didn't know what it was, but Kenta's expressions always seemed to make him laugh.

"Daichi, you're going to have to swing early in the count. The moment you hit 2 strikes, he'll hit you with that slower ball." Ken got his brother's attention and gave him some advice.

Daichi nodded, a look of determination creeping onto his face as he made his way up to bat.

When he was ready, Kotaro wound up and sent the ball flying towards the outside. The course looked to be just scraping the edge of the strike zone, something that could get called either way.

"Hmph."

Daichi let out a grunt and swung wide with his large shoulders. He had decided to take Ken's advice and swing at the earlier pitches, sinking his all into it.

DONG

The sound was a little crisper than usual, meaning Daichi had probably hit it closer to the end of the bat instead of the middle. Yet with his gargantuan strength, the ball rocketed to the outfield high over the first base head.

DING!

An eruption of cheers rang out from the dugout as the ball crashed into the foul pole. Daichi's face lit up as he threw the bat to the ground and began his victory lap around the bases.

Ken breathed a sigh of relief as Daichi ran around all of the bases and arrived home. As long as they had some runs on the board, he wouldn't be worried about losing the game.

The next two batters Tatsuya and Takeshi fell prey to the same tactics that Kenta had faced in his first at-bat, promptly being struck out by the knuckleball.

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

Chapter 58 - 58: 2nd Round (2)

Then it was Seiko's turn to field. Kouichi stood upon the mound looking loose and relaxed. He had only begun pitching again a few days ago and was pleased to notice that he felt no more pain.

The break paired with the training regimen had helped improve his throwing action and stamina. He was of course without his forkball now, but that was a small price to pay, especially after learning the 2-seam fastball.

Kouichi was on fire, shutting out the first 3 batters with only 9 pitches. Ken gawked, inwardly feeling remorse that he hadn't listened to his father in his previous life.

Of course he was capable of doing the same thing against this opposition who were centered around the pitching of Kotaro. This was the main reason why Ken was so relieved when Daichi had put some runs on the board, because Joto did not have a great batting line up.

The game continued like this for the next 8 innings, with Kouichi only giving up a single hit and no runs. Daichi was taken out of the game thanks to Joto realizing he was the only threat and deciding to walk him whenever he was in the batting box.

At first he was frustrated, but then he realized that it didn't matter as long as they won the game.

Ken once again was forced to sit on the side lines as the team clinched their 2nd round win over Joto in the Kanto Tournament. The Coach had come up to him during the game and praised that his mentoring had such a great effect on Kouichi.

Despite the praise, Ken cut straight to the heart of the matter, asking when he would get some playing time. He had improved so much that he knew he could make an impact on the game more than Jin who was in his place.

The coach grinned, "I was just about to mention this to you after the game. But I'm planning on starting you for the remaining games of the tournament. Are you ready to show me how much you've improved?"

Ken's face lit up, clearly not expecting such a straight answer from the Coach.

"Yes coach!"

Like that, everyone returned back home in good spirits, especially Ken who had just found out he would be joining the starting line up for the next game.

Daichi had noticed his chirpy expression ever since the end of the game, but had only decided to ask him about it over dinner. If it was what he was guessing, then it would be better to discuss away from the ears of his teammates.

"You're looking awfully happy today Big Bro." Daichi stated with a smile.

"Who me? What gave you that impression?" Ken asked, unable to remove the dumb smile that had been plastered on his face the entire afternoon.

"Just a feeling... So did the Coach tell you that you're in the starting line up next game?" He asked, feeling a sense of relief inwardly. Daichi had also been affected by the coach's decision to sit out Ken to watch over Kouichi.

In his opinion, the best players should be out on the field, no matter the circumstances. Well, unless someone was injured of course.

Ken's eyes narrowed, "Are you some kind of mind reader?" he asked suspiciously.

Daichi just stared at him silently for a few moments, as if to ask if he was stupid.

"Mom, I need some aluminum foil. Daichi is a mind reader!" Ken shot up from the table exaggeratedly and began looking for the roll of foil.

"Hahaha." Yuki began giggling in response, only for Daichi to join in moments later.

Of course Ken was just being silly, but he was in a great mood after being suppressed for so long. He would finally be able to play with his brother on the biggest stage for Middle School baseball.

Ken sat down and sent a wink Daichi's way. "We'll both be on the starting line up for the next game. Just 3 more wins until we win the tournament."

Daichi nodded, feeling his body fill with determination. "Will there be scouts at any of the games?" He asked.

"Only at the final game, so we need to at least make it up to there."

The two seemed fired up, even after dinner had finished. Yuki sent them off so she could have some peace and quiet for a while before heading to bed. She decided to call her husband and inform him of the good news.

"That's great!" Chris exclaimed through the phone speaker, causing Yuki to move it away from her ear for a moment.

"Yeah, thank goodness. I was starting to get a little worried about Kenny over the past couple of weeks." She admitted.

"I'll admit, it was a little selfish of the Coach to do what he did. Even I was about to give him a call and give him a piece of my mind."

Yuki smiled, she did not doubt his words. When it came to his family, Chris wouldn't be afraid to jump into a den of lions as long as it was to save them from harm.

When they had adopted Daichi, Chris had insisted on taking the role of foreign adviser for the NPB and Major League venture because it paid a lot more. Unfortunately, this led to his workload increasing significantly and he was away from home a lot more often.

However, Chris and Yuki's marriage was strong. They both agreed that having her stay at home and look after kids was the best way to raise them.

"When are you coming back home? I miss you." She said softly, staring out the window solemnly.

"I won't be home for another 3 weeks... I miss you too." He said tenderly.

Yuki looked a little sad, however her eyes lit up in the next moment. "If the boys make it to the finals, it'll be in about 3 weeks time. That means we'll be able to watch!" she exclaimed excitedly.

Chris was silent for a while before responding, "That sounds great, but don't tell them. I don't want to add any more pressure onto their shoulders."

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

Chapter 59 - 59: Stepping onto the Pitch

The next week went quickly for the two boys who had kept up with their training religiously. There was an additional fire in their bellies as they spurred each other on to improve at a rapid rate.

Soon enough, the day of the game arrived.

After barely squeaking by Joto middle school, they were up against Itakura Junior High. While this team had limited success during their baseball tournaments, Ken knew something that the others did not.

If he remembered correctly, a first year by the name of Hayato Yagi would have joined the squad this year. He was a clean up batter who would eventually turn pro, joining the ranks of the Yokohama Warriors in his 2nd year of university.

Thankfully, Ken saw Hayato's name as one of the reserves in their line up. Either he had not impressed the coach enough yet, or his skills had yet to manifest. Out of curiosity, Ken activated his Identify function while they were lining up.

TO USE IDENTIFY ON THIS TARGET WILL COST 20 MAJOR POINTS DUE TO THE DISPARITY IN ABILITIES. WOULD YOU LIKE TO CONTINUE?

[YES/NO]

Ken stealthily chose the yes button and managed to get a look at his status.

NAME: Hayato Yagi

AGE: 13

TALENT ASSESSMENT: C+

POTENTIAL: SS

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: B

>Pitching: C

>Fielding: B

>Game Intelligence: B

>Mental: B-

HAYATO YAGI'S DATA HAS BEEN ADDED TO THE COMPENDIUM.

'Another genius... His stats were way better than mine, and he's only 13.' Ken commented inwardly.

'Looks like the coach made a real blunder by keeping this guy on the bench. Kind of reminds me of another coach...' He complained inwardly, turning his gaze to Coach Yoshida who was shaking hands with the oppositions coach.

Perhaps he felt Ken's eyes drilling into the side of his face, because he soon turned around and sent a small smile in his direction.

The coin toss went to Seiko who decided to field first.

In the dugout, Ken was putting on his glove and baseball cap when suddenly he heard the sound of a notification.

DING

SYSTEM HAS DETECTED THAT USER WILL BE PLAYING IN THE KANTO TOURNAMENT - NEW MISSION AVAILABLE.

#NEW MISSION: Kanto Tournament

*Task 1: Get on base 20 times

*Task 2: Hit 3 home runs

*Task 3: Make the finals of the Kanto Tournament

*Task 4: Win the Tournament

*Task 5: Win player of the Tournament

REWARDS:

>Task 1 rewards - B-grade Agility Exlir

>Task 2 rewards - Silver Lottery Ticket + 300 Major points

>Task 3 rewards - Silver Lottery Ticket + 500 Major points

>Task 4 rewards - Gold Lottery Ticket + 500 Major points

>Task 5 rewards - A-grade Mental Elixir + 300 Major points

Ken almost exclaimed aloud at the mission tasks and rewards. If he felt motivated before, he now felt as if he was burning all over. It seemed that the system would reward him the more he played in organized baseball.

'We have to win...' He commented inwardly.

He ascended the stairs from the dugout onto the field. The moment he stepped onto the field, he felt an influx of emotions stir within his heart, causing him to stop in place.

Daichi slapped him in the middle of the back on his way past and smiled.

"Let's go win." He said simply.

The slap seemed to knock all of Ken's emotions back into place, bringing him back to the present. Embracing the stinging sensation in the middle of his back, he flashed a grin before jogging over to first base.

"Play ball!"

The umpires called out, sending the first batter up to the box. Kouichi on the mound was the picture of confidence as he performed his wind up, sending the ball roaring into the strike zone.

"Strike"

The batter swung on the first pitch, not expecting the movement from the ball at the last second. Ken smiled, it seemed that Kouichi had truly integrated the two-seam fastball into his arsenal.

"Strike out!"

"Strike out!"

"3 outs, change!"

Ken blinked a few times before following the others back into the dugout. He gave Kouichi a nudge and notified him that he could let the batters hit if he wanted.

"Haha, nope. Just because you've made the starting line up, doesn't mean you'll get any action." Kouichi said, poking out his tongue in response.

Keisuke happened to be close by and couldn't help but bursting out into laughter at Kouichi's response. Ken could only shake his head in exasperation.

'Kids these days.' He thought inwardly.

It was now Seiko's turn to bat against Itakura Junior High. The Coach gave Keisuke the signal to do as he pleased while in the batters box, receiving a nod in response.

The first pitch was sent flying towards the outfield by Keisuke who had already begun his dash towards the first base. Unfortunately, the ball was easily caught by the right outfielder.

"Out!"

Keisuke clicked his tongue and headed back to the dugout, yet no one seemed worried as it was only the first at-bat. Most players took time to adjust to the pitchers throws, finally gaining success in their second or third at-bat.

Ken's turn was next. He walked up to the batters box with confidence and determination practically oozing from his body. He had been waiting for this moment ever since the first game of the Kanagawa Tournament almost 2 months ago.

Even Coach Yoshida raised an eyebrow in surprise of how Ken was carrying himself. As he looked at his back from the dugout, he did not see a nervous teenager. This was someone that looked like a professional.

The first pitch came at him at just over 100km/h but Ken did not take a swipe at it. He lifted his leg and performed a checked swing, stopping before it went over home plate.

This was something that he had been doing in the image training realm, using it to get the timing down before he chose which ball to swing at.

As long as his bat was not swung through the strike zone, it wouldn't be considered a strike.

"Ball."

Thankfully the umpire was sharp today and called the pitch correctly. Thus Ken focused once again and prepared for the next pitch.

"Ball."

Once again, Ken performed a check swing before nodding. All he needed was two balls in order to get the timing right, now he was confident in being able to match the speed of the ball.

The pitcher seemed calm and collected, however he could hear a grumble behind him from the catcher.

"Are you gonna swing or what?" He mumbled under his breath.

It seemed his checked swings were starting to annoy the catcher, causing a small smile to form on his face.

"Don't worry, I'll swing when you give me a good pitch." Ken replied, letting out a chuckle.

The catcher seethed inwardly after hearing the reply. He stood up and placed his glove close to Ken's body, practically telling the pitcher to throw the ball at him.

The pitcher's face looked a little shocked, however he did as he was told. Winding up and throwing a blazing ball towards the open glove situated behind Ken.

'What the hell!?' Ken could instantly see the ball's trajectory and made a split decision to duck, only for the ball to whoosh past his head in the last moment.

"Ball."

The umpire called the ball, but he was not impressed. He placed his hand on the catcher's shoulder and warned him sternly before pointing at the pitcher and doing the same.

Ken managed to keep his cool, likely because his mind was more mature than the other teenagers. However, he didn't let such a thing go.

He clicked his tongue a few times and muttered under his breath.

"Tsk Tsk, I'm surprised you got this far with a battery like this. Too bad this will be your last game."

This seemed to incense the catcher even more, but he could not try the same thing again because of already receiving a warning. If he were to repeat the same action again it was possible that he and the pitcher would be ejected from the game.

'Alright Nobu, let's beat this guy fair and square with your pitching.' He said inwardly, positioning his glove outside and low.

Nobu the pitcher nodded and performed his wind up, firing the ball with great control exactly to where the outstretched glove of the catcher was.

'Yes! Perfect pitch!' the catcher shouted out inwardly.

However, Ken was also thinking the same thing. Ken performed a textbook swing that closely resembled Daichi's form, both of which they had learned from their father. Time

seemed to slow down as the ball was struck with tremendous force and flew towards the right outfield.

The moment he hit the ball, Ken knew that it was a home run. The sound of the bat paired with the feeling of hitting the middle, instantly told him all he needed to know.

A foreign feeling entered his body as he threw the bat down and jogged around the bases. It was only at this moment that he realized that this was his first home run between both of his lives.

As he crossed the first base he heard the cheers of his teammates in the dugout, causing him to look over. Daichi was the loudest out of the bunch, his face filled to the brim with happiness.

He was a little far away, but Ken thought that he might have seen tears welling up in the teenagers eyes.

'It's not that big of a deal right? It's only 1 run... right?' He thought inwardly.

Yet Ken felt a lump begin to form in his throat before his eyes began to mist up. Before he knew it, tears began to fall as his pent up emotions came rising to the surface. This was the feeling he had been yearning for all these years. This sense of accomplishment.

As he rounded third base, he saw Daichi waiting for him at home plate, despite not being up to bat next. He was grinning ear to ear and cheering him on loudly.

While everyone else was happy about the home run, perhaps no one other than Daichi knew how much this meant to Ken. All those months of preparation and sacrifice were now worth it as he stormed towards home plate.

As soon as Ken's foot touched down at home, Daichi picked up his brother effortlessly and embraced him tightly.

In that moment, Ken felt the happiest he had been in both of his lives, despite making it to Koshien before in his High School career.

It only took him a while to realize that it was because of Daichi. His best friend and now his brother had cheered him on throughout both his lives, even when he had continued to push him away.

Ken felt all of his remaining guilt and self loathing from his previous life disappear, filling him with a sense of freedom.

It wasn't till now that he finally recognized that despite being given another chance, he still carried those burdens over.

Ken had finally taken a step forward in his new life, together with his best friend and brother Daichi.

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

Chapter 60 - 60: War of Attrition (1)

Ken basked in his newfound freedom, feeling unfettered like a bird soaring in the sky. He wrapped his arm around Daichi like he had done many times before, yet this time it felt different.

He no longer saw Daichi as the one in his previous life, although he would forever be grateful to him. The Daichi in front of him was different, he was his brother.

'No matter what, we'll both go pro.' He vowed inwardly.

When he returned to the dugout, Coach Yoshida who was usually reserved, placed his hand on Ken's shoulder.

"You did well."

The words were simple, yet the tone in which they were said spoke volumes. This paired with his expression showed that the Coach understood he had wronged Ken and despite not saying this aloud, Ken understood his intentions.

Sometimes men didn't need an apology and it seemed that this was one of those times.

Ken was in a great mood so he merely took the compliment and turned his attention back to the game. Despite getting a home run, they had only gotten 1 run on the board as of now.

Up to bat was Kenta, the expressive captain who Ken believed would suck at poker for obvious reasons. After fouling a few times, he was eventually struck out by the pitcher with a slow curve which caught him off guard.

Wearing his emotions clearly on his face, Kenta frowned as he returned to the dugout.

"Let's go Daichi!" Ken yelled out words of encouragement as Daichi went up to bat. They currently had 2 outs so it would be a changeover if he got out here.

Daichi let the first couple of pitches go to the catcher, getting a feel for the speed and timing he would need to utilize. When the 3rd pitch came it was the slow curve which curved away from Daichi.

Feeling a little off guard, he tried to adjust his form and somehow managed to make contact with the ball, sending it between 1st and 2nd base. He was a little disappointed that he had been baited into going after a bad ball, but he still managed to safely get onto 1st base.

Tatsuya was up next, yet he was led by the nose and ended up striking out in only 3 pitches.

"3 outs, change!"

Ken grabbed his hat and glove before making his way onto the field again. They had managed to get one run on the board in the first innings, yet he was in no way satisfied with such a small lead.

Kouichi stood on the mound once more, ready to take on the clean-up batters of Itakura. The best batters were usually at the top of the order, with the heavy hitters generally being placed at 3rd, 4th and 5th.

This was because home runs were worth more when there were runners on base. A lead-off hitter like Ken and Keisuke were tasked with getting on base no matter what, setting up opportunities for the clean-up hitters to send them home.

Therefore, Kouichi had to be careful of the next 3 batters and attempt to keep their 1 run lead.

The first pitch came flying towards the open glove of Daichi, a sharp four-seam fastball on the inside.

DONG

The ball was sent straight to the captain at 3rd base who collected the ball and sent a throw to first.

"Ah damn" Kenta called out as soon as the ball left his hand.

Ken watched the ball come his way. He could see the Itakura player running towards him with great speed. In this situation, his job was to remain calm and simply catch the ball while his foot was planted on 1st base.

Yet as he saw the ball approaching, he could instantly tell that it was too high and was going to sail over his head. His mind worked quickly as he decided to prioritize

collecting the ball and preventing the runner advancing any further, even if it meant that he was safe.

Ken jumped up high with all of his might, stretching out his long left arm and snatching the ball out of the air. He only managed to hold onto it thanks to the Sticky glove skill which he had earned from the Silver lottery.

Yet in the time that he was airborne, the runner was close enough to the base that it did not matter.

"Safe!"

"S-Sorry Ken!" Kenta yelled out from the other side of the field.

"It's fine." Ken waved his hand to say that it was okay. As long as they got the next couple of guys out it wouldn't matter.

However, surprisingly enough, the next two batters also managed to hit a single, finding gaps in their defenses and loading the bases. Before they knew it, it was already no outs with 3 runners on base.

Ken frowned, what had happened to the confident and amazing Kouichi from the 1st innings?

He looked at Daichi with a raised eyebrow as if directing that question at him. Daichi decided to take a brief time out before the next batter came up to the plate.

"You all good man?" He approached the mound and spoke into his glove so no one could overhear what he was saying.

"Yeah I'm fine." Kouichi replied, looking a little frustrated.

"Your pitches are sharp, just make sure you follow my lead and pitch directly into my glove okay?"

"Okay no worries."

After a brief chat, Daichi returned into position and the game was restarted.

Daichi had plenty of experience now in the catcher position. With the Coach and his father mentoring him, he had quickly acclimatized to the new position.

While his leading was still a little immature, he was brilliant in picking up the quirks and habits of his pitcher. He had noticed that Kouichi tended to throw too hard sometimes, especially when he was tense.

While the pitches would generate more speed, the control would always suffer. Therefore he had told Kouichi to focus on throwing it into his glove, in hopes that he wouldn't try and throw so hard.

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