

Major League System

Chapter 461 - 461: End of the Deadlock (1)

The entire field was caught off guard, except for two people. Both Hiroki and Daichi sprinted from their marks as if they knew what was going to happen.

What was once a routine intentional walk suddenly turned the field into chaos.

The ball flew past the guy on first base and into the outfield. Since no one was expecting the ball to be hit, the US team were slow off the mark.

"GET THE BALL!"

Both Darius in the right outfield and Davion on 1st base locked eyes as if not knowing who should go for the ball. It wasn't until the shout from Leo behind the plate reached their ears that both of them surged forward.

Ken's eyes were locked onto the now vacant 1st base as he lowered his head and pumped his legs like a freight train. As long as he got safely onto the base, they would get at least 1 run from the exchange.

He saw Ryan running towards the base from the mound, yet he promptly ignored him. Judging by their running speed, they would arrive at a similar time.

Meanwhile, Hiroki was barreling down towards home plate with vicious intention. Part of him wished Leo would stand in his way so he could run through him, yet it seemed he wouldn't get such a chance.

Tap

Hiroki's foot landed on home plate before he quickly got out of the way and surveyed the field. Daichi had already placed his foot on 3rd base and was on his way home.

"FIRST!"

Ken lifted his head slightly and could see the fielder in the act of throwing. The call had come from Ryan who was right beside him, though this only brought a smile to his face.

'I'll make it there first.' He thought, easily calculating the distances.

Yet what happened next was out of his expectations.

He felt an almighty push from his left side, knocking Ken off balance. His eyes widened in shock before he was sent crashing to the ground, rolling a few times in part due to how fast he was running.

Pah~

Ryan stepped onto first base and held his glove out towards the umpire, waiting for the out verdict. A few moments later, Daichi stepped onto home plate and turned around to see Ken on the ground in the foul zone.

'What happened?'

"BOO!"

Before the umpire could make the call, a collective boo from the crowd erupted, filling the stadium with jeers.

"What the hell was that!?"

"This isn't football, what a joke."

What was quite surprising was that this was meant to be a home game for the United States team, yet their fans were not happy with Ryan's conduct. They had come to see the best of the new generation yet were met with such a scene.

First it was the intentional walk, now it was the dirty push on the noble Japanese player.

Ken was a little shaken, but he managed to get up slowly. Since he hadn't been expecting the push, he wasn't able to brace himself for impact, yet perhaps that was why he didn't suffer any injuries.

He too looked at the umpire and awaited his decision.

"What the hell man!? You can't just push my Ken over!" Ai yelled out at the TV, her whole body shaking with rage.

If Rie didn't stop her, she would have thrown her drink at the TV in anger.

Back on the field, the 1st base umpire didn't feel comfortable making the decision by himself, gesturing towards the plate umpire before walking towards the edge of the field together.

Mark was in the US dugout massaging his temples slowly. When Ryan had pushed Ken he had quickly gotten angry and almost stormed onto the field.

Not only was it his Grandson getting pushed, it also was a dangerous play. There were plenty of other ways to get in front of the runner and avoid risking an obstruction call, yet the heated teen had taken matters into his own hands.

Perhaps it was retaliation for being played with, or maybe he just had a bad temper. Either way, they were in this current predicament thanks to Ryan's decisions.

As the two umpires were talking to each other, Ken was rubbing the dirt off of him and standing beside 1st base. There was a smile painted on his features, though he kept his mouth shut.

'As long as the umpire isn't blind, we'll get a favorable call.' He thought.

To Ken, the scenario was clear, even when he looked at it objectively. The ball hadn't even left the fielders hand when he'd been pushed out of the way by Ryan, it was a clear obstruction.

"Want me to knock you on your ass again?" Ryan said, his fiery blue eyes staring at Ken.

Ryan was pissed off that Ken was still wearing that stupid smile. For some reason, he felt like he was being mocked every time he saw it, filling him with anger.

"Hahaha." Ken merely laughed and shook his head.

'He truly is a kid.'

Just before Ryan was about to respond, the umpires seemed to be done with their talks.

"Obstruction by the fielder. We have safe on 1st base and the other two runners are home."

At these words, the crowd cheered and so did the Japanese dugout. The pitchers duel had finally been broken with Japan now taking a 2-0 lead in the 7th inning.

"What!? You can't be serious..." Ryan was livid after hearing the result. If it wasn't for Davion on 1st base holding him back, he would have exploded at the umpire.

Ken shrugged, adding his two cents without being asked. "It was the right call, what can I say?"

This only served to make Ryan even more angry, to the point where he almost lashed out again. Yet before he could, he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder.

Just as he was about to retaliate, he heard his coach's voice in his ear.

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

Chapter 462 - 462: End of the Deadlock (2)

"Calm down before I throw you off my team."

The words were deep and terrifying, causing him to freeze on the spot.

Mark Williams turned Ryan around and led him back to the mound, not before apologizing to the umpire's briefly.

On the way back to the mound, Ryan was like a child who had gotten in trouble. Any thoughts of getting angry or back chatting had been quickly thrown to the back of his mind. Judging by the tone of the coach's voice, he wasn't happy.

"I don't understand." Coach Williams said when they arrived at the mound.

"W-What do you mean?" Ryan asked, genuinely confused.

"You were willing to throw away your pride and walk Ken earlier, yet in the next breath you threw away the chance to save a run because of it." Mark said, looking down at Ryan, with a frown on his face.

Ryan himself didn't know what had come over him. After being hit while trying to throw an intentional walk, he felt a rush of embarrassment which turned to anger. Pushing Ken had definitely made him feel better, but it did not last long.

After seeing the teen was silent, Mark placed his hands on both of the guy's shoulders and leaned down.

"The game isn't over yet. Pull yourself together and follow Leo's leads... If you do something like that again, you'll be watching the rest of the match from the bench."

After saying what he needed to say, Mark briefly looked up and saw Ken standing on 1st base. He received a thumbs up from Ken, causing an imperceptible smile to appear on his lips for a moment before he turned around and headed back to the dugout.

'Did he plan all of that?' Mark thought, thinking back to the last at-bat.

If it was true, then his Grandson was an absolute genius. It also meant that he was both cognizant of other's emotions and knew how to elicit a reaction from certain people.

In short, it was emotional warfare.

'It seems like he was born to be on a baseball field...!' Mark commented inwardly.

Meanwhile, Hiroki and Daichi had already returned to their dugout, receiving high fives like they were free samples at Costco. The two were heroes, having finally recorded some runs against the stalwart US team.

Daichi even received a hug and a peck on the cheek from Miho when nobody was looking, causing his face to turn beet red in an instant.

"You're the best Hiroki~ I could kiss you!"

Hiroki on the other hand, had to stop the advances of Aki who was trying to kiss him.

"Piss off!"

Taking a page out of Captain Makoto's book, he sent an uppercut to Aki's mid section, turning the guy into a prawn on the ground.

"OOOOF."

"Batting 6th, 2nd base, Ichiro."

'I'm so sick of this...'

Ichiro was almost in tears as he walked out onto the field after Ken's flashy display. He could feel the excitement of the crowd instantly die down. In fact, it looked like everyone had picked this time to either go to the toilets or get some hot dogs.

Even Ken's mother who had constantly been cheering the whole game was currently on her phone, leisurely browsing.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

PAH

"Strike."

Even now at his 3rd at-bat, Ichiro wasn't even close to the fastballs that were being thrown. He was as helpless now as he was at the start of the game, causing him to shed tears inwardly.

DING

"Ah!?"

The ball he incidentally hit, went straight to Ryan on the mound who leisurely threw it to the first base for an easy out.

"Out."

"3 outs, changeover!"

Making contact with the ball was such a surprise that he had barely been given the chance to run before the ball had ended up at first base.

"Don't mind Ichiro. Hit it a bit further next time okay?"

Ken pat him on the shoulder on their way to the dugout, causing him to almost lash out.

'Damn it! I don't wanna hear that from you!'

Ever since he had been moved to 6th batter after Ken, he had lost all confidence. It wasn't that his skills had regressed, just that Ken's performance was too good in comparison to his own.

He was truly an Extra in this World Cup.

'Maybe I should retire after High School...' He thought.

It was now the bottom of the 7th inning with Japan taking the field. After breaking the pitchers duel, they looked to be in a great position with a score of 2-0 in their favor.

This was especially the case since Ken still looked full of energy.

"Batting 1st, Center outfield, Santiago."

Now that they were behind, Santiago seemed a little more serious. While he did send Ken and Daichi a smile, it didn't take long for him to get into position, his figure pulsing with determination.

This would likely be his last at-bat unless they were able to get some hits flowing.

Daichi could tell that his "Uncle" was ready to smash the ball, but he had complete faith in Ken's pitching. Till now, the only person who had been able to make contact with Ken's fastball was their captain, Leo.

After crouching down, Daichi called for Ken's specialty, planning to keep up their momentum.

Of course Ken nodded before beginning his wind up and sending a blizzing fastball towards the outside.

WHOOOOSH

DING

The ball ricocheted off the bat and into the foul zone along the ground.

"Foul."

Daichi sucked in a cold breath of air. He hadn't expected Santiago to make contact with that ball, though he thought it might be a bit of a fluke.

'Let's try again.'

Once more Ken threw another fastball, this time towards the bottom of the strike zone.

DING

The ball was tipped yet there was not enough contact for it to alter the course of the ball much. Daichi was able to still catch the ball and complete the strike.

"Strike."

Now feeling a little nervous, Daichi called for a changeup. Since Santiago was getting accustomed to the fastballs, it was the next logical step to throw one.

Yet when he called for it, Ken shook his head, vetoing the lead.

'Huh? He doesn't want to throw it?'

Daichi blinked in confusion.

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

Chapter 463 - 463: I'll make you my Rival (1)

Ken saw Daichi call for the changeup and felt incredulous. Of course Daichi wouldn't know that he didn't have the ability to throw that ball unless showdown was active.

He could try, but he wasn't prepared to take such a risk at this moment. Not after they'd worked so hard to finally break the deadlock of the pitchers duel.

Therefore he shook his head in response to the lead.

Daichi frowned. He wasn't prepared to call for another fastball, so he made the sign for a curveball instead. Yet he received another no as response.

At this point Daichi was getting a little annoyed. Usually Ken would leave him to make the decisions and only occasionally reject his leads, but not this time apparently.

Forkball, no.

Fastball, no.

'What the hell do you want to throw then? Do you know any other pitches?' Daichi screamed internally, becoming rather annoyed.

"Ah..."

He suddenly remembered his conversation with Ken before the game. He'd been so shocked at the mention of a changeup that he had forgotten Ken had another pitch he'd yet to throw.

Daichi mumbled something about Ken being reckless before finally calling for the ball Ken wanted to throw.

Thankfully, Ken nodded before sending him an apologetic glance. He knew that he had annoyed his brother, but they needed to be sure of striking out Santiago.

Ken lifted his left leg up high, placing his hands together near his chest. With a powerful step forward, his arm whipped out, sending the ball towards the strike zone.

Santiago's eyes lit up, he saw the ball spinning wildly and deduced that it was another fastball.

'I'm hitting this one!'

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout!"

The bat fell short of the ball which seemed to slither away from the plate.

Santiago stood in place with shock for a few moments as he tried to understand what pitch he'd just faced.

"Was that a cutter? No it was too low..."

While Santiago was trying to figure it out, Mark, Chris and Coach Takashi had their jaws almost dislocate as they dropped simultaneously.

"SLIDER!? How many pitches does your son know? And why didn't you tell me!?"

The Head Coach's eyes shined in wonder as he grabbed Chris by the collar and began to swing him around. Due to their height and age difference it looked rather comical, but Chris was too stunned to speak.

Mark could only let out a small chuckle after coming to terms with what had just happened.

"Just what kind of monster have you been hiding..." Mark said, his gaze turning to his son in the other dugout.

Santiago made his way back to the dugout, still trying to figure out what pitch he was thrown out on. It was then that Mark placed his hand on the teen's shoulder and smiled.

"It was a slider, and a wicked one at that." He said simply.

A look of realization surfaced on Santiago's face. Since Ken's pitch was still so fast, the slider almost felt like a cutter in a way, confusing him a little.

"He's strong..."

"Mmm, and he's only gonna get better." Mark remarked with a hint of pride.

"I really wish we could see him more often. You know, before..." His words trailed off before he could finish his sentence.

Mark wasn't expecting those words from Santiago and was slightly taken aback. Throughout the World Cup he'd been too focused on work and his miraculous recovery to fully think things through.

No matter the result tonight, all of the World Cup teams would be returning to their home countries. This of course meant that Ken, Daichi, Chris and Yuki would be returning to Japan.

He felt a sense of loneliness that he had been repressing ever since becoming sick threaten to overwhelm him.

Mark also saw the look of sadness on his sons face and felt a mixture of emotions. He had not told Santiago of his cured status as of yet, wanting to surprise the whole family after the match today.

Yet he couldn't keep the news any longer knowing of his sons sorrow.

"Santiago... I have some news."

A few moments later, Santiago burst into tears, burying his face into his father's chest. His helmet was still on so the old man must have felt a little pain from the impact, but he took it in his stride.

It was punishment for withholding the information from his son.

On the field, Ken happened to look over and see the embrace. While many might think Santiago was hugging the coach since he was upset about getting out, Ken thought different.

'Does that mean he's healed?' Ken felt a seed of hope beginning to bloom inside of his heart, but he did not want to nurture it just yet.

It was a beautiful sight no matter who saw the scene. The perceived act of the coach consoling his player after being struck out on the biggest stage for Youth Baseball, it was truly touching.

Only now did the crowd remember that these were teenagers playing on the field right now. While they may be the next generation of professional players, they were still boys making the transition to adulthood.

Suddenly, the reactions to Ryan Smith's conduct were a little easier to forgive.

"Batting 2nd, Short stop, Ayden."

Everyone's attention was brought back to the field as Ayden's name was called over the speakers. He stepped into the batters box much like he did the last time, with very little faith in hitting the ball.

Ken's fastballs were just too tricky and too fast to hit.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

PAH

"Strike."

PAH

"Strikeout!"

Only a couple minutes after stepping into the batters box was Ayden sent back to the dugout with a self-deprecating smile on his face.

"Sorry Sammy, I still can't hit them." He said, feeling a little dejected.

"Don't worry Ayden, we'll get those runs back." Sam's deep voice rang out as he walked past his friend and onto the field.

"Batting 3rd, 3rd base, Sam."

As the big guy stepped into the batters box, he was wearing a big grin.

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

- Chapter 464 - 464: I'll make you my Rival (2)

Chapter 464 - 464: I'll make you my Rival (2)

His eyes were locked onto Ken the entire time as he waited for the pitch.

'Fastball, changeup, I'll hit whatever you throw at me...!' Sam thought, gripping his bat tightly.

WHOOOOOOSH

DING

The very first pitch was a fastball on the outside which was promptly sent into the foul zone by Sam's mighty swing. The pressure from the bat surging through the air was enough to make Daichi nervous.

"Foul."

Like all good batters, Sam was starting to pick up Ken's pitches by the 3rd at-bat. Alongside Leo, the big guy was one of the most dangerous batters on the US team.

Daichi called for the next ball above the strike zone, hoping to bait out a swing. As long as they get another strike, the slider should put the big guy away for good.

Ken nodded before entering his wind up and whipping the ball out of his fingertips. From the batters perspective, it almost seemed as if the ball was rising as it neared the strike zone.

WHOOOOOOSH

DONG!

"Ah!"

Ken's face morphed into panic as he saw the ball get slogged before it could reach Daichi's outstretched glove. He quickly turned towards the ball in the sky and made some calculations in his mind.

'Crap, it's too close to tell...'

The ball went high in the air towards the Center outfield, soaring over Masayuki's head as he ran with all his might towards the back wall.

There was so much hang time that Masayuki had already reached the back wall and was staring up into the sky, waiting for it to come down.

Ken shifted uncomfortably as he waited to see if the ball would stay in or go over for a home run. It was a tense few moments before it happened.

Pah~

"Out!"

"3 outs, changeover!"

"Nice Captain!"

Ken breathed out a sigh of relief, wiping the sweat from his brow with his forearm. It had been a tense few moments as the result was literally up in the air.

Sam who had been running towards first base looked disappointed that he hadn't been able to hit a home run.

"So close..."

The top of the 8th inning began with Aki in the batters box. Despite his boasting skills in the dugout, he was struck out in succession with ease. His wide swings were almost comical as he tried to face Ryan's moving fastballs.

Seeing Aki struggle so much, Ichiro felt a little better.

Kuro suffered a similar fate, though he had at least managed to hit a foul ball on the second swing. Yet the result was the same and he was removed from the field after 3 straight pitches.

Ryan cleaned up Atsushi and put an end to the 8th inning with the score still 2-0 in favor of Japan. He had calmed down since being put in his place by the Head Coach in the previous inning.

'Seems like he's got his priorities straight now.' Ken thought, watching Ryan walk off the field.

In his previous life, Ryan was someone he looked up to. Though he would be lying if he said that he wasn't jealous of the guy.

Now that he could stand on the same field as the American prodigy, Ken's pride wanted nothing more than to show his superiority. Of course he knew that this version of Ryan was not the same player he looked up to, nor was he on the same level.

Just because Ken was winning in this game, didn't mean he was better than Ryan overall. He had the system and was far more wily and mature than Ryan, at least right now.

There was also a large part of him that viewed Ryan as a rival. With Ken's accolades in Japan and now the World Cup, he needed a rival in order to push himself further on the path to become a professional player.

In fact, his action of getting under the guy's skin was a way to push Ryan forward. Ken knew that after this match, he would leave an undeniable mark in Ryan's heart, though maybe not in a positive way.

'It's fine as long as he continues to push himself to get better.' Ken thought inwardly.

"Are you ready Ken?" Chris asked, his tone sounding a little worried.

Ken was broken out of his reverie by his father beside him. He had been in deep thought and hadn't noticed him approach.

"I was born ready." Ken said with a grin.

"Pfft."

Chris let out a scoff and handed his son his glove before smacking him on the backside on the way past.

Ken tightened his cheeks in response, almost letting out a squeal thanks to the unexpected smack.

"HAHAHA!"

Chris burst out into laughter. It was like that time when Ken pitched in the bullpen at the Yokohama Warriors stadium after receiving his first introduction to professional baseball.

Hearing his father laugh, Ken felt his body relax swiftly.

With that he walked onto the field alongside his teammates. He would need to get through Leo in this inning, the US team's most dangerous batter.

"I'm counting on you bro." Ken fell into pace alongside Daichi and put his arm around the guy.

Daichi grinned in response, "You better not refuse my leads again then."

"Ah..." Ken had no response for his brother's words. It wasn't like he could tell him why he didn't want to throw the changeup against anyone but Leo.

Even if he could explain it, would Daichi even believe him?

"A-Alright bet. Let's go put an end to this World Cup." Ken said, holding out his knuckles.

After returning the gesture, Daichi made a shooing motion, sending Ken to the mound as he stopped behind home plate.

When the Japan team were finally in position, the announcer called over the speakers.

"Batting 4th, Catcher, Leo."

With his name being called, Leo approached the batters box, his entire being radiating pressure. His expression was still wearing a cold mask, yet it felt rather scary.

"6 more outs to go." Ken muttered.

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

Chapter 465 - 465: Outclassed (1)

Despite radiating a fierce determination, Leo was feeling rather anxious on the inside. This only increased, when he felt the familiar burst of power from the mound as he stepped into the batters box.

They had been far too careless in the lead up to the game. Yet this current scenario was as much a result of their carelessness as it was Japan's coach's brilliance.

By using Ken as a closing pitcher and limiting his pitching arsenal, they were able to hide his true abilities from everybody in the competition.

Already, Ken had thrown 2 pitches that they'd never seen him throw before. The addition of those 2 pitches might not seem like that much, but it ripped a hole in their already shaky game plan.

Now that Leo had to worry about the changeup and slider, his window of opportunity had shrunk even more.

Leo gripped his bat tightly and stared down the freshman standing on the mound. This game had been eye opening for him in more than one way.

He had thought there was no challenges left for him in High School, yet a player had emerged from the other side of the world to prove him wrong.

Despite only being a freshman, he had held the entire US batting lineup to no hits in 7 innings. If one didn't find this impressive, then they were blind as well as stupid.

'I acknowledge you Ken... But I'm getting a hit this time.' He said inwardly, honing all of his focus on the tall figure upon the mound.

Ken could feel a sense of danger from Leo in the batters box, yet this only served to pump him up. The additional strength coursing through his body felt as if it needed an outlet.

He lifted his left leg high and tucked his arms to his chest, entering his wind up. In the next moment he exploded forth, sending his arm whipping out beside him.

WHOOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike!"

The swing was so intense that it had affected the ball's trajectory despite not making any contact with it. Thankfully Daichi was able to latch onto the ball, a testament to his continuous training and instinctual chemistry with his brother.

This elicited a noise from the crowd. Even from their vantage points, they could tell that the ball was close to being sent packing.

Daichi swallowed his saliva and threw the ball back to Ken.

"Nice pi~tch"

"HAHAHA"

Aki let out an uproarious laughter as he heard Daichi's voice crack. It wasn't just him, the shout was so loud that even those in the outfield had heard it.

Ken did his best to hide his smile, not wanting to embarrass his brother.

Leo on the other hand was still wearing his cold mask. Only now did he remember that the catcher was also a freshman. He'd been so focused on Ken that he'd forgotten about the other genius in the Japanese team.

Daichi's ears had turned bright red after the fact, wanting nothing more than to bury his head in the dirt and hide. If it wasn't for the fact he was in the middle of the finals of the World Cup, he might have even asked to get subbed off.

Yet after looking at the figure of Leo in the batters box oozing fighting spirit, he realized that he was overreacting. He shook his head and quickly adjusted his focus.

'Let's try for another fastball, inside this time.' He thought, calling for the pitch and placing his glove to the desired spot.

Ken also quickly recovered, nodding seriously. He entered his wind up and sent the ball rocketing towards the inside.

Leo's eyes lit up as he adjusted his center of gravity, pivoting his body slightly and letting loose his dreadful swing.

WHOOOOOSH

DOOOONG!

"W-WHOA!"

The crowd screamed and cheered as the ball sailed into the left outfield. At a glance it was easy to tell that the ball was heading over the back wall, yet the trajectory seemed a little off.

Everybody on the field followed the ball, watching with bated breath to see if it would stay fair.

'Go out!'

Michael stood out of his chair and prayed silently. He wasn't in a great position to see the angle of the hit, so he looked at the jumbo screen in worry.

As the ball and the foul post got closer, it was still not obvious what the result would be.

In the end, the ball made it into the stands without touching the foul post.

"Tch."

"Foul!"

All of the Japanese players on the field let out a collective sigh of relief after catching a break. The hit was far too close for comfort.

At this point, Daichi was freaking out. He knew that they couldn't throw any more fastballs to Leo otherwise they'd risk giving up a home run.

'We have to throw that now...'

With his mind made up, Daichi squatted down and made the signal, receiving a nod from Ken in response.

Leo's eyes narrowed.

'Here it comes...'

There was no way that any sane catcher would call for another fastball in this situation, not when he'd almost sent the last one packing with ease.

Ken entered his windup and sent the ball out, using the same action as his fastball.

'There it is!'

Leo's eyes scanned the ball and could see a difference in the shade of the ball. This was what the Head Coach had told him to look out for since changeup's spin slower than a fastball.

Since it spun slower, the seam would appear less often, giving it a lighter shade than a fastball. It was truly difficult to pick, yet Leo's mind had the capacity to differentiate between the two.

WHOOOOOSH

DONG

Leo felt a lot less contact on the ball than he would have wanted, but he still quickly threw the bat down and ran towards first base as fast as he could.

Riku only managed to collect the ball by the time the guy had almost arrived onto 2nd base.

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

Chapter 466 - 466: Outclassed (2)

'How did he hit that changeup?'

Both Ken and Daichi were stumped. They had only thrown the pitch a single time before, yet the guy was able to get a double from it.

'What a monster...!' Ken thought inwardly.

"Nice hit Leo!"

The home crowd cheered loudly as finally the US team had managed to get a hit against the Japanese relentless defense. Now that it was the 8th inning, their chances to score were running out.

"It should have been me..." Sam mumbled to himself, feeling a little depressed.

Before the duo of Ken and Daichi had recovered, the announcer introduced the next batter.

"Batting 5th, 2nd base, Ryder."

A teen with black hair and a serious expression walked into the batters box. His shoulders were wide and he had long arms, reminiscent of a chimpanzee.

Though a little shaken, it wasn't exactly the end of the world if they let someone onto base. Of course that meant Ken's hopes of a perfect game were now over, but he never took notice of such things in the first place.

Ken gazed at Daichi behind the plate and tried to calm him down. It was a little difficult to do so since the additional strength he received from the Showdown skill was in the process of leaving his body.

Thankfully the guy didn't seem to be over thinking things. They were still in a good position and just needed 3 outs to end the inning.

Daichi squatted down and called for a fastball, only to receive a nod from Ken.

The first throw after showdown wore off was usually a little shaky, but he had yet to let Ryder make contact with the ball yet.

Ken entered his wind up and sent the ball flying towards the open glove of Daichi.

It was then that he heard the sound of rushed footsteps behind him.

"3rd!"

Aki's loud voice rang out, startling Daichi behind the plate. Due to the disturbance, he failed to catch the ball and was forced to try and pick it up in haste.

"Strike"

By the time he reached it and sent out the throw, Leo was already in the middle of sliding towards 3rd base.

'Damn it.' Daichi cursed inwardly, annoyed with his mistake.

Thanks to his butterfingers, Leo was now in scoring position on 3rd base with no outs in the inning.

This was the worst position Japan had been in all day, though since they were up 2 runs it didn't seem too bad, at least for now.

Just as Ken was about to call for a timeout, Daichi gave him a thumbs up, letting him know that he was fine. He'd been in far larger pinches than this, therefore he felt fine enough to continue.

He squatted down and called for the next ball, this time a two-seam fastball.

WHOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

Daichi nodded in satisfaction. As long as they could strikeout the remaining 3 batters, Leo wouldn't have a chance to make it home no matter what.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout!"

After another fastball, Ryder was left swinging at nothing but air. He promptly left the batters box albeit reluctantly before heading back to the dugout.

"Batting 6th, 1st base, Davion."

Davion had a dark complexion and looked to have explosive athleticism. It was rather odd that someone like him would be stuck on 1st base, though it probably meant they valued him more as a batter than anything else.

Yet Ken had been able to keep him under wraps throughout the whole game. But he still needed to be careful since this was his 3rd at-bat where anything could happen.

Daichi too, understood the precarious situation they were in.

He called for a low fastball, hoping to bait a swing into the infield and possibly get a double play if the US team weren't on their toes.

Ken nodded and did as he was told. With the heavy spin on the ball, despite being on a low trajectory, it looked as if it was rising.

Davion's eyes snapped open as he went directly for the ball with force. It was as if he was a panther, pouncing on his prey with murderous intent.

WHOOOOSH

DOOOONG!

'No way!'

The ball was struck from underneath, allowing the ball to pop up into the outfield despite its initial low trajectory. It headed straight to Masayuki in the center outfield who promptly got under the ball.

Pah~

A few seconds later it dropped into his glove before he took a few steps and sent a killer throw towards home plate.

Leo had tagged up on 3rd base and was already in the midst of steamrolling his way home. It didn't take long for him to reach his max speed, showing just how impressive his acceleration was.

Daichi stood in front of the plate, waiting for the ball that was in the air and heading his way. He took his eyes off the ball for a brief moment, trying to gauge where the runner was.

By the time the ball arrived into Daichi's glove, Leo was just within striking distance.

Daichi lunged forwards with his glove outstretched, willing to put his body on the line in order to save the run. He braced for impact but in the next moment his jaw dropped as something completely unexpected happened.

As he fell to the ground, he saw the taut figure of Leo soar above him as if he was an Olympic swimmer diving into a pool.

Everything seemed to go in slow motion as the perfect figure performed a graceful swan dive towards home plate. He tucked his head in at the last moment, completing a gorgeous roll before ascending to his feet.

His foot tapped on home plate casually before he looked at the umpire for confirmation of his victory.

"S-Safe!"

After receiving the verdict, Leo walked off the field as if nothing had happened, leaving Daichi on the ground in disbelief.

With Leo's efforts, the US team had finally accrued a run on the board, making the score 2-1 in Japan's favor.

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

Chapter 467 - 467: Battered and Bruised (1)

As Leo sauntered off, the Japanese players on the field were in awe of the heads up athletic play of the American. The amount of body control required to soar through the air like he did was off the charts.

Ken could only smile wryly in response. Leo was truly a powerhouse athlete who would be making waves in the Major League soon in the future.

Instead of being depressed about it, Ken did a little introspection. He had underestimated the US batters after striking them out consistently this game.

Even with his powerful fastballs and large arsenal of pitches, even Davion whom he didn't view as a threat was able to orchestrate a sacrifice fly into the outfield.

'I guess it's not over till it's over.' He commented inwardly.

Daichi had already gotten back up to his feet and was feeling rather depressed. He was sure that it would be an easy tag to secure the out and save a run, yet Leo's actions had caught him by surprise.

Perhaps only he would be able to do such a move.

Leo received a warm welcome back in the dugout and the US team's morale began to surge. Finally getting a run on the board, Ken's pitching didn't seem as daunting as before.

Their change in attitude was evident as the next batter almost swaggered onto the field.

In Japan, Ai's eyes were glued to the TV in shock. She had been screaming earlier when Daichi was about to receive the ball and expected him to tag Leo out with relative ease. Yet upon seeing his move she was shocked into silence.

What was worse is that the broadcast team continued to replay the move, making her feel depressed and filled with worry.

"Come on Ken... You're almost there." She muttered, hugging a pillow close to her chest.

Rie's eyes had been moving between two players the entire time, not even caring about the match itself.

'Who has the better body? Is it that American or my Japanese sweetheart?' She thought inwardly.

She had plenty of time to ogle the peak physical form of Leo during the slow motion replays, yet felt it was a little unfair.

"I wanna see the other guy in slow motion..." Rie muttered to herself.

"Hmm? Did you say something?" Ai asked

Rie's face reddened a little, but she poked her tongue out and pointed to Hiroki's figure on 1st base.

"Who is that guy?"

"Ah, that's Hiroki. He plays for Yokohama High with Ken." Ai said simply, yet she felt a little suspicious.

"EH!? Since when does Yokohama have all these hot guys?" Rie stammered, feeling her jealousy surge.

"Hot? I dunno about that..." Ai replied.

As if to prove her friend wrong, Ai brought out her phone and brought up the team photo from Koshien and handed it to her friend.

Rie took the phone and her eyes widened like saucers.

"Hot...HOT...HOT. OH MY GOSH!"

She looked at Tatsuya, Jun, Makoto and Hiroki before exclaiming loudly. Yet as her eyes moved over the rest of the team she became a little more disappointed.

"Who is the midget guy?" She asked, pointing to a particular player.

"Pfft..."

Seeing that she was pointing at Shiro, Ai couldn't help but cover her mouth in amusement. Yet thinking about this, she thought about her manager friend Kaori whom he had a crush on.

'I wonder if he asked her out?'

Yet knowing Shiro, he likely didn't have the guts to do such a thing.

"Oh no, an error in the infield leads to a single for the US."

The sound of the commentators voice caught Ai's attention as she quickly looked back at the TV. There was a replay of Aki missing the grounder and allowing it to roll through his legs.

This allowed the US batter to easily make it to 1st base.

"Ever since Leo's heroics at the start of this inning, Japan look to be frazzled. Could this be the resurgence the United States were looking for?"

"Argh what are you guys doing!?" Ai let out a deep sigh of frustration, almost pulling at her hair.

Back on the field, Aki looked as if he'd swallowed a fly after his mistake.

"S-Sorry guys!"

His loud and nasally voice rang out, asking for forgiveness.

"Don't mind, 1 more out." Ken said in response.

It wasn't the end of the world just yet. As long as he got another out, they would be able to stop the bleeding.

"Batting 8th, Right outfield, Darius."

At the approach of the new batter, Ken's expression shifted. It was time to get serious and put an end to this inning.

Darius was feeling the momentum shift towards his team, filling him with confidence. In his eyes it was now the US team's time to make a comeback and take over the game.

He got into position and smiled towards Ken. He'd expected to see a worried expression on the guy's face yet was almost taken aback at the sharp eyes staring past him.

'Err...'

PAH!

"Strike!"

"H-Holy sh—"

Darius almost cursed out loud as the roaring fastball flashed past him. It was like a blur, not giving him any time to react thanks to its sheer speed.

He gulped, feeling his earlier confidence get pushed down by the harsh reality.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

'Damn it...'

The next fastball was another bullet. Despite swinging, he was far too late to make contact with the ball.

Both Ken and Daichi were in sync at that moment, wanting nothing more than to keep sending fastballs at this guy until he struck out.

Thankfully for Darius, he was put out of his misery with the next ball.

PAH

"Strikeout! 3 outs, Changeover."

With that, the bottom of the 8th inning had come to a close.

The score was now 1-2 in Japan's favor and they would be starting with Riku at the top of the batting order. With this being the potential last inning, an extra run or two would give them some comfort.

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

Chapter 468 - 468: Battered and Bruised (2)

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ

"Hmm? Whose callin me in the middle of the damn World Cup!?" Tetsu's gruff voice complained as he tore away his eyes from the TV briefly.

"Hello..." He responded unhappily.

"T-Tetsu... Does Naomi still have her sewing kit?"

The other voice on the line sounded weak, causing Tetsu's expression to falter.

"Where are ya!?" He asked, standing up in a panic.

"I'm out front."

Tetsu didn't even respond, quickly throwing his phone down and racing outside in the next moment. As soon as he walked out, he saw his friend Tsukasa covered in blood and lacerations all over his arms and face.

Without another word he ran over and placed the guy's shoulder over his own, bringing him into the house. There was no point asking what happened, not until his wounds were taken care of.

"NAOMI! Sewing kit!"

"Huh?"

She was about to ask him why, yet as she saw the bloodied figure being led in by her husband, she quickly moved into action.

Tetsu placed his friend onto one of the chairs in his lounge room, not caring about the blood that was everywhere.

"Where did they get ya?" He asked.

Tsukasa removed his jacket gingerly and showed a gash running from his chest to the top of his stomach.

Tetsu sucked in a cold breath of air as he saw the injury, feeling the hairs on the back of his neck stand up at such a sight.

"Hehe, you should see the other guys..."

The fact that he said guys meant that it was definitely more than a few who he had got into a fight with. Tetsu didn't ask for specifics since it didn't involve him, at least not anymore.

Naomi arrived into the room with the sewing kit and let out an audible gasp of shock after seeing the wound.

"Get me some rubbing alcohol and fresh towels."

"Y-Yes..."

A few minutes later, he had everything he needed to provide first aid.

"Alright, this is gonna' sting like a bitch."

Tsukasa grinned widely before placing his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Thanks brother..."

Tetsu shook his head and poured the alcohol directly on the large open wound.

"AH-ARGHHHH!"

Tsukasa let out a pained yell before his head fell back and he lost consciousness. It seemed that the pain was too much for him to bear in that moment so his brain switched off.

Yet Tetsu ignored it and began cleansing the wound thoroughly. Without him moving, this was the best time for him to begin his work. With his adept fingers, it only took Tetsu around 15 minutes to clean and stitch the wound completely.

Tsukasa happened to wake up a couple of minutes after the task was completed and saw his friend staring intently at the TV.

He looked at what was showing and happened to see Ken in the batters box.

"Oh is Kenny playing?" He asked a little weakly.

Tetsu shushed him, not even paying him any attention.

DOOONG

"Ah! Nice hit!"

Tetsu got to his feet and shouted, staring at the TV and watching with his eyes wide open.

"And it's caught in the outfield by Santiago. That marks the end of the inning for Japan who will now have to defend against the US batters. Will they be able to hold the US team back and secure the World Cup? We'll bring you back to the action after a word from our sponsors."

"Are you struggling with baldness~?"

"Argh so close!" Tetsu lamented, feeling a little disappointed.

Only after reaching the ad break did Tetsu finally acknowledge the man who was bleeding out on his couch just 15 minutes ago.

"So? Why are ya showin' up at my house half dead?" He asked plainly.

A wry smile appeared on Tsukasa's face at his brother's rudeness, though he didn't appear to be offended.

"We got into a skirmish with a rival gang..."

"Ya mean ya got ambushed right?" Tetsu responded dryly.

The expression on Tsukasa's face looked as if his friend had hit the nail on the head.

Tetsu shook his head in exasperation, letting out a sigh.

"Ya can stay here a while, just don't interrupt me." He said simply, sitting back down in front of the TV.

Tsukasa grinned, already feeling better after being patched up. Naomi walked in a few moments later with some water and treats before leaving the two alone.

After filling up on some much needed water, Tsukasa laid his head back and went to sleep, his soft snores ringing out a few moments later.

If it wasn't for his condition, Tetsu might have kicked the guy out for snoring while he was watching the match, yet he held a little more compassion than that.

In actuality, he was quite pissed off right now. Since his little brother was left in such a state, he didn't mind coming out of retirement and showing some people who was boss.

As people from around the world tuned into the World Cup broadcast, Ken had just left the field after being caught by Santiago. With both Riku and Masayuki being struck out, Hiroki and Daichi had both managed to get hits.

This was almost a repeat of how they scored in the 7th inning, yet a superb play by Santiago had cost them some much needed runs in the end.

Once again his ability to navigate and maneuver his body in the air had robbed the Japanese team of a 3-run home run and kept the US team's hopes alive.

"Don't mind Ken. Just 3 more outs and we'll have won the World Cup."

Daichi tried to console his brother, yet it seemed that Ken was already locked in. He could already imagine the pressure that Ken was under to perform in this final inning.

"Let's go Kenny! Daichi!" Yuki's voice rang out from within the crowd, energizing the two brothers.

Ken let out a deep sigh and smiled, "Let's go put an end to this match."

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

Chapter 469 - 469: Do you trust me? (1)

"Batting 9th, DH, Cooper."

While the first batter was walking onto the field, Coach Williams had gathered his players together in the dugout. At such an important time in the match, it would be an oversight not to take the opportunity to say some words.

"We've done well to get where we are now and keep the margin to only 1 run. All of you have faced Ken 3 times so far which means you should have some understanding of his pitches by now."

Mark was animated as he talked to his players, excitement evident in his tone.

"I need you to focus on getting onto base. Santiago, Ayden, at least one of you need to step up and make the play so we can get Sammy and Leo back into the game. Do whatever you can."

"Yes Coach!"

He looked at his players and smiled warmly, causing some of the team to be shocked. Ever since he'd taken over the team, this was the first time seeing such an expression on his face.

In truth, while he was sick, Mark took on the persona of the strict and taciturn coach. He believed that this was the best way to instill values into the team and teach them correctly.

Yet only after recovering did his outlook change.

These were still kids, not professionals. What they needed was a nurturing figure who would let them learn from their own mistakes, not rule with an iron fist.

"Let me say this, I'm proud of how far we've come this World Cup. Now go out there and show them our baseball."

"YEAH!"

This change of attitude seemed to work wonders on the players as they felt their spirits soar. Even Ryan who wasn't part of the batting line up felt his mood increase despite not being entirely satisfied with his performance.

WHOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout!"

Unaware of the touching speech from his Grandfather, Ken promptly struckout the DH with 3 pitches. Despite pitching all game, he seemed laser focused, not outwardly showing any signs of fatigue.

Santiago approached the field and walked past his teammate, receiving some words of good luck in passing. This would be the fourth time he'd faced Ken, yet he looked completely different than last time.

On the other occasions he'd either nodded in greeting or sent his nephews a smile. This time however, it was clear that this was purely business.

Daichi could feel the shift in the atmosphere, causing the hairs on his neck to stand up. This was the first time that he truly felt threatened by his new family member.

Yet now was not the time to give in to such pressure, not when they were only 2 outs away from securing the victory.

He squatted down and sent a sign to Ken. Since he'd thrown 95% fastballs this match, Daichi decided it was time to make full use of his pitching arsenal.

Ken nodded and sent his pitch out in the next moment. There was so much spin on the ball that the seams weren't visible even to the most trained eye.

Santiago's eyes widened and he loaded up with power.

WHOOOOSH

DOOONG

His patience had paid off, allowing him to connect against the curveball on the very first swing despite not facing it before in this match.

"Left!"

The ball sailed over Aki's head as he called for Riku to collect the ball. It was perfectly hit, dropping just before Riku was able to reach the ball and allowing Santiago to make it onto the base successfully.

Ken could only smile wryly as he looked at his Uncle on 1st base. He was shocked that the guy could hit his curveball without practice, yet there was nothing that he could do about it.

With Santiago getting onto base, that meant he would have to face Sam even if he got the next guy out.

He let out a small sigh.

'Why didn't I learn any pick-off skills?'

Yet his depression didn't last long. Perhaps it was because of his Dauntless trait, or maybe he had matured a lot lately through many high stakes games.

Either way, he was now focused on the task ahead of him.

"Batting 2nd, Short stop, Ayden."

Gulp~

Being stared at intently by Ken on the mound caused Ayden to feel intimidated. It was like he was a wild animal staring down his prey, right before going in for the kill.

PAH

"Strike!"

'So damn fast!' Ayden thought meekly.

'This guy is a monster... Hasn't it already been 9 innings? How can he still throw 100mph fastballs?'

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

Ayden grit his teeth and gripped his bat tightly. He couldn't go down like this...

As soon as Ken began his wind up, Santiago lowered his head and took off towards 2nd base like a rocket.

"2nd!"

WHOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout."

Daichi collected the ball and threw with all of his might towards Ichiro on 2nd base. Ken had to duck out of the way to avoid getting cleaned up, yet Santiago was too fast for the right arm of Daichi.

"Safe."

"Don't mind! 2 outs!"

Aki clapped his hands and called out, perking up everybody's spirits. Japan were still in a decent position, even with Santiago advancing to 2nd base.

As long as Ken could get the giant Sam out, it would be the end of the game.

Daichi clicked his tongue in annoyance. If he had been a fraction of a second faster, they might have been able to bring an end to it right at that moment.

"Batting 3rd, 3rd base, Sam."

The large figure of Sam walked into the batters box once more with a determined expression. His full size beard and broad chest still made him look like a Gorilla, though no one would say so to his face.

He tapped the bat onto home plate a couple of times before loosening his hips and taking his stance. Then after gripping his bat tightly, he let out a grin.

"Come to papa."

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

Chapter 470 - 470: Do you trust me? (2)

Unaware of his words, Daichi crouched down and called for a fastball, all the while chanting a mantra in his head.

'One more out...'

'One more out...'

It wasn't just him. The Japanese players on the field chanted the same inwardly.

Whatever fatigue that had built up over these past 2 weeks had seemingly vanished now that they were so close to the finish line. All it would take was a few more pitches before victory or defeat.

Ken breathed out a deep sigh and collected himself before nodding.

"Hup!"

The ball flew out of his fingertips at 100mph, its target the inside of the strike zone. Like many big men, they had trouble adjusting their bodies in order to make full contact on inside pitches.

Yet no one told Sammy that.

WHOOOOSH

DONG

The moment the bat made contact with the ball, the crowd erupted in cheers. The sound it made caused the Japanese team's heart to sink as they frantically looked for the ball.

"Left!"

Just like Santiago's hit, this ball was sent over Aki to an almost identical spot, bouncing before Riku received the ball.

"Hold!"

Right before Riku was about to let loose a throw towards first base, Aki yelled out from his position. A few moments later Sam arrived at first base, struggling to catch his breath after the all out sprint.

"Aki why did you stop me throwing?" Riku said with a frown.

Aki didn't even respond, pointing to Santiago retreating back to 3rd base after seeing that Riku still possessed the ball.

Riku seemed to be satisfied with the answer in the end. It was far too risky to make the throw to 1st base for a possible out when Santiago would have more than likely made it to home plate if it was safe.

While it may have been the right call, Japan were now in a much worse position than before. With a runner on 1st and 3rd, any large hit could have dire consequences.

However, their biggest problem had only just arrived.

"Batting 4th, Catcher, Leo."

At the mention of Leo's name, the home crowd went crazy. Somehow the game had come full circle and the hero who had collected the first run had returned at the midnight hour to save the US team.

Ken and Leo's gazes met as he approached the batters box. Along with the strength filling his body from his showdown skill, Ken felt a burning sensation in his veins.

'I won't lose.'

These words did not need to be spoken out loud to be understood. Leo's whole being seemed to be reciprocating this phrase, leading to their aura's clashing head to head.

The whole stadium felt the suffocating atmosphere which threatened to swallow them all. [Search the * website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.](#)

In the final inning with 2 outs and 2 runners on base, the Japanese Ace was facing the US Captain with the entire game on the line. Even a fully paid staff of writers could never concoct such a poetic and powerful moment.

Michael was at the edge of his seat, his face filled with worry. These past 2 innings had been brutal for him to watch as a self-proclaimed Ken fanboy.

Even his friend who had been cheering for the home team vehemently all game was now completely silent as he watched on nervously.

'You can do it Ken...'

"Timeout please."

Daichi's voice interrupted the stare down between the two, causing Ken to frown a little in response. He saw his brother jogging up to the mound and could already tell what he was thinking before he opened his mouth.

"You want to walk him?" Ken asked, his tone steady.

Daichi nodded and was about to continue, yet was interrupted.

"Before you speak, let me ask you this... Do you want to walk him because you think I can't beat him? Or is it because you think the next batter will be easier?" Ken asked.

Despite being cut off, Daichi didn't look upset. He thought for a while before answering the latter.

Ken nodded, "That's all I needed to know." He said with a wide grin.

"OI EVERYONE!"

Ken raised his head back and yelled out from the middle of the field, getting all of his teammates attention. The umpire almost jumped in fright at the sudden yell in a foreign language.

"DO YOU TRUST ME!?"

There was a small silence before Hiroki on first base piped up.

"YEAH!"

Next, Aki and Kuro yelled out.

"YEAH!"

"OF COURSE!"

Then like a pack of barking dogs, the rest of the players on the field yelled out their acknowledgments.

Riku, Masayuki, Ichiro, Tomoya. They all shouted out loud, filling the field with a cacophony of voices.

"DAMN RIGHT I DO!"

Chris even joined in on the chorus, yelling out his thoughts.

"Hehe... And how about you little bro? Do you trust me?" Ken said, his face turning up into a grin.

Daichi was gobsmacked, not expecting such an approach from his brother. Yet the fact that their teammates were willing to answer in such a fashion showed just how much they trusted Ken in such a situation.

He was left with no choice but to accept the verdict since the whole team had decided for them.

"I may not trust you around my desserts, but when it comes to anything else... I trust you with my life." Daichi said, holding out his fist for a fist bump.

"Hahaha! That pudding was delicious by the way." Ken said with a wide grin, giving his brother some knuckles.

Daichi could only shake his head and laugh on his way back to home plate. After seeing the expression of the umpire, he felt a little awkward after causing such a scene.

He bowed in apology, doing his best to speak some English.

"Imu sorry."

The umpire sent a thumbs up, feeling a little odd at the earlier display.

"Play ball!"

Now that the timeout was over, play was now resumed.

"Well, time to live up to my teammates expectations of me." Ken said out loud with a chuckle.

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

Chapter 471 - 471: Game Set (1)

'All bets are off... A single mistake and we lose.' Daichi thought, his gaze moving to the immaculate figure in the batters box.

Daichi was feeling the pressure of the moment. It was as if all eyes were on him, even if it wasn't the case.

In fact, Ken was probably garnering the most attention in this moment. He held the hopes of not only his teammates, but his home country on his back.

Daichi could only imagine the suffocating pressure on Ken's shoulders right now. As he gazed at his brother upon the mound, the afternoon sun appeared on the horizon behind Ken, casting a long shadow in front of him.

As his figure moved, the shadow morphed, reminiscent of a giant tree in the wild breeze.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

The fastball was sent rocketing into Daichi's glove as he felt his hand begin to tingle. After catching 80+ 100mph fastballs, his hand was beginning to grow numb.

Yet that didn't matter right now. Only two more strikes and the game would be over, they would be victorious against the best team in the world.

'Let's try a slider next...' Daichi thought, swallowing his saliva.

His throat was as dry as the Sahara desert, likely from the pressure of the titan in front of him.

After crouching down and making the signal, he waited patiently.

'2 more strikes...'

Ken nodded and entered his wind up, feeling the strength flow through his body. Upon planting his foot, his right arm snaked out like a whip and unleashed the devastating slider from his fingertips.

The ball took a wicked turn in the air and rushed to the outside of the strike zone.

WHOOOOSH

DING

Leo's eyes widened as he pursued the ball, making contact with the end of the bat and sending the ball into the foul zone.

"Foul."

The crowd were on the edge of their seats as anticipation grew. Despite being a home crowd, there were many in the audience who believed Japan deserved to win. They had shown heart and sportsmanship throughout the game, winning over everyone's hearts.

Yet unfortunately, such things did not determine the winners.

Once again, Ken lifted his leg and sent another pitch.

WHOOOOSH

DING

"Foul."

WHOOOOSH

DING

"Foul."

DING

"Foul."

One ball after another, Leo sent them into the foul zone. His eyes were able to track the moving fastball, though he hadn't been able to properly make contact with it so far.

The reason was because of the sheer speed of Ken's pitches.

101mph

102mph

Every ball was at peak velocity, making it extremely difficult to hit even if one could guess the course of the ball.

The two were locked into a fierce battle of wills, neither one wanting to back down. It was not only their pride on the line, but also their country's pride.

As long as Leo was able to get a single, the game would go into extra innings since Santiago was already in scoring position. But if he hit a home run... It would be curtains for the Japanese team.

'I have to break the status quo.' Daichi thought, gritting his teeth.

He squatted down and called for a wasted pitch. The count was still 0-2 which meant they had some wiggle room. If he could bait Leo into chasing a bad pitch, they might be able to steal a strike.

Ken nodded and entered his wind up.

PAH

"Ball."

PAH

"Ball."

Daichi frowned. The two fastballs he'd called for were close enough to the strike zone that he believed Leo would fall for them, however it seems he underestimated the US Captain.

Not only was he not baited, he looked to completely calm and composed standing in the batters box. It was as if he was a marble statue, unaffected by the passage of time.

With a count of 2-2, Daichi needed to be careful. He didn't want to drag this out any longer, but there was a feeling of helplessness when fighting against Leo who was so poised.

On the mound, Ken picked up the rosin bag and began to roll it around in his right hand. His shoulder was starting to get a little fatigued, especially since he was throwing with showdown's effects still activated.

With the increase in strength, it put more strain on his shoulder, therefore he was trying to buy a little more time between pitches.

'Man, why hasn't my Crunch Time or Limit Break skill activated this game?' He thought, feeling a little perplexed.

Though it was the opportune time for the skills to activate, a part of him was glad that it hadn't. It might sound a bit silly, but he quite enjoyed this head to head clash with the US Captain.

'I just need to break through.'

WHOOOSH

DING

"Foul."

WHOOOSH

DING

"Foul."

DING

"Foul."

"How many balls has he fouled off now?"

"Isn't it like 10?"

The crowd began to murmur, the anxiety levels getting to them. They couldn't imagine how the players on the field felt if even they were feeling the pressure.

Yuki on the sideline had been silent the entire time, saying silent prayers in her heart. Of course she wanted her sons to win, but she was more concerned for them to stay safe.

Seeing her son continuously pitch and knowing of his previous shoulder issues, caused her to worry non-stop.

'Please be okay...'

What was more pure than a mother's worries? Perhaps a child's worries.

Michael too crossed his fingers and watched on with rapt attention, saying his own prayers.

'You can do it Ken!'

Back on the field, Ken wiped away the sweat from his brow and adjusted his hat. Despite the stadium getting cooler with the setting sun, his body was beginning to overheat.

He had never experienced showdown for so long and his body was beginning to reach his limit.

"Haaahhh, one more... Let's do this." He muttered.

He entered his wind up and let loose a pitch, yet the moment it left his fingertips, his eyes widened.

'Damn it!'

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

Chapter 472 - 472: Game Set (2)

Due to the excessive powder on his fingertips, he wasn't able to get enough spin on the ball, which meant the next fastball would be lacking movement.

His eyes locked onto the ball, watching its course.

"Hmph!"

WHOOOOOSH

DONG

Leo smacked the ball, popping it high into the air. He looked at it briefly before clicking his tongue in annoyance as it went into the foul zone.

Ken breathed a sigh of relief. If that ball had been struck properly, the game would have been over.

Just as he was returning to his position on the mound and was about to call for a new ball, he heard the crowd gasp collectively.

"What's happening?" Ken muttered, looking around the field.

While he'd been preoccupied, a figure had his eyes on the foul ball that had been popped into the air. He ran towards the edge of the field and didn't think twice before standing on the rolled up tarp.

"Kuro!?"

The whole field was shocked at his next move.

Without caring about the consequences, Kuro jumped into the empty seats and landed hard, letting out a squeal of pain in the next moment.

DING

"What is he doing!?"

All anyone could see was a glove remaining in the air before a loud shout ensued.

"YEAHHHHHH!"

"HAHAHAHA"

Kuro yelled and screamed in triumph, holding up his glove as if he were hoisting up the World Cup trophy.

"N-No way..."

The umpire came over and told Kuro to show him the ball to which he complied.

After a few seconds, the umpire shouted.

"OUT! GAME SET!"

"O-OHHHH YEAH!"

Only now did the Japanese players on the field suddenly understand what was happening. Riku, Aki and Masayuki who were close by rushed at Kuro and manhandled him back onto the field before hoisting him up.

Kuro's face was filled with tears, though it was unknown if it was from the pain of the earlier impact, or if they were tears of joy.

Ken felt his whole body become jelly as the showdown skill wore off, causing him to fall to his backside in fatigue.

"Hah... Hahaha. We did it." Ken muttered, letting out a tired laugh.

"Big bro!"

Daichi ran over with his arms wide open and tears in his eyes as he threw himself at Ken's figure on the ground.

"OOOF"

Suddenly Ken was assaulted by Daichi's bodyweight, yet he was too devoid of strength to move him. He could only suffer as the sweat-soaked teen assaulted him over and over.

"Y-You stink! Get off me."

Only after a few moments did Daichi get up, his face wearing a devilish grin.

"WE DID IT KEN!"

Unfortunately for Ken, the rest of the team had now converged onto the mound to celebrate with their ace.

Aki was like a bullet as he ran forward in order to be the first to pile onto Ken. Yet like a guardian angel, Daichi quickly lifted him to his feet just in time, causing the guy to fall face first into the mound himself.

Everyone ignored the figure and huddled around Ken, ruffling his head so much that his hat fell off.

Meanwhile, Leo, Santiago and Sam walked off the field with their heads lowered. They had been so close to making the come back and securing the win, yet the gutsy play from Kuro had dashed their hopes.

Mark smiled wryly, feeling a mixture of emotions. Disappointment that his team didn't win, yet a big sense of pride because of how his Grandson's had performed in this World Cup.

He placed his hand on Leo's shoulder.

"Hold your head up high Captain, you led your team properly and played a wonderful game." Mark said, his expression showing pride.

It was then that Leo's usually stoic expression began to crumble as tears began to fill the corner of his eyes. Yet he composed himself in the next moment, giving the coach a nod before returning to the dugout.

"OH YEAHHHHH BABY!"

Ai was on her feet in Rie's lounge, pumping her fists and dancing around like a madwoman. One would think that she was the one who had won the World Cup instead of her boyfriend.

Funnily enough, at the same time in Yokohama...

"HAHAHA THAT'S MA BOY!"

Tetsu began to do a jive in front of the TV, waking up Tsukasa from his nap. The guy looked as if he'd just been to war, yet he didn't complain about being woken up.

"He won?"

Tetsu gave his brother a questioning glance, as if asking him why he was awake.

"Yeah... Now go back to sleep, you're bothering me."

Tsukasa didn't know whether to laugh or cry, so he took a brief drink and tried to go back to sleep as instructed.

Back on the field, both Coach Takashi and Chris had joined their players in the celebration. The Head Coach was wearing a blissful expression, his smile almost looking perverted.

SPLASHHH~

In the next moment, someone poured the iced water all over both of the coach's in a single movement.

"Hehehehe~"

Riku giggled like a school girl as he reveled in his feat.

The two coach's didn't seem to mind, in fact it made them feel invigorated.

Chris looked around and finally found his two sons. Without even thinking, he walked forward and brought them both into his embrace, squeezing hard.

"I'm so proud of you both!"

Both Daichi and Ken hugged their father back, feeling very happy in this moment.

In the crowd, a woman was covering her mouth as she began to cry and weep with joy. Seeing all of her boys on the field after victory filled her with so much pride.

She wanted nothing more than to run onto the field and celebrate with them, yet she'd probably be put in cuffs before making it a few feet onto the field.

Thankfully, Ken and Daichi had not forgotten about her.

"Mom! We did it!" Daichi said with a wide grin.

"Mmm. Well done." She said, pulling him into an embrace.

Tetsuhiro happened to see the interaction on the jumbo screen and frowned deeply.

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

Chapter 473 - 473: Accolades (1)

The Japanese team celebrated on the field for a while before they were told to retreat to the dugout for now. A bunch of people came out of the tunnels and began to set up some stands and camera's for the Closing Ceremony.

The victory still felt surreal for the players who had been fighting with all of their might only a few minutes ago.

"We really did it huh bro?" Ken said, feeling his face hurt from smiling so much.

However, after not receiving a response from his brother, Ken turned around only to see him locking lips with Miho a few feet away.

"Dude what the hell?"

"KURO! I LOVE YOU SO MUCH!" Aki squealed, grabbing the guys face and trying to kiss him on the mouth.

"OOOOF"

For the second time in a few minutes, Aki had found himself laid out on the ground, tears flowing from his eyes.

Ken shuddered, feeling the gloomy atmosphere behind him. He decided to grab his phone and head over to the corner of the bench to make a quick phone call.

"Ken? Is that you?" Ai's voice spoke out from the phone a moment later, her tone sounding excited.

"Yeah it's me, did you watch the game?"

After hearing her voice, Ken's face turned up into a smile. Despite it only being a few weeks since their first kiss, he still missed her.

"What game? Did you play today?"

"..."

Ken was speechless for a moment before his ears were blessed with Ai's infectious giggles on the other end of the phone.

"Of course I watched the game silly. You played brilliantly of course. Even that Yu Tanaka had to praise your performance by the end of the game." She said matter-of-factly.

"Huh? Yu Tanaka?"

"Mmm, that Japanese pitcher from the Texas something-or-other team. He was commentating on the live stream we watched."

Ken felt his heart warm up in response. The legendary Yu Tanaka had been praising him, something that he never would have dreamed about in his previous life.

"They said that the Closing Ceremony will start soon. Do you think you'll get any individual awards?" Ai asked curiously.

"Eh, I dunno. I'm happy enough with the Gold Medal if I'm honest." He replied truthfully.

"H-Hey, what are you—"

Ken heard a commotion on the other side of the line before his ears heard another female voice.

"Hi Ken~ this is Rie, Ai's friend. Can you put that player who stands on the first base on the phone for me please~~?"

"Hmm?" Ken was a little perplexed, yet he suddenly figured out who was on the phone.

His face went grave for a moment before going on a quest to find Hiroki.

Eventually he found him relaxing on the bench drinking some water. The moment he saw Ken's face, he instantly had a bad premonition. The air suddenly felt thinner, like he was being suffocated.

"W-What is it?" He asked suspiciously.

Ken held his hand over the receiver and spoke softly.

"Hiroki... I will only say this to you once. If you mess this up, you will regret it for the rest of your life..."

With that, he handed the phone to a freaked out Hiroki who had been heavily spooked by Ken's words. With shaking hands, he held the phone up to his ear and stammered.

"H-Hello?"

Ken then sat back and watched the show, a small smirk reaching the corner of his lips. Eventually Hiroki calmed down enough to hold a decent conversation with the girl who seemed to be rather straightforward.

"D-Double date!?"

Hiroki's words were loud enough that the whole dugout heard his voice. No matter what the players were doing, they turned towards him with their vision turning red.

These were all virgin teens whose raging hormones would cause them to pounce on and destroy anyone who tried to leave their ranks.

"Oh crap, you've said it now..." Ken muttered, snatching the phone from Hiroki's hand.

"Rie you there? He said he'd love to."

"AH-ARGH! Save me!"

While Ken resumed his phone conversation, Hiroki was suddenly attacked by his team from every direction, pouncing on him out of jealousy.

"Okay thank you~ I'll put your girlfriend back on." Rie stated, handing the phone back to Ai.

"Sorry about that. When I told her that you and Hiroki went to the same school, she wouldn't take no for an answer." Ai said, feeling a little guilty.

The two talked for a while longer before Ken said he needed to go. Coach Takashi had already tried to get everyone's attention.

"Let's chat when I get back." Ken said, about to hang up the phone.

But just before he did, he placed it in front of his mouth and said 3 words.

"I miss you."

BEEP BEEP BEEP

Ai's face flushed red as she heard the words, making Rie squeal in delight.

"Alright you lot! Listen up." Chris said, sounding a little drunk for some reason.

Coach Takashi stood in front of his team with his hands behind his back, like he'd done many times before. However this time, a wide smile was painted on his features, causing his face to wrinkle.

He took a deep breath to try and compose himself, yet the smile wouldn't disappear.

"You guys worked as a team and played your heart's out. You've made this old man proud..."

For once the Head Coach was lacking words for his speech, causing some of the players to let out a few chuckles.

"Thank you all for putting your trust in me and allowing us to come out victorious today." He said, bowing his head towards the players.

"Ah! Don't bow Coach."

Masayuki who was at the front rushed over and lifted the man's head, it wasn't just him, everyone felt that it was too much to receive a bow from the world renowned coach.

Seeing the Coach's mood, the fact that they had won the World Cup began to sink in a little further, no longer feeling surreal.

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

Chapter 474 - 474: Accolades (2)

"Everybody, the closing ceremony will start soon. Make sure your bags are packed and ready so we don't have to stick around for long after." Chris said after noticing the Head Coach was done speaking.

Over in the other dugout, Mark was addressing his players. Due to just falling short of the Gold, there was a somber mood.

"Now now, there's no need to be depressed. We left everything on the field tonight, so you can keep your heads raised high." Mark said in a soft tone.

"If anything, we lost due to my negligence. We were not prepared for Ken's pitching today which put a lot of pressure on our batting line up."

At these words Leo shook his head and walked forward, placing his hand on the coach's shoulder.

"It's not just the coach to blame, but also me." He said sternly, getting everyone's attention.

"Leo, what are yo—"

Leo cut off the coach and continued his words.

"As the Captain, I was far too arrogant. Until this game, I believed that High School baseball posed no more challenges for me. I was so focused on College baseball that I took Ken and Japan lightly."

At the back of the pack, Ryan raised his head and looked at Leo with shock. This was the first time that he'd seen the guy reflect in such a way despite being on the same team for 2 years.

His introspection opened up a small window for Ryan to do the same. He thought back to his behavior and arrogance this World Cup and suddenly felt disappointed in himself.

From the beginning he was toyed with, allowing his emotions to control his actions. Those two runs today could have been prevented if he had not pushed Ken so brazenly while the guy was running to first base.

"I'm sorry..." Leo said, bringing a close to his speech.

"M-Me too!" Ryan said hurriedly, causing everyone to turn and face him.

Having all of his teammates eyes on him, Ryan felt a lump in his throat, making it hard to swallow.

"I'm sorry for my conduct in this World Cup..."

Both Leo's and Mark's eyes widened in disbelief. That arrogant prodigy was apologizing? On his own volition too?

The two exchanged gazes, as if to confirm what they were witnessing was true and not a dream.

"HAHAHA"

Sam burst out into laughter as he grabbed Ryan and pulled him into a heavy hug, almost squeezing all of the air out of the guy's lungs.

At this act, the players couldn't help but let out some laughter, seeing Ryan suffer. Usually he would be far too aloof to allow such a thing to happen.

Seeing that the mood had improved, Mark let out a smile and ruffled his son's hair who was beside him.

"I'm proud of you all. Make sure you smile for all the photos later, we don't want the fans thinking we're too proud for the silver medal." Mark stated.

While the two teams were doing their separate things, the field was being set up with a podium and some cameras for the broadcast. After around 20 minutes, a representative popped their head into the Japanese dugout.

"Please get the team onto the field and stand in the designated area." She said to Chris.

With that, the teams made their way onto the field.

Ken raised his head and noticed that the Cuban team were also present. He saw Jorge among the players since he was hard to miss.

He nodded his head and smiled, receiving a thumbs up in response from the big guy.

Soon enough, the team lined up past 2nd base, facing home plate where a stage had been set up. They were flanked by the US team on their right and Cuban team on their left, creating a square shape from the air if one included the stage.

After a few minutes, a lady appeared standing behind a podium with a microphone in her hands.

"Thank you all for attending the finals of the U18 Baseball World Cup. Congratulations to the teams who made it this far, you've been a pleasure to watch."

Her tone was confident, showing that she was used to speaking in front of large crowds.

"Before we get onto the award ceremony, I'd like to introduce some of our VIP guests in the stadium first."

She gestured to the seats that were sitting just off the field which held around 10 people.

Then one by one she named the people, receiving small bursts of applause from the crowd and the players alike. Of course no one knew who these people were, so Ken was just half listening.

"The chairman of Suzuki Corporation and the U18 World Cup Sponsor, Tetsuhiro Suzuki."

A man with wide shoulders and thick yet impeccable black hair stood up and raised his arm, acknowledging the cheers. His eyes seemed to be locked onto the Japanese team, though it was too far away to tell who he was looking at directly.

After he sat down, the woman continued, moving onto the next part of the closing ceremony.

"We'll now hand out the Individual Awards."

"Most runs batted in, Daichi Takagi from Japan."

"Eh!?"

At the mention of his name, Daichi was flabbergasted. He hadn't expected an award, yet after receiving a nudge from Ken, he quickly made his way up front.

He was directed onto the stage where he was told to wait. Ken almost laughed from how stiff and awkward his brother looked in that moment.

"Earned Run Average, Ken Takagi from Japan."

"Ah..."

Now it was Ken's turn to look surprised as he quickly jogged forward and joined his brother on stage. At the mention of his name, Daichi let out a sigh of relief since he would not be alone in front of everyone's eyes.

"Most stolen bases, Santiago Williams from United States."

When Santiago joined them, he was all smiles. Being with his two nephews on the stage seemed to make him quite pleased.

"Most runs scored, Leo Cameron from United States."

"Most wins, Satoshi Subaru from Japan."

"Best defensive player, Santiago Williams once again."

"Our final individual award, the Most Valuable Player goes to... Ken Takagi from Japan. Truly a jack of all trades."

DING

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

Chapter 475 - 475: Closing Ceremony (1)

"Eh?"

Ken heard the notification from his system and felt a wave of happiness spread through his body.

'SSS-Grade mental elixir...'

He swallowed hard, trying to stop himself from salivating.

"Please welcome the president of WSBC Richard Fresco and Tetsuhiro Suzuki who will be handing out the awards."

The crowd began applauding for the winners of the individual awards.

Ken received 2 different trophies. The ERA trophy was silver with a glass baseball fastened on top and looked quite fancy. The MVP award seemed a little more simple, but it truly was beautiful.

He accepted the awards from the two men, though he felt the wide-shouldered man was looking at him intently.

'Hmm?'

Yet just as Ken turned his attention to the man, he had already moved onto Daichi. He handed Daichi the RBI trophy and held out his hand for a handshake.

"Thank you." Daichi said, taking the hand. He was going to pull away but he couldn't due to the man holding on tightly.

He lifted his head and looked at him with confusion, only to see the man staring at him intently. His brown eyes were locked onto Daichi's, not moving in the slightest.

"Daichi..." He murmured, his face showing untold emotion.

"Mr. Suzuki?" Richard said from beside him.

They needed to hand out the remaining awards to the other players.

Only then did Tetsuhiro relinquish his grip on Daichi's hand, moving down the line alongside Richard to hand out the other awards.

Ken frowned, feeling the interaction was rather odd. Yet Daichi quickly moved on, too preoccupied with the festivities to pay anymore attention to the situation.

Once the awards were handed out, there was a photo taken with all the award winners and a few of the VIP's who were introduced earlier.

"Smile please."

The photographer singled out Ken who was horrible when it came to posing for photo's. Unfortunately for him, it took a while before the photographer was satisfied with the photo.

After what seemed like an exorbitant amount of time, the players were sent back to their teams and the next part of the ceremony started.

"Next we'll be announcing the World Team." The speaker said smilingly.

"Starting pitcher, Satoshi Subaru."

"Relief pitcher, Ryan Smith."

The list continued until the best 10 players were announced. From Japan Satoshi, Ken, Riku, Hiroki and Daichi were announced as part of the world team, showing just how well they performed in comparison to their opponents.

The award this time was a plaque, given to everyone on stage. Thankfully this time the Director of Suzuki corporation was not the one giving out the awards.

After returning back to their teams, Cuba was called up to receive their bronze medals and get a photo. This repeated a few minutes later when the United States went up for their silver medals.

By this time, the Japanese players were getting rather restless. It had been a long 2 weeks for them, not to mention they had just played a grueling game.

GRUMBLE

Riku painfully lowered his head and held his stomach.

"I'm so hungry..."

The game had finished around 6:30pm today and the proceedings had taken longer than anyone expected. It was currently around 7:30 and the players hadn't eaten since about 10 that morning.

No one made fun of Riku, mainly because they lacked the energy needed to do so.

"Now calling up your U18 Baseball World Cup winners... Team Japan!"

"Ah, let's go."

This time, both Coach Chris and the Head Coach were gestured to come onto the stage. Their names were called out 1 by 1 and medals were placed around their necks by the President and Mr. Suzuki.

Thankfully nothing weird happened this time.

For the final moment, Coach Takashi and Masayuki accepted the winners trophy. It was around 3 feet tall and was painted golden with a baseball nestled on top.

After the proceedings and some more photos, Japan returned to their position on the field and the Japanese National Anthem was played. The Head Coach had tears run down the corner of his eyes as he sang along passionately.

Once this was done, the closing ceremony finally came to a close. As the speaker said one last thanks to the crowd, the teams were allowed to retreat and grab their things.

When Ken arrived in the dugout, Daichi nudged him, getting his attention.

"Hey, I managed to get a few game balls..." Daichi whispered, showing his bag almost full of them.

He had a wide grin on his face, as if he'd just won the jackpot.

Ken shook his head and laughed. "Maybe we can get some framed."

Daichi nodded, "Then sell them on 3bay!"

Ken didn't exactly agree with this as it seemed far too petty. However, his face changed in the next moment.

"Hey, can I have one of those?"

"Hmm? Sure."

Ken placed it in his pocket and smiled before walking out of the dugout, following the rest of his team towards the tunnels.

His gaze moved over the crowd, as if he was trying to spot someone in particular.

"Ah, there he is." Ken exclaimed before jogging over.

"Hey Michael! I thought you'd be here." He said with a grin.

"K-Ken! You were so cool out there!" Michael's eyes shined as if he'd just met his idol.

Even his friend was stunned into silence seeing that such a big shot knew Michael's name and had even come over of his own volition.

"Hehe thanks. You got a marker?"

"Y-Yes of course!" Michael wasn't sure what it was for, but he eagerly agreed to lend him his marker.

Ken took the game ball out of his pocket and began to skillfully write upon the ball before he flourished his hand and wrote his signature.

"Can't have my #1 fan leaving empty handed right?" He said with a grin, handing the ball over.

"What is this?" Michael asked in confusion.

"It's one of the match balls of course. If I see it on 3bay I'll be disappointed okay." He said, feigning anger.

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

Chapter 476 - 476: Closing Ceremony (2)

"O-Okay, thank you Ken!"

Ken sent him a wink and ran back to the rest of his team, turning back to wave before he went into the tunnels.

"Holy crap! How are you so lucky!?" Michael's friend exclaimed, his jealousy through the roof.

However, Michael did not care about his friend's jealousy. He looked at the match ball and read what it said.

'Dream big and never give up - Ken'

"What does it say?" His friend tried to peak over his shoulder, yet Michael quickly clutched the ball to his chest, tears forming on his face.

He looked over to Ken's retreating figure and shouted.

"I WON'T GIVE UP!"

Ken must have heard his words because he stopped in place and turned back around, flashing him a brilliant smile.

"I know."

He mouthed the words, but Michael could tell what he said.

"Bro, why are you crying?"

"I'm not..." Michael said, drying the corner of his eyes with his sleeve.

On their way into the tunnels, Daichi was confused.

"What was all that about?"

Ken grinned, "Just planting a seed..."

NAME: Michael Thompson

AGE: 13

TALENT ASSESSMENT: C-

POTENTIAL: ??

Additional Information: Quit baseball after being bullied in middle school. Will likely waste his potential if left to his own devices.

Ken dismissed the Identify window in front of him and couldn't stop smiling. Who knew that his number 1 fan would have the potential to be such a monster. Perhaps he would see him in the Major's one day.

After the players got all of their belongings and cleared out the locker room, they got straight onto the bus and were dropped off outside of a restaurant.

"Yakiniku!?"

"YESSS!"

Riku crawled out of the bus, as if he was in a desert after not eating or drinking for a week.

"Food... I need food."

"Get out of the damn way." Masayuki cursed, kicking the guy down the bus stairs.

"Alright guys, this is an all you can eat Korean BBQ restaurant. Don't hold back okay?"

After hearing the magic words, "All you can eat." The players were ecstatic and quickly piled into the restaurant. Instantly the place was rowdy with chattering and merriment.

Ken's dad returned to one of the tables with a couple of beers for himself and the Head Coach. Yet just before he could get a drink his phone went off.

"Ah! Back in a second."

He returned a few moments later with Yuki who said her hello's respectfully. She saw that Ken and Daichi were busy chatting away and decided to leave them be, letting them celebrate with their team.

As she sat down, Yuki felt a tap on her shoulder.

"Mrs. Takagi?"

"Hmm? Yes dear?"

Out of nowhere, the young woman leaned forward and hugged her tightly, leaving Yuki flabbergasted.

"Is that Miho hugging mom?" Ken asked, his eyes wide in shock.

"Ah!"

Daichi quickly stood up and ran over, feeling rather awkward. He bowed a few times and introduced them properly.

"We finally meet!" Yuki announced, getting to her feet and hugging Miho properly this time.

While the duo were getting acquainted, Ken was busy stuffing his face. After using showdown for so long, his body was screaming for sustenance. He could already tell that he'd lost weight on the mound this game, so he needed to bulk once again.

The night turned out to be quite entertaining as the players could finally unwind. Throughout the entire 2 weeks there was always the next game hanging over their head, preventing them from fully letting loose.

Yet now that it was all over, Ken began to see another side of some of the players.

Masayuki was probably the most unhinged. He was matching Riku's energy, if not overshadowing him in both being annoying and teasing.

It wasn't until 2 hours later that things had started to calm down.

Riku was fast asleep on the couch as he nursed his comically sized stomach filled with meat, while Masayuki was dozing off next to him. Hiroki was on the floor doing sit ups with the excuse he was burning off some calories.

As his gaze moved to the Head Coach, he saw the guy slurring his words while he talked animatedly at his father. Chris just smiled and nodded, letting the old man speak his mind.

After a few more minutes, Chris stood up and addressed the players, telling them to clean up and get ready to head back to the hotel. Their flight would be leaving tomorrow afternoon.

Riku required 2 shoulders to lean on as he held his stomach like a pregnant woman. Every step he took, he winced, making onlookers view him with contempt.

On the bus back, Ken sat next to Hiroki while Daichi was with Miho. Ken knew that they would be heading back to Japan tomorrow so he didn't want to interrupt his brother's time with his girlfriend.

Once they returned, who knew when the two would see each other next.

Upon arriving at the hotel, everyone went their separate ways. Ken got the first opportunity for a shower and quickly got into bed afterwards.

"Looks like I've got some time before anyone comes..." He muttered before lying on the bed.

This was as good a time as any to go through his World Cup missions.

#MISSION: U18 Baseball World Cup

*Task 1: Get onto base 15 times [32/15] [Completed]

*Task 2: Hit 8 home runs [16/8] [Completed]

*Task 3: Do not drop a single catch [Completed]

*Task 4: Advance to Super Round [Completed]

*Task 5: Finish top 2 in Super Round [Completed]

*Task 6: Win the World Cup [Completed]

*Task 7: Win player of the Tournament [Completed]

*Hidden Task: Rob a home run two times [2/2] [Claimed]

REWARDS:

>Task 1 rewards - 5,000 Major points [Claim Reward]

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

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

Chapter 477 - 477: Rewards & News (1)

[Congratulations, you received:

94,000 Major points

Fielding Boost

Skill Selection ticket

Potential Booster

SSS-Grade Physicality Elixir

SSS-Grade Mental Elixir]

The sound of hitting the jackpot sounded off in Ken's head, filling him with a rush of dopamine. This was the result of his hard work over the past 2 weeks of playing back-to-back games.

"It feels like Christmas..." Ken muttered, the smile not leaving his face.

'I'll use the Fielding Boost and Potential Booster now and worry about the others later.'
He thought inwardly.

Since they had just finished the World Cup, they wouldn't be playing again. Even when Ken returned home, the next match wouldn't be for a month or so with Yokohama.

[You have used Potential Booster. Potential increased to SSS+]

[You have consumed Fielding Boost. Fielding increased to A+]

Ken let out a sigh of contentment. While he probably could have waited to use these things, it was as if they were burning a hole in his pocket.

If it wasn't for the fear of excruciating pain from the Elixirs, he would have probably taken them both right now.

He let out a deep yawn, feeling the days fatigue suddenly creep up on him.

"Let's see my stats now..."

SYSTEM LEVEL: 4 (164,880/100,000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 16

TALENT ASSESSMENT: SS

POTENTIAL: SSS+

MAJOR POINTS: 164,880

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS

-SYSTEM SHOP

-LOTTERY (Locked)

-IMAGE TRAINING

-IDENTIFY

-TRAINING PLAN

-MENTOR

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: SS

>Pitching: SS+

>Fielding: A+

>Game Intelligence: B

>Mental: SS

>Skills: 21

>Traits: 2

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. SS)

Balance and Coordination: SS+

Agility: SS-

Strength: SS

Stamina: SS+

"Heh... Hehehe." Ken couldn't help but giggle like a school girl after checking out his status window.

After taking the SSS-Grade Elixirs, he could possibly rise into the Pro grades, though he didn't know what they were called just yet.

Just thinking about how much stronger he would become, caused Ken to be filled with a sense of anticipation. Yet he was far too tired to continue down this line of thinking.

'Mika, please use sleep protocol.'

[Understood.]

Those words were the last he heard before he fell asleep. He slept through Hiroki's incessant banging on the door as he tried to enter like he usually would. Unfortunately for him, he was yelled at by another resident and had to retreat back to his own room.

Daichi didn't return until 12am after spending his last night with Miho. He felt rather bittersweet in that moment, particularly because of the conversation they'd had prior.

Since this was the last day of their American trip, Daichi had brought up the elephant in the room, the long distance between them.

With Miho planning to attend Tokyo University next year and Daichi living in Osaka on school campus, they would be around 4-5 hours away by train.

After a lot of back and forth, the duo had made it clear they wanted to try and make it work, despite the odds being stacked against them. This obviously made Daichi ecstatic.

There was also the National Team duties that happened every year. As long as Daichi could continue to make the team, they would be able to spend even more time together.

"Are you awake bro?" Daichi asked in a soft tone.

Yet as he shined his torch, he saw Ken with his mouth wide open snoring softly.

Daichi smiled and was about to hop into bed, but his suspicions grew when he remembered he hadn't seen Hiroki at all.

He suddenly leapt into the air and landed on his bed, performing a textbook flying elbow to whomever was unfortunate enough to be sleeping in his bed.

However, after feeling nothing but the springy mattress underneath, Daichi let out a sigh of relief.

Meanwhile in Hiroki's room, the man suddenly sat up from his slumber, feeling a phantom pain in his stomach. He looked around a little before putting his head back on the pillow and going to sleep.

The rest of the night was uneventful for the players, though there were two figures helping themselves to some drinks in the bar fridge.

"Hehe, nothin' like some drinksssss after a win eh Chris?"

Coach Takashi's face was red as he poured a glass of whatever he'd procured from the bar fridge into a cup. The way he was unsteady on his feet was a sign that he had partaken in quite a few drinks himself.

"Damn right!"

Chris too seemed to be enjoying himself a lot, despite not looking as drunk as the Head Coach.

Coach Takashi handed him a drink before plonking himself down on the seat opposite Chris. He let out the typical sound an old person makes when sitting down.

"Cheers!"

The two raised their glasses and clinked them before taking a swig.

There was a stretched out silence for a while as the two enjoyed each others company. Men rarely felt the need to fill in the gaps of conversation, provided it wasn't awkward.

Coach Takashi looked rather wistful as he stared at the glass of booze in his cup.

"You really raised two monsters..." He said, his tone sounding full of appreciation.

Chris was a little taken aback, but he shook his hand dismissively.

"You'd be surprised... It was Ken who has been really pushing himself since last year, even dragging his brother along for the ride. Daichi didn't even pick up a glove until the end of Middle School."

"EH!?"

Coach Takashi almost dropped his drink after hearing such shocking news. He had known Ken and Daichi were freshman, but this was news even to him.

Yet he didn't doubt his assistant coach at all. Chris was such a character that his words could be trusted. Not once had the guy ingratiated himself towards him or tried to suck up throughout his tenure.

"Ya know... I didn't know what to expect when I took you on as an Assistant Coach. But I think I made the right decision." He stated, flashing a grin towards Chris.

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

Chapter 478 - 478: Rewards & News (2)

"Ah, thank you coach. It's been a pleasure working with you."

"Nonsense... And enough of this Coach business, call me Hajime."

"Y-Yes Hajime... Sir."

The next morning, no one showed their face before 9am, showing just how tired they were from the past 2 weeks of daily games. Of course there were a couple of outliers.

As Ken walked into the gym for his morning run, he saw that someone was already there working up a sweat.

"Morning Hiroki, I should have expected you'd be here."

Upon hearing Ken's voice, Hiroki turned his head causing Ken to take a few steps back in shock. The guy had dark bags under his eyes and looked like he'd been crying.

"Dude what's wrong with you!?"

"You locked me out..." He said, fresh tears running down his face.

"Ah..." Ken had forgotten to think of Hiroki before using Mika's sleep protocol. Even if Hiroki had been banging on the door he probably wouldn't have woken up.

"Sorry man, I must have been dead to the world." He said, slowly taking up the furthest treadmill away from the scary looking guy.

For the next 30 minutes, Hiroki complained about his roommate Aki who had kept him up most of the night with his sleep talking. But that wasn't all he was stressed about since he'd been roped into a double date.

"I don't even know what she looks like..."

"Didn't I show you the picture the other day?" Ken replied.

However Hiroki shook his head. While he wouldn't admit it, he was too busy with his one-sided rivalry against Leo to pay attention to Ken's phone at that time.

Ken shook his head and got his phone out, passing it to Hiroki.

GULP~

"Ahem..."

Hiroki passed the phone back to Ken and didn't say another word for a while, upping his speed on the treadmill. It wasn't until Ken queried him after the workout that he finally officially agreed.

"Well I mean it would be rude to refuse now after I already agreed..." He said, trying to act cool. Though it was clear his mood had improved after checking out Rie in the photo.

Ken couldn't help but chuckle at his friend's reaction, he didn't know Hiroki's taste in women, but no man could turn down a woman with such assets.

"A few of us are going sight seeing today with some of the staff, are you coming?" Hiroki asked while toweling himself down.

Ken shook his head, "I've got plans to see my Grandpa since we won't see each other for a while again."

Speaking of, he needed to go wake up his brother otherwise they might be late.

"Ah the US Head Coach... Well have fun, I'm gonna go shower and get ready."

With that, the two separated and Ken went back to his room to do the same. When he arrived, Daichi was still sprawled out on the bed fast asleep.

"I wonder what time he got home last night?" Ken murmured with a grin before hitting the showers.

Around 40 minutes later, Daichi and Ken met up with their mother and father in the lobby.

Chris looked like he'd been hit by a bus, while Yuki was as fresh as a daisy. She playfully teased her husband who had clearly been drinking well into the morning with the Head Coach.

"Man I'm starving. Are we going back to that same restaurant again?" Ken asked with some enthusiasm.

At the mention of food, Chris's face turned green and he almost vomited on the spot.

"Hehe~ we're headed to a cafe this time. I think your father could use a coffee." Yuki stated, hugging onto Chris's arm.

"Alright let's go."

"Hold on, Miho isn't here yet." Yuki said, prompting a questioning look from both Daichi and Ken.

"Miho is coming!?" Daichi looked excited.

"Mmm, I invited her last night at Korean BBQ." Yuki replied with a grin.

Ken narrowed his eyes suspiciously. While his mother's smile might look innocent, it was clear that she had her own machinations for setting up this situation.

Yet Daichi was too blissfully ignorant to notice anything amiss. To him, it just meant that he would be able to spend more time with her before they left for Japan.

"Sorry for keeping you all waiting."

Miho arrived in the lobby wearing a flowing sun dress and wide brimmed hat, causing Daichi's jaw to drop.

"So cute..."

Even Ken felt his face redden in shock. While he was not attracted to Miho the same way his brother was, seeing her in such an outfit showed just how cute she was.

Seeing Daichi's reaction, Miho smiled warmly before approaching him and holding onto his arm, much like Yuki was doing to Chris.

Only now did Ken notice that he was the only one going solo.

"Haaaaahhh, looks like I'm the 5th wheel..." He muttered feeling a little sad. It sucked that Ai wasn't here right now.

Soon enough, the 5 arrived at the cafe only to see Santiago and Mark waiting for them already.

Mark grinned and quickly went to give everyone a hug. He stopped at Daichi and saw the cute girl next to him and introduced himself.

Surprisingly, Mark had rudimentary knowledge of Japanese, surprising both Daichi and Miho.

Daichi suddenly felt a lot closer to his new Grandfather because of this, though he still wished to learn English to completely bridge the gap.

Ken held his hand out to Santiago, hoping that things would not be awkward between them due to the final match, however it seemed he'd been overthinking things.

Santiago completely ignored the offered hand and went in for a hug, a beaming smile on his face.

"Congratulations on winning last night, it was a very fun game."

Ken's eyes widened, but he still hugged back. Thankfully the guy didn't seem affected by the result.

Daichi and Miho both received a hug from the guy before everyone sat down at the table.

"Before we order anything, I have some news..." Mark said with a grin.

Ken stiffened, straining his ears. This would be the moment where he'd find out if the Recovery Elixir had worked or not.

"I am now cancer free." He said, causing both Chris and Yuki's face to morph into one of shock.

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

Chapter 479 - 479: Back Home (1)

"What do you mean!? You've gone into remission? But it was stage 4 cancer..." Chris seemingly sobered up in an instant, however he was having trouble understanding his father's words.

Mark simply smiled and shook his head.

"I mean the cancer is completely gone..."

Out of everyone at the table, only Ken didn't seem shocked. Though he quickly put on an act after realizing how weird it would look to the others.

He quickly translated to Miho and Daichi since they didn't know English, bringing with it another couple of gasps. Of course they were more confused since they never knew Mark had cancer in the first place.

Yuki covered her mouth as tears began to fall down her cheeks whereas Chris was far too shocked to react.

"It's a miracle." Ken said before getting out of the chair and hugging his Grandfather.

His actions seemed to knock everyone out of their shock as they quickly followed suit. Chris and Mark's hug went on for much longer than any others, showing just how happy he was.

With the big news out of the way, the mood turned celebratory.

Chris felt as if he was riding on the clouds after winning both the World Cup and the news of his father's recovery.

The group ordered food and chatted throughout the morning, speaking of anything and everything in each others lives.

"So, what are your plans for the future boys?" Mark asked, his gaze turning to Ken and Daichi.

"What do you mean?" Ken asked before taking a bite of a hash brown.

Mark smiled, "Well... Your father played his high school years in America before heading back to Japan for college. If you want, I can pull some strings..."

Yet before he could finish, Yuki stood up from the table with her face flushed red.

"Absolutely not!"

Her words were loud, causing the others at the cafe to turn their attention to her.

Mark grinned, before waving his hand dismissively, "I'm joking! Don't worry."

Seeing how he'd got a rise out of Yuki, he chuckled in satisfaction. Her reaction reminded him of his own wife when it came to discussing Chris's matters. His expression softened a little as he thought about her.

Yet there was one person who seemed swayed by Mark's words.

"I'd like to finish High School in Japan... But maybe College isn't out of the equation." Ken said softly, as if testing the waters.

He instantly received a burning glare from his mother, causing him to shrink his head down in response.

"Hahaha!" Mark laughed out loud, finding the interaction to be hilarious.

Chris on the other hand seemed rather thoughtful. There was no way that he could deny the talent of both his sons, especially since watching them so closely during the World Cup.

Yuki seemed to have sensed the shift in Chris's mood and subconsciously held onto his arm. It was clear that she was reluctant at the prospect of her sons going overseas.

Ken looked at his father expectantly, though he wasn't expecting an answer so soon.

'The prospects for a professional career in the Majors are far higher in American Colleges...' Chris thought deeply to himself.

The only problem with American Colleges, was that they cost an arm and a leg for tuition. They were not rich, nor would Chris accept help from his father on this matter, which meant there was only one other solution.

"You're still only in your first year of High School... But, if you wanted to go to an American College, you have to secure a scholarship." He said, looking at both Ken and Daichi.

Ken's face lit up with surprise, a stark contrast to the confused expression on Daichi's face.

Daichi had never thought about college before, especially one in America. This was too sudden for him to comprehend at this moment.

Santiago looked at Ken and Daichi with excitement on his face. He would want nothing more than to see his two new relatives more often, this would only be possible if they came over to America.

Mark too held a look of expectation on his face.

"Just keep playing like you are and I believe you'll easily get a scholarship over here." He added with a smile.

Everyone seemed to be ignoring Yuki who was pouting at the corner of the table with all this talk of her kids leaving the nest. It was clear that she'd be having a long talk with Chris when they were finally alone.

At this new prospect, Ken suddenly felt like he knew the way forward.

While he could go through the Japanese professional route, it would be much harder to be picked up by a Major League club. He would either have to play in Japan for 9 years, or be good enough for one of the US clubs to be willing to pay the posting fee.

For Ken who wanted to play baseball at the highest level, being picked up by a Major League club was his dream.

Ken kept all this new information close to his heart. All of it would be useless if he didn't improve his game and continue to get better during the remaining 2 and a half years of High School he had left.

Yuki's expression improved after the subject changed, bringing with it a harmonious atmosphere. Santiago chatted happily with Ken while his Grandfather yapped away like a man who was half his age.

Like all good things, they had to come to an end. They'd been chatting for well over 2 hours which meant the time to leave was nearing.

"I had a lot of fun coaching against you Chris. Let's do it again in 2 years time." Mark said with a grin.

At the mention of 2 years, Chris's face morphed a little. Since he had almost lost his father, he didn't want their visits to be so infrequent.

"Ah, don't give me that sad look. I'll come visit in a few months time for Christmas." He said slyly.

This of course made everyone at the table happy.

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

Chapter 480 - 480: Back Home (2)

Everybody said their goodbyes and went their separate ways. Mark and Santiago also had a flight to catch back to their home state of North Carolina which was leaving that afternoon.

Upon returning to the lobby, everyone was asked to pack their bags and bring them down to the lobby. Only after everyone had gathered did everything feel real.

Ken struggled to fit his new trophy's in with all of his other luggage without breaking them, which was better than the alternative of having none.

The team then went to the airport and waited, not boarding their flight until 2 hours later.

After a grueling trip, the Japanese team arrived back in Japan at around 6pm. The worst part was that everyone still had to travel back home from the airport after their 11 hour flight.

Thankfully for those who lived in Tokyo, they were just a few train stops away from their destination.

However, no one seemed to want to leave just yet, as if there were some words they wanted to say to each other.

"Hey, why don't we all exchange contact details?" Aki asked, breaking the silence between the players.

For once, everyone seemed to agree with the guy.

Players like Riku and Masayuki would not be eligible for the U18 team next year, which meant they would likely not see everyone again unless they made it to the men's team.

After everyone exchanged their details, Masayuki walked forward into the center and placed his hand out.

"Oho, the Captain is feeling motivated~" Riku said with a grin, promptly placing his hand on top of the guy's.

Ken let out a chuckle. While it seemed a little weird to do such a thing in the middle of the airport, he didn't care. The bond that he'd created with his fellow countrymen was something that he would cherish for life.

One after another, everyone put their hands in the pile with Daichi joining in last.

Just as Masayuki was about to say something, 3 more sets of hands piled on top.

Miho, Chris and the Head Coach placed their hands on top without a word, yet no one complained. They were all part of the team also.

"Victory on 3!"

1

2

3

"VICTORY!"

The words echoed through the airport, causing lots of eyes to fall upon them. However, no one was embarrassed.

"Well we're off. Don't be strangers!" Kuro and Aki walked off first, waving to everyone on their way out of the building.

"Keep an eye on the draft next year for us." Riku said, sending a wink to Ken and Daichi.

One by one the other players left, giving their parting words.

The blond delinquent Kei walked up to Ken and held out his hand, a serious expression on his face.

"We'll be coming for you in the next Koshien." He said.

"Heh, bring it on." Ken replied with a grin, taking the offered hand.

Soon enough it was only Ken, Daichi, Hiroki, Miho and the two coach's remaining.

Coach Takashi had already said his goodbyes and was about to call Miho to leave, however upon seeing that her and Daichi were having a moment, he quickly cleared his throat and looked the other way.

Chris also felt awkward since it was his own son.

"We'll make it work okay?" Daichi whispered, kissing Miho's forehead tenderly.

"Mmm."

The two tried to separate but were having a hard time doing so.

"Ahem..."

Finally, Coach Takashi managed to get Miho's attention in order to leave. Daichi looked sad as he watched her retreating figure, yet his determination grew.

'I'll become a pro... No matter what.' He said in his heart.

The two had vowed to become professionals in their own fields, all so they could be together when they grew up.

"Well... Your mother won't be here until tomorrow, so we should all go and get some sleep." Chris said, talking to his two boys. It was only then that he realized Hiroki was still with them.

"Ah, are you catching the train too?" He asked.

"Y-Yeah, I'm the stop after yours." Hiroki said, nodding. He felt a little awkward since he was the only non-family member in this instance.

"Alright, let's go then."

They made their way to the train station and hopped on. After flying for 11 hours, the over 1 hour train ride felt a little brutal. Especially since the train was rather packed.

After arriving home, the house seemed a little dusty, but everything was still in working order. They each took turns showering before heading to bed without many words exchanged between the three.

Ken finally got into bed and let out a big sigh of contentment. He had never liked the act of traveling, at least when it came to flying and the like.

Unfortunately for him, pursuing a baseball career would require plenty of it.

Now that he was free, Ken brought up the system window and began to eye his Elixirs. This was the perfect moment to take one of them, he just didn't know which one to use first.

He had a little bit of a headache, so he quickly ruled out the Mental Elixir since it would not do him any favors at that point.

'So it's the Physicality Elixir first then...' He said inwardly, letting out a sigh in preparation for the pain.

[Warning: User will not receive full benefits upon using SSS-Grade Physicality Elixir]

"Huh?"

Ken heard Mika's voice enter his mind and was instantly confused.

'What do you mean by that Mika? Is it because my body is fatigued?'

[Negative. User must level up the system to advance to ?? Grade]

'Oh... I guess that sounds reasonable?' Ken thought.

He quickly navigated to the upgrade menu and smiled. Thanks to the World Cup mission rewards, he had plenty of Major Points to upgrade.

#SYSTEM ALERT

>The user has chosen to upgrade the system.

>100,000 Major points will be deducted to upgrade the system.

>System will shut down for 13,000 hours in which all functions will be unavailable until the upgrade has been completed.

[Would you like to commence the upgrade now?]

[YES/NO]

'EH!? 13,000 hours? Isn't that like... 18 months?'

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