

# Major League System

## Chapter 481 - 481: The Decision (1)

Ken stared at the system window in front of him for a long time, his mind racing. His initial thought was to instantly hit the decline option and go straight to bed, hoping it would be different when he tried tomorrow.

If he accepted the upgrade, then he would lose the system for over a year and a half. He had never played a game without the system in this life, so he wasn't sure how he would play without it.

Would he still be able to throw 100mph fastballs? What about batting?

There were too many unknowns for him to make such a decision right now.

However, his insecurities began to float up to the surface. All those times he had thought the system was a cheat, or felt like he was not playing by the rules were brought to the forefront of his mind.

Instinctively he knew the answer. Once his system goes, he'll become just a regular player.

'You're nothing without the system.'

'You'll just become a failure again.'

'You don't deserve to have this second chance.'

Ken grit his teeth in frustration, trying to fight back against the voices in his head. Only now that this scenario had appeared did his anxiety and depression begin to rear its ugly head once more.

He quickly closed the system window and stared at the ceiling fan.

The truth was, he would be limiting himself if he did not upgrade the system. He could use both of his SSS Elixirs, but he would be capped at SSS+ for all of his grades.

While this might be good enough to play professionally, it would severely limit his potential.

Looking at it subjectively, it made sense to do the upgrade as soon as possible. This was especially the case since he was only in his first year of High School.

Getting it out of the way early would ensure he could try his hardest to apply for a scholarship in his 3rd year. In fact, the longer he waited, the worse off he would be in the long run.

'It's too much to think of right now...!' Ken thought, feeling his temples throb from a headache.

'Mika, please use sleep protocol.'

[Understood.]

With that, Ken drifted off to sleep, his worries retreating for now.

The next morning, Chris went to pick up Yuki from the airport, leaving both Ken and Daichi by themselves.

"When are you going back to school?" Ken asked, helping himself to some convenience store food that they picked up earlier.

"Probably this afternoon." Daichi said, seeming rather sad about the whole affair.

Ken nodded. They had already missed out on the first 2 weeks of the semester thanks to the World Cup, which meant they had a fair bit of catching up to do.

Since it was Sunday, they only had a single day to relax before it was back to school.

"What are you doing today?"

"I need to study..." Ken replied simply.

Daichi stretched his body and yawned in response, "Well, good luck with that... I'm going to go have another nap." He said, disappearing up the stairs in the next moment.

Ken could only shake his head and chuckle. He had no doubt that the guy had been on his phone all last night messaging Miho.

As for Ken, he was serious about studying. While he would usually moan and groan about it, he was now graced with the Academic trait, making the task a lot quicker than ever before.

'Time to go study... Everything.'

Ken retreated up into his room and began the longest yet most efficient study session of his entire life thus far. He began to pour over the curriculum from this year and the next, with the intention of making notes and burning the information into his mind.

He did this because subconsciously, he'd already made the decision to upgrade the system. If he used this time to study, he could save himself a lot of pain and suffering for the next year without his new trait.

Ken was only interrupted at dinner time where the family ate their final meal together before Daichi needed to leave. Since everyone was still rather tired, nothing heavy was discussed.

"It was fun bro... I'll see you later." Daichi said, holding out his hand towards Ken.

"Remember our promise." Ken stated, brushing off the hand and going in for a hug.

"Mmm."

With that, Chris took Daichi to the train station in his car, leaving both Yuki and Ken at home.

"Where do you think you're going?" Yuki said, her voice sounding rather suspicious.

"Hmm? I'm just going to study mom." Ken replied. He still needed to make the most of his Academic trait while he had it, otherwise he would regret it.

Yuki was gobsmacked. Since when had her son been the studious type?

"C-Carry on then..." She replied, taking a seat at the table. Only now did she feel how much her sons had changed.

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"Here he is! The World Cup MVP!"

Shiro's voice shrieked out loud, turning everyone's attention towards their direction.

Ken who had his back turned suddenly froze after hearing the familiar voice, yet he instantly felt his annoyance rise. For some reason, he tried to guess who was more annoying, Aki or Shiro.

Yet as he turned his head, his jaw almost dropped completely.

Standing in front of him was Shiro, but he looked different. His once short and childish build had changed dramatically, most notably his body shape.

His unassuming build had changed into a fit and slightly muscular exterior.

However, that was not the most shocking thing. It was another figure standing beside the guy.

"Kaori!?"

"Hi Ken..."

He looked down only to see Shiro holding hands with Kaori, like they were a couple.

'Don't tell me...'

Shiro turned to Kaori and whispered a few words. She then planted a kiss on his cheek before walking past and leaving a shocked and speechless Ken in place.

Ken looked towards Shiro with amazement.

"How...?"

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

## **Chapter 482 - 482: The Decision (2)**

Shiro walked up beside him and grinned, "Man you played so well in that final game, congratulations dude."

Ken didn't respond, his eyes still locked onto the changed version of Shiro in front of him.

"Alright... You've got some explaining to do." He said, placing his arm around the guy's shoulders.

They began to talk as they walked to class.

Apparently the team had been doing Ken's workouts every day while he was gone. At some point Shiro's body had beefed up and he amassed the confidence to ask Kaori out to which she surprisingly agreed.

This only served to boost his already burgeoning confidence, almost causing him to be unrecognizable in his current state.

Yet Ken was a little skeptical, at least until he remembered the skill he'd passed to Shiro during Koshien. With the Fatigue Management skill, he probably had a much easier time during training.

The two chatted all the way into class where everyone seemed to be looking at Ken like he was a celebrity. He had sort of gotten used to the looks since acquiring Charismatic Air, but it was almost 10 times worse now.

'Don't tell me Charismatic Air is even more effective now that I have some fame?' Ken thought, feeling a headache coming on.

Thankfully the bell rang and the teacher arrived not long later. Since Ken was at the back, the other kids couldn't brazenly look at him throughout class. Yet that didn't stop them during breaks.

"Congratulations on the World Cup win Ken!"

He was quickly inundated by his classmates at lunch time, making for an awkward scenario. Ken palmed them off with a few words and began to eat his bento, hoping they would leave him alone.

Despite it only being his first day back at school, he was already tired.

After what felt like an eternity, the bell signifying the end of school rang out, prompting Ken to let out a big stretch. He saw some of his classmates walk towards his table, about to start a conversation.

"Ah, I better get to club!" He announced, dashing from his chair and avoiding all of the students. Even Shiro was left for dead as he left the classroom in such a rush.

Soon enough he arrived on the baseball field only to see his Coach already setting things up.

"Coach!" Ken called out, happy to see a familiar face.

Seiji Hanada with his coarse stubble and bags under his eyes turned and saw Ken walking towards him.

"Haha! Well if it isn't Japan's U18 Ace. So nice of you to join us." He said with a grin.

"It's good to be back." Ken admitted, though it was only a half truth.

While he was looking forward to club activities, school was a bit annoying.

The two chatted for a while before the rest of the team arrived.

Yusuke, Makoto, Yuta, Tatsuya, Jun. All of his teammates that he won Koshien with gave him a warm reception, making him feel at home.

"Man when you hit that intentional walk pitch I was like... ORYAAHHHH!" Makoto said, slapping him on the back and laughing heartily.

When Hiroki arrived he was also inundated by the rest of his teammates. Since he was in his second year, he was closest to the 3rd years of the team.

It took a while but finally everybody had settled down enough to begin their training session. After only 20 minutes, Ken was beginning to sweat and couldn't help but smile.

After 2 weeks of no heavy training sessions, it felt good to be able to push his body to the limits once more. Not only that, he was in good company with his old team.

'I missed this...'

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Two weeks later, Ken was sitting in his room and closed up the text book he'd been reading from. Beside him was a mountain of notes which covered everything for the next year of studies.

Formulas, curriculum, lesson notes. Basically whatever he could remember through his memory recall and whatever he could find on the Internet he had studied profusely over the past 2 weeks.

While it had left him feeling somewhat drained, he knew that it would be well worth it in the long run. He'd also worked on his baseball knowledge while he had the chance, bumping his game intelligence to the A-Grade.

Ken retreated downstairs for dinner with his parents. Since Chris had returned from America, he'd been preoccupied looking for work in the meantime since the U18 operations had ceased for now.

Tonight, he came back with good news.

"You're looking at the new Assistant Coach for the Yokohama Warriors!"

"WOW!" Ken rose to his feet in shock and happiness, almost not believing his ears.

Apparently Chris had received a glowing recommendation from Coach Takashi and received a call from the General Manager of the Yokohama Warriors with the job offer.

Not only did it pay well, he wouldn't have to leave the country for his job.

Sure it involved some travel, but he would be home for at least 4-5 days per week which was much better than before.

"I'm so happy for you honey." Yuki said with a bright smile.

The news invigorated everyone as they began animatedly talking amongst one another.

"Ah, you should tell Daichi too." Ken said, not forgetting about his little brother.

"I called him earlier, don't worry." Chris said with a grin.

After dinner, Ken showered and went back up to his room. Now that he had got his affairs in order, it was time to make the decision.

He scrolled through the calendar on his phone, swiping past the months until he found the date and created an alert.

"April 20th, 2019 8:45pm... Let's hope everything goes okay until then." He muttered.

Ken opened his system window and began going through every part of the system. Things that he'd taken for granted just a few weeks ago were going to disappear for a time.

However, this might be the opportunity that he was subconsciously looking for. If he could continue his domination it would give him peace of mind, silencing the voices in his mind.

Yet would it turn out this way? Only time would tell.

#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]

"Yes..."

#SYSTEM ALERT

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

>100,000 Major points have been deducted.

SYSTEM UPGRADE INITIALIZING

SHUTTING DOWN TO INSTALL UPGRADE...

Ken sat in silence for a while as he stared at the ceiling.

'Mika are you there?'

...

"I guess not."

End Volume 3 - World Cup

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

## **Chapter 483 - 483: Life without the System (1)**

DOOOONG

"Yatsuo smacks the ball with force! It's going, going, gone!"

"Shinjuku have now increased their lead to 10 runs at the bottom of the 5th inning. It looks like the umpire has decided to call the game via the mercy rule."

"Yokohama have been eliminated in the quarter finals of this year's Koshien on the back of a disappointing performance from their Ace Ken Takagi. Ever since returning from the U18 World Cup he seems to have entered a slump."

Ken sat back on his chair and turned the TV off, gripping the remote in his hand tightly.

He resisted the urge to throw the thing in his hand across the room and tried to calm himself down. There was no point in getting angry since it had already passed.



'This sucks...' Ken thought, slumping back in his chair.

Ever since choosing to upgrade the system, everything seemed to be going wrong.

He could no longer pitch above 90mph, nor was he as proficient in batting. It was like all the skills he'd learned had disappeared overnight, leading to his mediocre play.

It wasn't like throwing 90mph was bad, in fact it was still very fast for his age. The only problem was, people were comparing him to what he used to be with the system.

Ken grabbed his hair in frustration as he stared at the ceiling. He knew it would be tough without the system, but he had underestimated just how hard.

Knock Knock

"Kenny, are you awake?"

The sound of his mothers voice called out from the other side of his bedroom door, sounding concerned.

"Come in." He stated simply.

She opened the door and saw her son despondent and slumped on the couch. Her first instinct was to go over and give him a hug, however she stopped herself.

Without a word, she walked into his room and sat on the edge of his bed, her gaze trained on him.

"Hmm?"

Seeing that she hadn't said anything, Ken lazily opened his eyes and looked at her. She was dressed in her cooking apron with her hair tied up in a practical bun, the smell of garlic and onion emanating from her.

"What's wrong Honey? You haven't been yourself for a while now..." She said with concern.

Hearing his mother worried about him, Ken instantly felt apologetic. He'd been trying to deal with everything on his own over the past year almost, yet it had become too much.

Every critic seemed to come out of the woodwork, bashing his performances of late. They called his Koshien and U18 World Cup victory's a fluke, discrediting everything that he'd worked hard for.

He heard it almost every day, so much so that he started to believe these things himself.

'It was the system that won you those accolades.'

'You could never achieve such things on your own merit.'

The voices of self doubt which he'd tried hard to drown out had returned with a vengeance. His performances without the system only served to add fuel to their words.

"I guess I'm just not feeling myself..." Ken replied to his mother after a while.

Yuki's heart ached as she heard her son's words. His body language looked like someone who had been beaten down and lacked the confidence to stand back up on his own.

"Oh honey... It'll be okay, you're just going through a lot at the moment." Yuki said, hopping off the bed and placing her hand atop his head.

"Your father will be home in a few minutes, maybe you'll feel better after some food."

Ken nodded, sending his mother a small smile, yet it didn't reach his eyes. He watched her walk out of the room and let out a sigh.

"I don't want to see Dad right now..." He muttered.

His father had already mentioned that he would be the Assistant coach again for the U18 team this year. Since the World Cup was last year, it was time for the Asian Championships this year.

With the way Ken had been playing, he didn't believe he deserved a spot in the tryouts. But there was a big part of him that wanted to go and perform on that stage again.

What if he tried out and didn't make the team? Wouldn't that just prove to the world that his first year was a fluke? It would give the media even more fuel to use against him and drag his name through the mud.

In reality, these weren't things that a teenager should have to deal with. However, Ken's rise to stardom had been so meteoric that he'd garnered attention from not only Japan, but the world.

As he stewed in his thoughts for a few minutes, he heard his father arrive downstairs. For a few moments he went through an internal struggle whether or not to go greet him, that was until he heard another voice.

"Where's Ken?"

"Daichi?" Ken sprung to his feet in surprise.

He moved to his door and peaked his head out, only to see his little brother ascending the stairs to his room.

"What are you doing hiding up there?" Daichi said with a grin.

Ken opened the door and walked out to give his friend a hug.

"I should be asking you the same question Mr. Koshien winner." Ken replied with a little sass.

"Ha hahaha." Daichi didn't mind the teasing, hugging his brother back.

"It's just a shame we didn't get to face each other this time."

"Mmm... So really, what are you doing here?" Ken asked, holding his brother at arms length.

"I'm not sure, Dad told me to come home."

Ken's eyes flashed with realization, his heart skipping a beat.

'Did Daichi get asked to tryout for the U18 team again?' Ken thought.

"Hurry up you two, dinner is ready." Yuki called out from the kitchen.

"Coming."

The two descended the stairs and Ken saw his father already sitting down at the table with the newspaper opened in front of him.

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

## **Chapter 484 - 484: Life without the System (2)**

"Hey Dad."

"Hey buddy, I haven't seen you in a while."

The four sat down at the table and began to eat their food. It was a traditional Japanese curry, something that his mother had perfected over the years.

The curry was sweet and savory with just the right amount of spice.

Once everyone was done, Chris looked across at his two boys with a mixture of emotions. Ken could instantly tell that something was awry, though he kept his mouth shut, waiting for his father to speak.

"I've got some good news and bad news." Chris stated, his eyes imperceptibly flashing towards Ken.

At that moment Ken felt a lump in his throat, preparing for the bad news.

"We won't be holding tryouts for the U18 Asian Championship this year since the team had been chosen already."

"Huh? That's a little weird right?" Daichi said, raising his eyebrows in response.

He had figured that the reason his father invited him back home was because of the U18 National Team tryouts, yet this was a little peculiar.

Ignoring the statement, Chris continued.

"Unfortunately, only Daichi was selected for the team this year."

CLANK

Yuki dropped her dish into the sink by accident, her face morphing into one of shock followed by heartache. She turned to Chris and was about to say something, however he placed his hand up, stopping her.

Ken felt his heart sink at these words, but he quickly tried to hide the pain.

"Congratulations bro." He said, placing his hand on Daichi's wide shoulders.

"But why?"

Daichi was confused. Ken was the biggest reason they had won the U18 World Cup, even taking out the MVP honors. Why wouldn't they have added him to the team?

"Well Ken has been going through a bit of a slump since returning from the World Cu—"

"So what!?" Daichi cut off his father, slamming his fist on the table.

Everyone including Ken seemed to be taken aback by Daichi's actions. They'd never seen him raise his voice or act out violently at all ever since coming into the family.

"Hey man, settle down." Ken said, his tone serious.

"S-Sorry... I just think its unfair that you were left off the team." Daichi admitted, realizing he'd gone too far.

Chris looked at both of his sons and felt his pride beginning to swell. Not only was Daichi the first to defend his brother's honor, Ken did well to reign him in and ensure that he kept a level head despite being the one wronged.

"Haaahhh, our hands are tied this year thanks to the new National Team sponsor. They wanted us to select the team without a trial this year based on the players most recent performances." Chris stated, letting out a helpless sigh.

"New sponsor?"

"Mmm, Suzuki Corporation is our new sponsor."

Both Daichi and Ken looked at each other, feeling as if the name was familiar.

"Ah... that weirdo that held your hand for ages at the closing ceremony." Ken said, pointing to Daichi.

It took him a while, but he finally remembered the person Ken was referring to.

"Didn't they sponsor the World Cup? Why are they sponsoring Japan now only?" Daichi asked in confusion.

"Well they're a Japanese company so I guess it makes sense." Chris replied, shrugging his shoulders.

He then turned to Ken, his expression serious.

"I'm sorry Kenny, my hands are tied in this matter."

Ken shook his head, "There's nothing to apologize for. It's true that I haven't been performing as well as I should be." He stated, though he would be lying if he said that he wasn't hurting inside.

"Next years world cup... You better be ready."

"Yes sir!" Ken said, adding a salute.

"Do I have to go?" Daichi asked, considering pulling out.

This time he received stern looks from both his father and Ken.

"You have no choice."

"Miho will be there too." Ken added.

At the mention of his girlfriend, Daichi seemed to suddenly remember that she was part of the U18 National Team staff.

He looked a little embarrassed and scratched the back of his head.

"Ha haha, yeah I should probably go. When do we leave?"

"Tomorrow we're heading to Tokyo University and we'll be leaving for Korea in 5 days."

The two continued to talk about the details while Ken merely listened.

'You'll never stand beside him without the system.'

'I can't believe you thought you guys were on the same level?'

Ken's fake smile froze on his face as the voices once again assaulted him, leaving him feeling vulnerable.

"Ah I forgot. This came in the mail from your Grandfather." Chris said, handing both Daichi and Ken a separate envelope.

At the mention of his Grandpa, Ken's mood improved considerably.

He didn't open it right away, waiting till he was in his room around 30 minutes later to do so. Ken wasn't sure what the contents would be, but he was excited.

"Dear Ken, I hope you're doing well. I've watched all of your Koshien games and something seems a bit off with your pitching form, are you injured or something? Do yourself a favor and watch back some of your old tape. Sometimes we can learn a thing or two from our past."

Ken eye's widened a little after reading his words, his heart thumping inside of his chest in response.

'Why didn't I think of that?'

He'd been trying to figure out what was so different about him without the system, but he felt like he was getting nowhere.

The letter continued, detailing what the old man had been up to, bringing a smile to his face. Yet it was the final line that caused him some shock.

"One of your fan's asked me to send this letter alongside mine, I hope you don't mind. He seemed like a good kid."

Ken's eyebrow raised as he dug inside the envelope once more, pulling out a hand written note addressed to him.

"Hi Ken, it's Michael"

...

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

## Chapter 485 - 485: The Letter (1)

"I just wanted to say thank you for inspiring me to take up baseball again. I joined my middle school team again and was able to make the Varsity squad within the first 2 months."

Ken read the words on the page and felt a smile creep onto his lips.

"I've made some good friends on the team and my coach is really nice, even if he says Ryan is a better pitcher than you (he's wrong)."

"My mom got your signed baseball framed for me so I can keep it safe. Anytime things get hard I'll see those words you wrote and remind myself never to give up. Thank you for believing in me, even though I didn't believe in myself."

"Your number 1 fan - Michael."

Ken gripped the handwritten note tightly, feeling some raw emotions after reading the touching letter. Despite his feeling of inadequacy, there was a young boy cheering for him on the other side of the globe.

Whatever self pity he had began to dry up. If he couldn't pull himself out of his rut, then he didn't deserve to be a role model to such a kind soul as Michael.

SLAP

Ken slapped both sides of his face hard, the sound echoing inside of his room. The sharp burst of pain seemed to wake him up, igniting a fire from within.

'There's no point in wallowing in self pity...' He told himself.

Sure he could wait until the system returned in half a year, but then he'd be in the same position when the next time to upgrade came. Those voices of self doubt would only be silenced temporarily, never truly disappearing.

This was his chance to prove to both himself and the world that he was going to be a professional, by hook or crook.

"It's time to study..." Ken muttered, moving over to his desk and booting up his laptop.

Thankfully there were archives of the Koshien games available on their website. After downloading the videos from this year and last year, he also got copies of the U18 matches where he played.

Ken spent the rest of the night watching over his game footage, both in the batters box and on the mound. Unfortunately for him, he couldn't see too many glaring differences.

He frowned, feeling as if he was missing something.

Since his Grandpa had spotted something, it meant that there definitely were some differences. However, unlike his Grandpa who had ridiculous game intelligence, he was far too lacking.

"I need some help..."

The first person he thought of was his father, however he would be tied up with U18 National Team business starting tomorrow.

His Grandpa was also off the list since they lived so far away from each other, which meant there was only one other person he could trust to help him.

Ken packed away his laptop and got into bed, staring at the ceiling for a while until he felt tired enough to fall asleep.

One thing that he dearly missed was Mika's sleep protocol which he'd gotten far too used to. Instead of feeling invigorated after 6 hours sleep, Ken needed at least 8 or 9 to fully function the next morning.

The next day, Ken hung out with his family for a while before his father and Daichi had to leave for Tokyo University.

"Give em' hell." Ken said with a grin, holding out his fist.

Daichi laughed, meeting the fist with his own.

"We'll bring home the Championship for you."



With that, the two left. They would be gone for almost 3 weeks while Ken was forced to stay behind. Although he was still a little sad about not making the team, he vowed to show visible improvement by the time they came back.

It was around 11am on Sunday and he and his mother were left at home alone. While Yuki felt a little lost, Ken decided it was time to begin the first step of getting back into form.

"I'm going for a run, I'll be back soon." Ken stated, heading out the door before his mother could reply.

Yuki frowned in response, puffing her cheeks in annoyance.

Despite not having Mika as his on board personal trainer anymore, Ken remembered all of her tricks. He tried to replicate the training sessions, yet had to stop his run a few times.

Ken huffed and puffed, feeling as if his lungs were about to burst from his chest.

"Why... Is this... So hard..." He said between breaths, feeling some confusion arise.

When he used to run, his body could keep up with this kind of workout. Yet for some reason, it was almost impossible without the system.

Ken completed his 10 mile run and almost collapsed on his way through the door.

"I'm... Home." He said, struggling to breathe.

"Welcome Ho—me?"

Yuki peaked her head around the corner and saw Ken on his hands and knees, sweat pouring from every pore on his body. If she wasn't so concerned about him, she would have thrown him straight into the shower.

"Are you okay?" She asked with concern.

"I'm... Fine." Ken said, picking up his labored body.

He took off his shoes and slowly walked towards the bathroom, his legs shaking with every step he took.

Yuki watched in silence, though her face turned worried a moment later.

In her mind, Ken was probably still devastated after finding out he didn't make the National Team. His crazy work out was probably a result of him trying to punish himself for failing.

She felt the urge to talk to him, however her husband's words rang in her head once more.

Last night after the boys had gone to bed, he'd pulled her aside for a few words.

"Whatever you do, don't coddle Ken while we're gone."

Before she had responded, Chris continued with a serious expression.

"This is a chance for Ken to learn and grow from this setback. He'll never find his own way if we continue to baby him."

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

## **Chapter 486 - 486: The Letter (2)**

Just remembering those words caused Yuki to puff her cheeks in annoyance. She muttered something along the lines of stupid men and their stupid ways before going back to preparing food.

What mother didn't want to take their child's pain away? She could see the hurt and rejection in his face even now, making her feel like she had failed him.

But instinctively she knew that what her husband had said was right.

"Arghh, I'll never understand men..." She huffed.

In the shower, Ken washed away all the sweat, feeling his muscles sing out in satisfaction. While he had been running every day over the past year, today was the only time that he'd truly pushed himself.

He had used Mika's training regime, yet noticed that his body had not been able to keep up. This either meant that he had gotten worse over time naturally, or it had something to do with the system.

Judging by all the other areas that were affected, he was 99% sure that it was because he no longer had the system.

'So it's not only my Baseball skills that are tied to the system, but my bodies fitness as well.' He thought inwardly.

If that was the case, he had a theory as to why.

"The Elixirs..."

The main reason why he was able to excel so quickly in his physical state was because of the Elixirs. They were wondrous drugs that boosted all of his physical attributes at the cost of excruciating pain.

'When I upgraded the system, it said that all of its functions would be unavailable. If I assume that the functions include Elixirs, then my regression in fitness would make sense.'

As the water poured down his head and body, Ken began to craft a theory, one that began to make more and more sense the longer he thought about it.

Originally he had thought functions referred to things like the Image Training and Identify aspects of the system. Skills and traits too would fall under the same category, rendering them unusable.

Yet now that he truly thought about it, Elixirs were also a byproduct of the system.

'But what about the Recovery Elixir?'

His body suddenly shivered as he thought this far. Not only had the Recovery Elixir saved himself from death, it had also cured his Grandfather's lung cancer.

If those were also reverted like the other Elixirs, then both he and his Grandpa would be goners.

'Damn it, I really need to think things through next time...' He thought, grasping his chest where his heart was beating wildly.

The fact that he was still alive and he had received his Grandpa's letter confirmed that the Recovery Elixirs seemed to be independent of the others.

When Ken finished showering, he felt another surge of motivation and began to review his tapes once more.

BUZZ BUZZ

"Hey, I'm back home. Are you free?"

Ken's eyes widened as he saw the message.

Not even a second later he left his room and descended the stairs.

"I'm going out to see Ai!" He said to his mother.

"Ai? Ah I forgot Naomi mentioned she was coming back today." Yuki murmured.

"Wait! Did you put deodorant on?"

SKID~

Without another word, Ken ran back up the stairs and put on some deodorant and checked the mirror to make sure he was presentable. He'd been too excited and forgotten to do the basic steps.

This wasn't the first time that Ai had returned to Yokohama, but it had been about 3 months since they'd last seen each other.

After triple checking everything, he ran back down the stairs.

"I'll be home for dinner~"

With that he made his way to Ai's house, with a spring in his step. For the first time in quite a while, he actually felt good about himself.

Around 15 minutes later, Ken arrived out the front and saw Tetsu.

"Look who it is..."

The guy was still intimidating as ever, even while wearing his blue baking apron. Ken noticed a scar running up his arm that wasn't there when he last ran into the guy.

"H-Hello Mr. Koyama." Ken said, bowing slightly.

Tetsu's face lit up with a smile and he let out a hearty laugh.

"No need ta stand on ceremony my boy! HAHAHA" He walked over and slapped him on the back a few times before leading him towards the house.

Ken cringed in pain a little, but he put up with it. Ever since he and Ai had started dating, Tetsu's attitude towards him had done a complete 180.

"Ai's upstairs, come on in."

"Honey! Ken's here."

As they entered the threshold, Tetsu called out to his wife and announced his presence.

"Ken! It's good to see you again." Naomi said, bringing him into a hug.

Ken could only smile wryly as he was treated like an esteemed guest upon entering.

While he couldn't complain about the treatment, he really just wanted to see his girlfriend.

After a few moments he heard footsteps coming down the stairs, causing his ears to perk up. Ken turned his attention to the sound and saw a figure revealed step by step.

The girl was barefoot and wearing denim shorts and a cute white top. Her body was shapely and had seemingly been developing in the 3 months since they'd last seen each other.

What was once a budding woman had now blossomed into a beautiful flower.

Her clear blue eyes stared at him with a hint of embarrassment, yet her smile lit up her beautiful features, causing him to lose his train of thought.

"Hey..."

"Hi..."

The two stood apart with Tetsu and Naomi looking on expectantly. As if feeling their intrusion, Ai walked over and grabbed Ken by the hand before leading him up to her room.

"Ah wait." Tetsu muttered, however they were both gone before he could finish his words.

He frowned a little, however Naomi shook her head.

"We can trust her." She said simply, smiling at her husband.

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

## **Chapter 487 - 487: Reinvigorated (1)**

A man with wide shoulders and dressed in an immaculate suit stepped out of a black sedan parked on the side of the road. He was flanked by two other men in similar attire, though they were much bigger in stature.

The neon lights lit up the street where drunk people stumbled out of bars and onto the sidewalk. Just a cursory glance around the place and one would find many things not suitable for those underage.

"It's in here sir." One of the large men gestured, pointing to a smoky bar not far away.

"Mmm, let's go."

The figure walked towards the bar behind his entourage who ensured none of the drunkards got too close to their boss.

Upon entering, music was playing loudly as scantily dressed females walked around the place, serving drunk men. Every now and then the sound of bum's being slapped by the patrons could be heard.

"W-What can I do for you sir?"

Seeing the two large men alongside an important looking figure, the security guard stammered. He could tell that these people were not the kind who would visit their establishment without a reason.

"I'm looking for a woman." The man's deep voice rang out, his tone commanding.

"A-Ah... What type of woman sir? We have plenty."

One of the large men pulled out a photo, which depicted a young woman with shoulder length black hair and brown eyes.

The security guard looked a bit troubled as he tried to match the face to one of the girls in the establishment.

"Forgive me sir, I'm not sure we have a woman like this here." He replied, feeling a little nervous.

"Her name is Sachiko Koga, she's in her 40's."

A look of realization quickly crept onto the man's features after hearing the name. It seemed that the photo was quite an old one, causing him to not recognize her straight away.

"This way please sir."

With that, the security guard led them to one of the private rooms at the back of the establishment. Without any fanfare, he split the curtains and revealed a man and woman who were sitting cosily.

The woman was wearing a low cut top, displaying her assets proudly as she poured a drink. Judging by her actions, it was clear she had also been drinking.

"What the hell are you doing!?"

The man who was on cloud nine earlier suddenly stood up after having his privacy disturbed. He was about to continue his tirade but suddenly saw the 2 large men and the well dressed figure behind the security guard.

He gulped, forcing down his anger.

"Apologies sir, allow me to move you to another private room." The security guard said before tactfully leaving the scene.

After the two left, Sachiko sent an angry gaze to the two large men.

"Tch, you're ruining my business here." She said, slurring her words.

Yet as her gaze moved to the well dressed man at the back, her eyes suddenly widened.

"T-Tatsu?"

At first her face was filled with longing and happiness, yet it quickly turned sour as tears began to pour down her face.

"How could you leave me... Tatsu you bastard!"

She threw herself at the man, pounding her fists upon his chest in a fit of anger as she buried her head into him.

If it wasn't for the man waving off his security detail, she would have been quickly captured, or worse.

Tetsuhiro's expression was cold as he waited for the woman to calm down. To him, this was the person who hid his nephew from him for the past 17 years.

If it wasn't for the fact he'd seen Daichi's resemblance to his late brother, he may never have known about him.

"Take a seat Sachiko." He said with a deep voice.

Hearing her name, Sachiko seemingly snapped out of her haze. She lifted her head and looked at the man with shock.

"You're not Tatsu... Who are you?"

Even in her drunken state, she could still remember the sound of his voice, and realize that this was not the man she had fallen in love with.

"Take a seat."

Hearing the tone that left no room for rebuttal, Sachiko did as she was told and sat down at the private table.

Without being asked, the entourage walked outside the room and closed the curtains, leaving only the two of them remaining.

Tetsuhiro sat down beside the woman and looked her in the eyes, his gaze cold and unfeeling. He had perfected reigning in his emotions throughout years in the cutthroat business world.

"Do you know who I am?" He asked simply.

Sachiko felt a shiver run down her spine subconsciously. The man in front of her shared similar features to her late husband, yet he was lacking the warmth and love that she had remembered.

"Are you Tatsu's brother?"

"Mmm." Tetsuhiro nodded. The fact that this woman could guess as much would make this easier for him.

"Now, perhaps the better question is, do you know why I'm here?"

Sachiko gulped, her body shivering with fear.

"N-No..."

"Tsk tsk." Tetsuhiro clicked his tongue, a flash of annoyance creeping onto his cold features.

He straightened up his tie before continuing.

"Your son... My nephew. You hid him from us, making me believe that my brother's lineage had died off. You committed this grave act against me and dare to feign ignorance?"

Tetsuhiro's volume remained the same, yet one could feel the wrath behind his tone.

If Sachiko was still feeling tipsy before, she no longer was now. She felt a genuine threat to her life as the cold man stared at her.



"I—I'm sorry... Tatsu died before our son was born. I didn't know what to do since he cut off contact with you all." Her face was full of panic as she tried to defend her actions.

"So why did I find out that Daichi was adopted by another family?"

Hearing her son's name, Sachiko's face twisted in a mix of emotions. Pain, sadness and even a hint of viciousness.

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

## **Chapter 488 - 488: Reinvigorated (2)**

Yet seeing that she was still being stared at intently, she quickly composed herself.

"H-He took him from me! I was taken advantage of by that man... He came to my house and forced me to sign away my parental rights." Sachiko yelled out, holding her head in her hands.

Tetsuhiro was silent for a while, as if taking in all of the information. He knew that he couldn't trust her words completely, yet his mind moved quickly.

After a few minutes of scary silence, he opened his mouth.

"I have a proposition for you..."

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"It's getting late, I should probably get home soon." Ken said reluctantly.

He held the woman in his arms tightly as their fingers intertwined. They'd been sitting like this for a while, enjoying each others company.

"Just a little longer..." Ai said softly, not wanting him to leave.

Ken smiled and agreed with a chuckle.

There was a span of silence between the two, yet it wasn't awkward. Despite not seeing each other for so long, they communicated pretty much every day via messages.

Ai laid her head on his chest before speaking.

"I was worried about you for a while." She said softly.

"Hmm? What do you mean?"

"Well, it seemed like you were pulling away from me. It was like you were a different person almost." Ai admitted.

Ken frowned a little.

"And now?"

Ai lifted her head and turned her gaze towards him, a small smile creeping onto her face.

"You're back to normal now."

As she said those words, she leaned in and planted a deep kiss onto his lips, causing whatever response Ken had lined up to be forever lost.

After spending another 15 minutes together, Ken left the house and said his goodbyes. Ai was reluctant, but she still sent him off with a smile.

On his way back, Ken began to reflect on Ai's words. Without noticing he had begun to retreat inwards, shutting others out like he had done in his previous life.

Just the fact that Ai could notice it even though they were so far away was an indication that it wasn't something small or insignificant.

'I need to be careful...' Ken thought to himself gravely.

He didn't want to end up like his previous life after pushing everyone away. Even if he made the Majors in this life, it would mean nothing if he didn't have his family or girlfriend to share his success with.

Ken returned home feeling much better than he had earlier that day. Not only did he get to spend some time with Ai, he also had a way forward to break out of his rut.

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DING DONG

The school bell rang, bringing an end to classes much to the delight of the students.

Ken and Shiro left their class and headed towards the baseball field for club practice.

"Why have you got that?" Shiro asked, pointing to USB stick Ken was carrying.

"I wanted to do some film review with the coach after practice." Ken admitted.

There were only 3 people that he trusted to help him with his pitching form. That was his Grandpa, his father and Coach Seiji Hanada.

Not only did they all have professional baseball experience, but his current coach actually specialized in sports science. Out of the three, he would probably be the most knowledgeable when it came to tweaking one's form for maximum gain.

"Eh? What film? We don't have any tournaments coming up until the end of next month." Shiro asked, tilting his head in question.

Ken shook his head, "This is all film of me pitching."

"Huh? Why would you want to look at that?"

"Shiro, be honest with me." Ken said, stopping in place.

"Do you think my pitching has gone backwards since I came back from America?"

Since Yuta had graduated, Shiro had been promoted to starting catcher. He had improved tremendously in the role, mainly due to his hard work and determination to get better.

Shiro's face stiffened for a moment, almost as if he didn't want to give Ken the bad news. Yet seeing the earnest expression on his friend's face, he couldn't bear lying to him.

"Well... Yeah. For some reason your pitches lack the same liveliness and power that they used to. I thought it might be from an injury or something, but you never mentioned anything."

Shiro finally admitted his true thoughts, yet Ken was not angry. In fact, he respected his friend even more for not trying to meddle in his affairs.

Ken placed his hand on the guy's shoulder and smiled.

"You're a good friend man."

"Eh?"

Shiro looked at him suspiciously. What kind of person would say such a thing after receiving such a harsh feedback.

"Did you hit your head last night or something?" Shiro asked, trying to inspect Ken's head.

Yet Ken had grown a lot taller in this past year, currently standing at 6'3 or around 190cm tall.

Ken slapped away his hand in annoyance.

"Can't you just take a compliment?" He asked, giving the guy a nudge.

"Nah, it's weird when you say it."

"Weird!?" Ken feigned being offended, placing his hand on Shiro's shoulder in response.

"Oh my goodness Shiro, your muscles have gotten so big~" He said teasingly.

Shiro couldn't help but shiver at those words, causing him to want to back away as fast as possible. Yet he couldn't pull away from the vice grip attached to his shoulder.

"You must be working out every day, you're such an inspiration!" Ken continued, his words sounding straight out of a bad theater play.

"H-HELP!"

Shiro's expression fell as he felt Ken's odd tone caress his psyche.

Just when he thought that he would have to continue suffering, he heard a female voice from behind him.

"What are you guys doing?"

"Eh?"

Ken turned to see Kaori staring at him weirdly from behind.

"Ahem... I gotta go~" Ken said before shooting off towards the baseball field.

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

## **Chapter 489 - 489: The way forward (1)**

After practice, Ken walked up to the coach who was busy making some notes on his clipboard. The man looked the same as ever with his 5 o'clock shadow and messy hair, making it look like he'd just woken up.

"Coach, have you got some time?"

"Mmm? Don't tell me you want some more training?" He asked, feeling a headache coming on.

He had PTSD from all of the extra training this stubborn player had asked ever since joining the club. Not only did he have to create the training plans, he also had to put in overtime to administer it.

"Ah... Sort of." Ken admitted.

"Haaaah."

Seiji let out a dramatic sigh, silently saying goodbye to all of his remaining free time. He had thought he might get a break since there weren't any tournaments for a while.

Ken found the coach's reaction to be rather amusing, but he quickly got on topic.

"As I'm sure you've noticed, I've gone backwards in form lately."

Coach Hanada's eyebrow raised, his curiosity piqued. It wasn't often that athletes could make such an assessment of themselves, particularly when it came to teenagers who lacked the ability to view things objectively.

"Go on..." He prompted.

"Well, I have a feeling that it has something to do with my pitching form. For some reason I can't seem to pick what exactly is different, which is why I was hoping that you could help me."

Seiji furrowed his brow and began to think, tapping his pen on his clipboard for a few moments. His mind poured over the past year and the changes in Ken's performance since the World Cup.

He had to admit that Ken truly had regressed. Not only were his pitches slower, they also lacked the liveliness that once made his pitches so difficult to hit.

After almost a minute of silence, the coach nodded.

"Alright, track down some footage of your pitching in Koshien last year and maybe some of the World Cup. After that, I'll take some time to review your form."

Ken smiled, feeling a sense of warmth inside. He knew that his coach wouldn't hesitate to help him out, that's just the kind of person that he was.

"Already done." Ken said, pulling out the USB drive out of his pocket and handing it over.

"Ah..."

For some reason Seiji looked a little disappointed, though he quickly hid it.

"Very good. Let's chat tomorrow after practice." He replied, shooin Ken away.

As Ken practically skipped towards the locker room, Seiji's face fell.

"And here I was looking forward to watching some K-drama tonight..." Letting out another sigh, the coach returned to his office, feeling rather downcast.

A couple of hours later, Seiji returned home to his one bedroom apartment and opened the fridge. He stared at the empty shelves before letting out a small sigh.

He walked back out the door and returned 20 minutes later with a 6 pack of beer and some food from the convenience store.

PSHH

After puling up a chair at his desk, the coach opened up one of his beers and took a few swigs, letting out a satisfied grunt.

He fished in his pocket for a moment before pulling out the USB stick and plugging it into his laptop. It wasn't long before the computer recognized the contents and he was able to view the videos.

"Ah thank goodness."

It seemed that Ken had cut the clips, only showing the moments that he was pitching. This would save him a lot of time when it came to reviewing the footage tonight.

Seiji continued to sip on his beer as he watched the clips. Sometimes he would pause the video, and other times he would slow down the footage, ensuring to watch carefully.

After a few hours of this, he sat back in the chair and stretched, feeling a sense of fatigue.

"He truly was reckless..." Seiji muttered, feeling a little remorseful.

Inwardly he was rather shocked after looking at Ken's throwing action at both last year's Koshien and the World Cup. Such a form was putting significant pressure on his developing muscles, wearing them down significantly.

This was especially the case when he was pitching against people like Leo Cameron, Jorge Lopez and even his own brother Daichi.

He cringed just thinking about what kind of pain Ken would have been enduring after those games.

If he had learned anything from these clips, it was that Ken's current predicament was not necessarily a bad thing, at least with his longevity in mind.

"I'm not sure he'll accept that as an answer though..." Seiji said, letting out a chuckle.

After another stretch, he decided it was time to shower and go to bed, otherwise he'd be at risk of not waking up to his alarm.

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The next day, Seiji could feel Ken looking at him all throughout the training session with eager eyes. If it weren't for the fact he would get in trouble, the kid probably wouldn't have been able to wait until they were finished to speak to him.

Only after the coach blew his whistle and put an end to the training did Ken bound his way towards him.

"Hey coach, how did you go?"

"Go get cleaned up and meet me in my office in 20 minutes." Seiji said, shooing the eager teenager away.

"Yes sir!"

The coach shook his head and let out another sigh, sounding like an old man. He leisurely made his way to the faculty office and began to meticulously organize his desk like he usually would.

He needed everything to be in its place otherwise he would struggle to work.

"Hey Coach!"

As soon as he finished, he almost jumped out of his chair in fright at the bubbly greeting he received.

"D-Damn it Ken! Are you trying to kill me?" He said, claspng at his chest as his heart beat wildly.

"Sorry, but you told me to meet you here." Ken said innocently.

"...Yeah, in 20 minutes. It's been 10..."

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

## **Chapter 490 - 490: The way forward (2)**

Ken scratched the back of his head in embarrassment, letting out a laugh.

"Ha haha, sorry coach. I'm a little eager for your feedback if you couldn't tell." He admitted, causing the coach to roll his eyes in response.

"Alright whatever. Take a seat."

Not needing a second invitation, Ken pulled up a chair and stared at the Coach expectantly. He knew that the man would have some news for him, which meant he would finally find out what steps to make in order to improve.

Seiji turned around and saw Ken's face not far from his own.

'Too close...'

"Ahem... Well first off, I want to ask you something." He stated with a serious expression.

"Hmm? Sure, anything."

"How is your body feeling?"

'Eh?'

Out of all the questions he could have been asked, this was not something he had expected, leading to an awkward pause.

Ken lifted his arms and moved them around, showing that there was nothing wrong with his movements.

"I feel fine I guess?"



"Hmm... I see. The reason I ask is because your old throwing form is rather dangerous, especially for someone your age whose body is still in the process of developing." The coach said.

After saying so, he opened his laptop and pointed to one of the old clips that was open.

"See here, the way you're whipping your arm through is putting significant pressure on your shoulder. If your muscles aren't strong enough, your ligaments will begin to deteriorate."

Ken narrowed his eyes and looked to where the coach was pointing. The clip rolled on in slow motion and he could see the strain that was put on his shoulder in that moment.

The blood suddenly left Ken's face, causing him to go pale.

He could suddenly understand why he had gotten injured in his past life.

Seiji continued, "But if we look at your current pitching form, its as if your body is instinctively holding back. Instead of your arm being open here, you're throwing more compactly."

"This is where you're losing your velocity." He said, pointing to Ken's shoulder.

Ken nodded. Now that the coach had pointed it out, the position of his arm significantly impacted the whipping action of his arm when throwing.

"That's not the only reason..."

The next 20 minutes was filled with Seiji going over the differences between the forms and pointing out the impacts it was having on his pitching.

Ken felt overwhelmed at all the new information. Somehow he had subconsciously shifted his form after the system began its upgrade, leading to his current predicament.

'Perhaps it was the system itself that allowed me to pitch like that in the first place?' Ken thought, though he wasn't so sure. There were too many unknowns that he couldn't explore just yet.

While it was all well and good speculating, it didn't really help him in the long run. His main concern was to get better in this period of time, which was why he asked for help from the coach.

"So what do I do to return to my old form?" Ken asked.

Seiji frowned. He was hoping that Ken wouldn't ask this question, at least right now.

He shook his head, "Just the fact that you reverted to your current form should tell you enough Ken. Whether you want to admit it or not, your body subconsciously shifted, likely as a way to protect itself."

Ken's eyes widened, not expecting such a response from the coach.

While the coach's theory might not be entirely correct, it did have its merits. The fact that he lost his strength as a result from the system shutting down was the most likely cause for his pitching form changing.

Now that he was lacking the physical fitness required for such an action, his body adjusted on its own in order to maintain itself.

"So I just need to improve my muscles and I can pitch like I used to?" Ken muttered, more so to himself than anyone else.

Seiji's ears perked up at these words. He was going to suggest building muscles in order to protect the vulnerable shoulder ligaments, yet Ken seemed to already be on the right track.

"If your goal is to get back to where you were, yes you would need to improve your musculoskeletal strength." He admitted.

Ken's eyes lit up as he quickly got to his feet in excitement.

"That's awesome! Thanks Coach!"

"Hey, settle down there tiger. I don't just mean do pull ups and the like, you'll need to specifically train the correct muscles or you'll just completely ruin your form." He replied, trying to calm down the overexcited teen.

"Ah... sure thing."

Ken had gotten a little ahead of himself after hearing the solution. He had to admit that he just planned on doing pull ups and push ups in order to strengthen his shoulders, yet apparently that would be detrimental.

He felt a cold sweat run down his back in response to his bad assessment.

Thankfully there was an experienced sports science coach in front of him that would be able to point him in the right direction.

Seiji began to write down some things on a piece of paper.

Curious, Ken peaked over his shoulder and had trouble understanding what was written. It wasn't that he couldn't read it, just that he'd never seen some of the words on there.

'Shoulder external rotation, TRX push up, bent over dumbbell row...'

"Eh?"

The coach finally finished writing down the exercises on the piece of paper and handed it to Ken. Yet the more he tried to read the words, the more confused he was.

"What are these words?" Ken asked, his face staring blankly at the coach.

"They're exercises... Search the internet and you'll find plenty of tutorials that will be beneficial to you."

After saying so, Seiji stretched his arms and let out a yawn.

"Ah, you'll also need to build up your core strength." He said, pointing to Ken's stomach.

Just when Ken was about to leave, Seiji left him with one last direction.

"I don't want you pitching for another 2 months at least."

"EH!?"

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

## **Chapter 491 - 491: He's not worthy (1)**

"No pitching for two months..."

Ken muttered to himself on the way home from the train station, his mind wandering.

He had approached Coach Hanada in order to find a resolution for his poor pitching, but he didn't think the guy would give him such a stipulation.

There was only 6 months remaining until the system finished its upgrade, which meant he'll only have 4 months remaining once he could pitch again.

'How can I get back to my form by not pitching?' He thought inwardly.

While he might not understand this part of the coach's reasoning, Ken agreed that he needed to strengthen his body considerably. In addition to the shoulder strengthening exercises he'd been given, the coach also told him to focus on his legs and core.

Power was derived from a strong base, therefore he needed to ensure his foundation was firm.

Ken was silent for a while before he pulled his phone out and began to type a message.

"Coach says I need to work on my core muscles, do you have any suggestions?"

Not even a few minutes after sending the message, Ken received a lengthy reply.

He read the message, blinking a few times in disbelief.

"That guy is crazy..." He muttered, feeling his muscles twitch, as if they were complaining.

Of course he had consulted the resident gym junkie Hiroki. If anyone knew about core and abdominal workouts, it would be the Greek God himself.

Ken let out a sigh, yet his features morphed shortly after.

"I've just gotta do it..." He said, gripping his fist tightly.

While others might just take the easy way out and wait for the system if they were in his position, Ken felt a burning desire to prove to himself that he could do it.

After making up his mind, Ken jogged all the way back home.

"I'm home." Ken said aloud, heading straight past his mother in the kitchen.

"Welcome home Kenny, how was your—"

"Sorry mom, I've got some workouts to do."

Before Yuki could finish her words, Ken had already run up the stairs to his room, leaving her standing alone in the Kitchen.

"..."

Yuki stood silently for a while, before letting out a harrumph and returning to what she was doing.

Not understanding his own plight, Ken quickly got changed and opened up his laptop, searching the names of the exercises on the Internet. He hadn't heard of half of them before, so he was worried that he would mess up without proper guidance.

After around 20 minutes, Ken's face turned a little pale. Only now that he knew what each exercise was did he realize just how much work was ahead of him.

With these exercises in addition to his morning run and club practice, he would be burning a ridiculous amount of calories. Ken already knew that he would need to increase his caloric and protein intake for the best results.

Ken let out a deep breath and began his workout, starting with his upper body and shoulders first. He had a limited amount of equipment on hand so he had to improvise some of the exercises.

Almost straight away he could feel the burn of his shoulder muscles, letting him know that he was doing it correctly. It took him around 30 minutes to complete the upper body regime that the coach had provided, but by the end he was half exhausted.

"Haaah damn it that's tough..." Ken mumbled, staring at the ceiling as he was laid out on the floor.

After a few minutes rest, he jumped into the core exercises that Hiroki had sent through.

"You son of a..."

After only a few minutes of the workout, Ken felt that his abdominal muscles were on fire. All he could do was grit his teeth and persevere, digging deep with as much discipline as he could muster.

By the end of the core workout, Ken was spent.

"A-ARGH CRAMP."

Ken panicked as his abs began to cramp up, giving him an unexplainable pain. Thankfully he knew what to do in that situation, quickly moving onto his stomach and performing a prone ab stretch.

It took almost a minute to finally calm down after which Ken let out a contended sigh.

Yoga was something that he had performed as a part of his routine when he first got the system. It had been a while since he used it last, but the stretches seemed to be quite beneficial in this case.

"May as well finish my routine then." Ken muttered.

After an additional 15 minutes, he was finished with his brand new workout routine. All up it had taken him over an hour to complete, yet he could already feel the aftereffects.

As long as he could make sure to use progressive overloading, there was no doubt that these workouts would do what he needed them to do.

"Time to shower." He announced, hearing his stomach growl a little in protest.

Around 30 minutes later, Ken returned into the Kitchen only to see his mother already eating dinner by herself.

"Hmm? Is dinner ready?" Ken asked, not seeing a plate set out for him.

Yuki briefly looked at Ken before completely ignoring him, returning back to her meal.

"Umm..." He stood awkwardly, not knowing what he'd done wrong.

GRUMBLE~

Yuki's eyebrow twitched as she heard the protest from her son's stomach. Her face softened a little, particularly when she remembered that he'd been going through a lot lately.

Yet there was a stubborn part of her that didn't want to relent.

"My dinner is ready, but I don't know about yours." She responded in a sassy tone.

Ken frowned, fighting back the hunger. His half-empty mind tried to think how he could have offended his mother.

'Why is she angry? We didn't even really speak this afternoon—'

"Ah..."

Suddenly he remembered he didn't even greet his mother when he came home this afternoon, rushing straight to his room to begin his workouts.

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

## **Chapter 492 - 492: He's not worthy (2)**

After realizing the error of his ways, Ken apologized profusely to his mother, almost getting on his knees while his stomach protested loudly.

Yuki had already half forgiven him before his apologizing, yet she ensured that Ken had fully understood his rudeness before yielding. She retrieved his dinner from the microwave where she'd hidden it and put it on the table in front of him.

Ken thanked her many times before digging in, satiating his hunger.

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CLANK

"WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING? ARE YOU MESSING WITH ME!?"

The sound of items falling onto the floor rang out in the room as a teen was yelling at his computer screen. His face was red and filled with fury while his sandy blond hair bounced around.

Upon the screen was a baseball match between Yokohama and Shinjuku High, depicting a tall figure on the mound who looked crestfallen. He massaged his shoulder briefly before walking off the field.

This was the final match shown on the video titled "The downfall of Ken Takagi" posted on youtube.

"Thank you for watching the video, please like and subscribe for more videos around baseball news."

As the narrator finished his words, the screen went black, showing his logo.

Ryan stared at the screen with a mixture of emotions, yet the most evident was anger. How could the person who beat him in the World Cup be reduced to such a state in the past year?

He had been diligently working on his game with Ken set as his rival. The pressure that he felt from the freshman was like someone was breathing down his neck, spurning him to give it his all.

Yet after Ryan returned from practice today, this video came up on his feed. At first he had scoffed, his inner keyboard warrior getting ready to explode.

However, after watching the video, all he felt was anger and bitterness.

"What a joke... There's not point in beating you now."

After seeing such a thing, Ryan felt a bad taste in his mouth. He now felt that Ken was not worthy of being his rival, despite winning against him at the World Cup.

"He'll never make it to the Majors, I should just forget about him." He said, though part of him was disappointed.

"Ryan? What was that noise?"

A woman's voice called out from the other room, getting his attention. She opened the door slightly before poking her head in.

"I just dropped something Mom sorry." Ryan replied, trying to sound sincere.

The woman frowned, "But I heard you yelling? Is everything okay?"

It took a few minutes of him explaining before his mother finally accepted his excuses.

"Ah, I almost forgot." She said, opening the door a little wider.

"You got this in the mail."

After handing her son the letter, she promptly left the room, muttering something about teenagers being weird.

Ryan of course heard every word that she said, yet he chose to leave it be.

He turned his attention to the letter and opened it.

"Congratulations, you've been selected for the USA U18 Baseball team for the Pan American games. Please see enclosed details and RSVP as soon as possible."

Ryan nodded, before folding the letter back up. He felt a little better after being named as part of the U18 team once again this year.

Every bit of opportunity he received on the National Team would only add to his stock coming into college. Since he was in his 3rd year, he was already projected as a top prospect ahead of every other pitcher in High School.

At first this wasn't enough for him, yet after seeing what Ken had turned into, he began to think a little differently.

"I guess you can be thankful that you at least beat me once." Ryan muttered.

With that, he threw Ken out of his mind. The guy was no longer worthy to be considered by him at all.



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"We're home!"

Chris and Daichi walked into the house after returning from the airport at around 2pm. It had been over 3 weeks since they first left for Tokyo University for the U18 Asian Tournament.

The two looked dead tired, as if the trip had taken its toll on them both physically and mentally.

"Welcome home you two!" Yuki almost jumped out of her chair as she went to greet the two at the threshold.

She hugged them both lovingly and smiled.

"We're celebrating tonight!" Yuki said, almost skipping back to the kitchen where she was preparing to cook dinner.

"Where's Ken?" Daichi asked, looking a little confused.

"He's probably in his room." His mom said nonchalantly, as if it had turned into a typical thing.

Both Daichi and Chris looked at each other briefly before the latter motioned for him to go check.

Daichi was feeling a little uneasy, hoping that Ken wasn't holding a grudge for missing out on the U18 team. Of course he had no part in not selecting Ken, yet he still couldn't help but feel guilty.

He quietly made his way up the stairs and knocked gingerly on Ken's door. Yet after not receiving a response, Daichi put his ear up to the door, trying to see if the guy was sleeping or something.

Yet all he could hear was the sound of heavy breathing and grunting coming from the other side, causing him to go pale. He almost turned around and walked away, yet there was part of him that was curious.

'Just what the hell is he doing?'

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

"Come in!"

Surprisingly, Ken called for him to come in, despite the grunting still occurring.

Daichi slowly opened the door, steeling his heart for what he was about to see.

He almost breathed out a sigh of relief as he saw Ken on the floor doing some sit-ups. Yet in the next moment his eyes widened as he saw the figure that Ken was sporting.

"Hey bro, welcome back!" Ken said, a hint of surprise in his voice.

He stood up from the floor and seemed incredibly imposing. His entire body was layered with a sheen of sweat and his muscles seemed to be bulging with power, specifically his shoulders and abdominals.

"W-What the hell man!?"

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

## **Chapter 493 - 493: Threat (1)**

"What's wrong?" Ken asked, feeling a little confused by his brother's reaction.

"I—ugh, just put a damn shirt on man." Daichi stammered.

"Ah, right. I'll meet you downstairs in a bit, I've got a few more reps to go."

Daichi nodded before leaving Ken's room with a blank expression, yet a few moments later he smiled.

He had been truly worried about his brother all this time. It was clear it had been affecting his performance on the field as well since his father had to reprimand him when they were in Korea.

It just showed how much he cared for Ken's wellbeing.

"Guess I was worried for nothing." Daichi mumbled before heading downstairs to grab his things.

Around 20 minutes later, everyone gathered downstairs in the dining room. The sound of chatter and laughter rang out, bringing a smile to Yuki's face.

There was nothing better than having all of her boy's home, no matter what day it was. She happily dithered around in the kitchen, preparing tonight's dinner for her hungry men.

"Do you remember that Dam guy who played on 1st base for Korea? None of us could keep a straight face whenever he spoke up. The umpire even warned us to stop laughing or we'd be ejected." Daichi explained, his face full of amusement.

Ken thought back to the guy in question, remembering that he'd received the middle finger from him when they were leaving the baseball park.

"Yeah, and we got an ear lashing from the umpire after the game." Chris said with a wry smile.

Both Daichi and Chris laughed. Looking back it was a rather ridiculous scenario, yet they could both look back on it with amusement.

There was a short pause before Chris addressed Ken, trying to keep his tone light.

"What have you been up to?"

Ken could feel that his father was tiptoeing a little, likely trying to gauge his mood. He felt a little warmth rise inside of him, appreciating his father's worry.

"I asked Coach Hanada to help with my pitching form since Grandpa said it's been different since the World Cup." He said, causing both Daichi and Chris to pay attention.

"Your Grandfather said that?" Chris asked, looking thoughtful.

"Mmm. That's the reason why I haven't been able to pitch the same." Ken admitted.

Daichi of course knew nothing about pitching forms so he stayed quiet, waiting to see his father's reaction.

"Well you asked the right person. Seiji was always good at that kind of thing back when we were colleagues. Yokohama's GM even offered him his old job a while back."

Now it was Ken's turn to be curious. The fact that the Warrior's General Manager had requested for his Coach to return to the professional league showed just how much he valued his skills.

Suddenly Ken felt as if he'd lucked out greatly. Not only did his coach not take the position, he stayed in order to help the team, showing just how passionate he was about his coaching role.

'I definitely made the right decision going to Yokohama.' Ken thought inwardly.

"So? What did he tell you to do?" Chris asked out of curiosity.

Ken went on to explain what he'd been doing for the past 3 weeks, including all of his other workouts, causing both Chris and Daichi to look at him weirdly.

"Dude, how are you still alive?"

"..."

"You should see him come back after his run..." Yuki said ominously from the kitchen, sending her husband a glance.

"Ken... You need to be careful. If you're trying to pitch when your body is fatigued, you're almost guaranteed to get an injury." He said seriously.

Even professional athletes would not work out so much, let alone a teenager still in High School.

"Oh, I'm not pitching." Ken stated nonchalantly.

"Eh?"

"..."

"Ahem... That's good I guess." Chris said, clearing his throat. "Still, you need to be careful okay?"

"Yes Dad." Ken said, nodding like a pecking chicken.

Daichi stared at Ken blankly for a little while, taking a bit to catch up to the conversation.

"Wait, why aren't you pitching? Didn't you say you wanted to return to form? That doesn't make sense." He said with confusion.

Ken then went on to detail all of the feedback he received from the Coach. He spoke about his subconscious mechanical changes in form as well as the purpose of his workouts, painting a clearer picture for everyone at the table.

Yuki frowned from the kitchen, letting out a huff. Even she had not been made aware of Ken's circumstances, otherwise she would have given him a good talking to.

There was silence for a while as everyone took in Ken's words.

Finally, Chris spoke up.

"Looks like I'll need to thank Seiji personally. Even myself and Coach Takashi weren't aware that your pitching form had such flaws..."

Inwardly he felt rather disappointed with himself for putting his son in such danger. Ken had already injured his shoulder once, it should have been a red flag for him to begin with.

Yet the stubborn kid in front of him had never complained about pain in his shoulder, at least not in front of him.

"So, doing these exercises will allow you to use your old form again? Is that what you're saying?" Chris asked, a frown forming on his face.

Ken felt alarm bells going off in his head, already guessing where this was going.

"In theory, yes. But the Coach said he wants to fix my pitching form before I step on the mound again. He wants to find a happy medium where I can still pitch like I used to, but ultimately don't risk getting injured."

Ken said his piece in one breath, showing just how nervous he was. He'd seen this expression on his father's face before, and it never ended well for him.

"Mmm." Chris looked thoughtful for a few moments before nodding. The fact he was willing to accept Ken's words meant that he trusted Yokohama's head coach with his son's wellbeing.

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

## **Chapter 494 - 494: Threat (2)**

Once Chris had accepted the compromise, the mood turned harmonious once more.

The conversation turned back to the Asian Championships where Daichi talked about their win. He even went and retrieved his trophies showing off his individual accolades and the gold medal.

Ken was happy for everyone, though he inwardly vowed to make it for the next World Cup with the U18 National Team.

"When are you heading back?" Ken asked his brother who was now digging into his food.

"Mmph To—morrow" He said between chews.

"Don't talk while you're chewing Daichi dear, you'll choke." Yuki said, fussing a little.

Gulp~

"Yes mom..."

"Let's go for a run in the morning before you leave then." Ken stated, helping himself to more food.

"Mmm."

After dinner, both Chris and Daichi entered a food coma. Thankfully this time they were in Korea which meant they didn't have to put up with burgers for 2 weeks, yet nothing beat a home cooked meal from Yuki.

They soon retreated to bed, leaving Ken and Yuki to clean up the aftermath.

Once he'd cleaned up, Ken had a shower and went to bed straight away.

The next morning, the two boys went for a run, working up a sweat as the sun rose over the horizon. It was just like old times as the two competed against each other.

Yet Ken quickly found out the difference between the two.

"Haah, what's wrong bro?" Daichi asked, looking back from pole position in front of him.

Ken grit his teeth and tried to increase his speed, only to receive a laugh in response from his brother. The gap he'd closed quickly grew wider as Daichi put on the afterburners, leaving him in the dust.

Daichi kept his lead throughout the entire run before they arrived at the park where they always cooled down from their run.

The two slowed down and began to catch their breath, feeling the morning breeze brush up against their sweaty bodies.

As Ken was fighting for his life, Daichi walked up to him and placed a hand on his shoulder, wearing a concerned expression.

"What's happening with you man? Are you overworked or something?" He asked.

Ken shook his head, trying to get his breathing under control. If he tried to talk right now, he felt that his chest might explode.

He couldn't explain to his brother that his fitness had dropped thanks to the system being offline. In fact, he didn't really have a reasonable excuse for his lack of fitness that Daichi would believe.

"Don't worry, I'll get back to peak form soon enough." Ken said, shrugging off the hand on his shoulder.

"Let's cool down." He said, walking over to one of the benches.

Daichi frowned a little, but he quickly shrugged it off. There were times when he felt his brother was hiding things from him, but he knew that Ken had his own reasons.

Just because they were brothers, it didn't mean that he had to tell him everything.

'As long as I'm there to support him, he'll open up eventually.' Daichi thought, making his way to the bench alongside Ken.

The two cooled down and returned home for some breakfast.

Chris had to leave right after and check in at the Yokohama Warriors facility for team training.

A few hours later Daichi had to leave for Osaka once more since there was school tomorrow. The two brothers bid their farewell after Ken walked him to the train station.

"I guess we'll see each other in the spring right?" Ken said with a grin.

Daichi flashed him a smile, "Only if you make it."

"Psh."

"Hahaha."

The two laughed before saying goodbye. The Fall tournament was starting shortly which would determine which 10 teams made it into the Jingu tournament. While not as prestigious as Koshien, many teams still entered.

Generally those 10 teams who made it into the Jingu tournament were granted spots in the Spring Koshien, or Senbatsu as it was called.

As long as they both played well, Yokohama could face Osaka Toin in the Spring.

The only problem was, Ken wasn't allowed to pitch for over a month which meant the pressure would be on Akira once more.

However, Ken chose not to think about it right now. His goal right now was to improve since he knew stepping onto the mound at this moment wouldn't do him or his team any favors.

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"Congrats on the Asian Championship win coach!"

Chris was greeted by the staff as he walked into the Yokohama Warriors facilities. Everyone was super excited by the success of the U18 National team, particularly because it housed the next generation of Japanese professionals.

"Hey, when are you drafting that son of yours into the team?"

"Ha ha, it's a little early for that don't you think?" Chris replied with a chuckle as he made his way through the office.

Finally he arrived at his desk that he'd left for the past 3 weeks. It was much larger than he was used to as a scout for so many years.

Even after 12 months, it still felt a little foreign to him.

Chris let out a grunt as he sat down on his ergonomic chair and placed his suitcase onto the table. Just as he was about to open it, he saw an envelope on the table, addressed to him.

"Hmm? What's this?" He muttered.

Usually his mail was kept in a pigeon hole and would be delivered to him throughout the day, yet this one was sitting on his desk.

Chris grabbed the envelope and carefully opened it, retrieving the letter from inside. As his eyes moved over the words, his face began to pale.

After a couple of minutes, he slumped back in his chair, his face full of disbelief.

"Extortion and Intimidation huh?" He mumbled.

Chris grit his teeth and scrunched up the letter in his hand in anger, almost throwing it across the room.

"So now that Daichi is showing some success, you want him back?"

Chris's expression darkened.

"Over. My. Dead. Body." He spat through his teeth.



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

## Chapter 495 - 495: Breakthrough? (1)

"Honey, what's wrong?"

Yuki sat down at the table after Ken had gone to his room for the night and addressed her husband. Ever since he'd returned home from the office today, he'd been a little off.

Chris let out a sigh, feeling a mixture of emotions. He'd done his best to mask his mood, not wanting to drag Ken into the situation since it would only upset him. But now was the time to talk with his wife.

"I got a letter today..."

He began to explain the contents of the letter and who it was from. By the end, Yuki was even more furious than him.

"How can she be so selfish!?" She said in shock and anger.

Chris didn't know what to say. Finally when Daichi was able to really live out his childhood, his mother was trying to grip her claws onto him.

"Why now?"

"I can only assume its because she's seen him succeed in baseball. If he were to go professional, he would be getting a lot of money." Chris stated with a sour expression.

Yuki mulled it over for a while, feeling as if something wasn't adding up.

"Didn't you say that she practically jumped at a chance to get rid of her parental rights?" She asked.

It was then that Chris's face fell.

"That was only after I offered her money..." He admitted.

Yuki almost let out an audible gasp. It was clear that Chris had left out this part when he had explained everything to her on that night.

However, she was not angry. She purposefully stayed ignorant on the matter, allowing her husband to do what he needed to do to get Daichi out of that place.

She was silent a while before speaking up in an almost defeated tone, "So what do we do? If she takes you to court, even if it doesn't hold up, your reputation will be dragged through the mud."

Yuki was right. There wasn't enough evidence to claim that Chris had extorted Daichi's mother, nor could they prove she had been intimidated, particularly since a cash settlement was involved.

But someone in Chris's position could be ruined if such a scandal got out. An organization such as the Yokohama Warriors would rather cut Chris off than be associated with a case like this.

They cared far too much about public image to put up with it.

"I don't know... If she went to the police and said she was extorted by me, I think that even after a preliminary investigation they would be able to see the truth. We also have photo evidence of Daichi's injuries..."

Speaking this aloud seemed to calm Yuki down considerably. While the threat was indeed scary, it seemed that was all it was. Thankfully Chris went through the correct legal channels in order to adopt Daichi.

"I also doubt she will be able to afford the lawyer fees for a civil suit, if it came down to it." He added.

Since she had been so eager to take the 2 million yen back then, Chris doubted she had money for such things.

The only way she could get Daichi back would be through those channels, or if Daichi failed to be emancipated from their family. But there was no way that would happen.

"So you're saying we'll be okay?" Yuki asked, gazing at her husband with some worry.

Chris frowned a little, but his face soon became resolute, "I'll protect us all, no matter what."

Hearing the words of her husband, Yuki let out a small sigh of relief before laying her head on his shoulder.

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A few weeks later, Ken walked out the door to begin his morning run. He had been pushing his body like crazy lately, trying to increase his fitness and get closer to what he was like with the system.

Yet it almost seemed like he was getting nowhere.

Every time he ran the 10 miles, he would be absolutely spent afterwards. Ken felt he was similar to Hiroki who struggled to get better since his potential was capped.

Ken had thought he might have also regressed to his original potential, but he refused to believe it. If he accepted this as fact, he would have no reason to continue pushing himself, therefore he vehemently opposed it.

'Just a little more...'

He huffed and puffed as he continued to run, pushing his body to the limits. It was as if an invisible barrier preventing him from progressing any further.

Ken grit his teeth, pushing through the pain.

He continued like this for another mile, his lungs on fire and his body about to give up. Just as he was about to finally call it quits and slow down, a scene began to play out in his head.

It was the night he returned from work before his overdose. He could feel the despair and emptiness, almost like he'd been transported back to that moment in time.

'If only I had listened to Dad back then.'

"Haaah... Haaah..."

'Fate is so cruel... Why Daichi and not me?'

"Haaah... No..."

'What's the point in living if I can't play baseball?'

"NO!"

Ken screamed out in the midst of his laboring breaths as he experienced all of his thoughts and despair from that night. They weighed on him like a ton of bricks, holding him back and causing immeasurable pain.

"NOOOO! THAT'S NOT ME ANYMORE!"

He bellowed loudly, rejecting his old self. Though this was a part of his history, he wouldn't let it take hold, not when he'd been given another chance.

"ARGHHHH"

Ken pushed through the pain, forcing it to quieten down.

His body began to heat up, threatening to burst with every step he took forward. The pressure continued to mount, causing his organs to work overtime in order to keep him moving.

Just as Ken felt like he was going to collapse, a cool and soothing sensation spread across his body, bringing him a euphoric feeling.

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

## **- Chapter 496 - 496: Breakthrough? (2)**

### **Chapter 496 - 496: Breakthrough? (2)**

His labored breaths began to even out and even his screaming muscles seemed to ease up a little.

'What is this?' Ken thought, his eyes wide with surprise.

He continued to run, testing out his body, as if it was brand new.

'Did I overcome my limits?'

Only after completing 10 miles did Ken come to a stop at the park. He quickly worked on getting his breathing under control and inspected his body.

A sense of joy overwhelmed him as he confirmed what he believed to be true.

Just like Hiroki when he'd used the systems training plan to overcome his potential, Ken had made a similar breakthrough.

Of course thinking about this logically would lead to only dead ends, so he had to think outside of the box. Ken began to stretch his muscles and put his mind to work, trying to pinpoint what had happened.

His earlier theory about the Elixirs effects disappearing seemed to have some merit, but it became more unlikely after today's happenings.

If he didn't improve in the 6 weeks he'd been truly training, it meant that it couldn't be true.

'What if the Elixirs improved my muscle capacity?' He thought silently.

Since the Elixirs had definitely made physical changes to his muscles, it wouldn't make sense if they were to disappear overnight. But perhaps it was the system that was maintaining them?

Ken frowned, he felt like he was onto something, but things still didn't add up.

It wasn't like the system was continuously feeding him power or anything. In fact, his muscles should have remained the same, even without the system.

"Ow~"

Ken suddenly stretched his hamstring a little weirdly, causing him to let out a yelp of pain. Yet in the next moment his eyes widened in understanding.

"Fatigue management??"

He stood in place for a few moments before a smile crept onto his face.

His fatigue management skill was constantly active, healing his muscle tissues and extremities.

"With no fatigue management, its no wonder that my muscles had regressed over time." He muttered.

Only after pushing through his limits this morning did he understand that he truly had regressed over the past 12 months. If he could see his status window right now, his physical stats would likely be barely in the S-Grade.

Ken felt that he suddenly had a way forward. This breakthrough was something that he'd needed for the longest time, giving him a much needed boost to his confidence.

"Are you okay young man?"

Ken turned his head only to see an old man going for his morning walk, his face was filled with wrinkles, yet one could see that he was wearing a concerned expression.

"Ah, I'm fine thank you." Ken responded, feeling a little odd at the question.

"Oh good. I heard you screaming while you were running earlier, you scared the crap out of me!" He exclaimed, giving Ken a small smile.

Ken suddenly felt his face redden, not realizing that anyone had seen or heard him amidst his internal battle.

"Ha haha, sorry about that." Ken replied, scratching the back of his head in embarrassment.

The old man shook his head, sending him a smile. "Don't worry, we all fight our demons sometimes. Even someone like me."

With that, the old man continued his shuffling walk, on his merry way.

Ken blinked a few times, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. He hadn't felt that embarrassed in quite a long time, but it was quickly overshadowed since he was in such a good mood.

Now that he knew how to induce a breakthrough, there was nothing stopping him from moving forward.

With a newfound purpose, Ken returned home in order to get cleaned up since he still needed to go to school today.

Around 2 hours later, he arrived at school only to see Shiro on his way in. Over the past year, the guy had found his confidence, even gaining a couple of inches in height although he was still far shorter than Ken.

Shiro happened to see Ken walking in with a grin on his face, instantly filling him with PTSD. Flashbacks of the one everyone referred to as the Training Demon appeared in his mind, causing him to freeze in place.

'RUN!'

Shiro screamed internally, yet he was unable to move his body.

"Shiro my man!" Ken called out, his grin growing wider.

Gulp~

Not sensing Shiro's odd reaction, Ken placed his arm around the guy's shoulder and continued to walk towards the school gates.

"So I was thinking, maybe we should bring back the extracurricular training." He stated thoughtfully.

Yet to Shiro's ears, Ken's voice was like that of the devil who was about to administer the next round of torture.

"Hiroki will definitely be in, as well as Yusuke. I might need their help getting the 1st years to show up."

As Ken went off on his tangent, tears began to run down Shiro's face as he mourned for his poor body. He would also have to kiss his free time with Kaori goodbye.

'Damn you Ken!' He cursed inwardly.

"Oh hey Ken."

Hiroki happened to be walking in at the same time as the duo and called out.

"Ah, just the man I was talking about." Ken replied happily.

Hiroki happened to see Shiro's sour expression and could almost guess what had happened.

"Are you down for some extra tr—"

"Hell yeah! All this study has got my body itching" He responded, cutting Ken's words short.

His response caused Shiro to almost fall to his knees in agony.

Ken on the other hand smiled, though it turned a little sour in the next moment. Since Hiroki was in his 3rd year of High School, he would be forced to retire from club baseball to focus on entrance exams for University since Koshien was now over.

So while he might be able to work out with them, he was not allowed to play in the upcoming Fall Tournament.

Thankfully, Hiroki didn't seem to be upset at all.

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

## **Chapter 497 - 497: Rumors (1)**

"Extra training!?"

Seiji Hanada almost had a heart attack upon hearing the suggestion enter his ears once more. Yet upon seeing the expressions of Ken, Hiroki and Yusuke, he felt that it would be difficult to outright reject them.

His gaze moved to the shining eyed first years who had seemingly been roped into the mix by the trio in front of him.

'You poor souls.' He said in his heart.

Seiji let out a brief sigh before agreeing to host the additional training after club practice. Large baseball schools like Osaka Toin trained far more than public schools like Yokohama, which was why they generally performed better.

This additional training would put them on even footing with those schools.

"We'll start the training tomorrow, I'm busy tonight." The coach said, receiving no rebuttals.

"Awesome!" Ken grinned, feeling that his return to form was not far away.

Hiroki was also pleased, but then he remembered he still had lots of study remaining today. In actuality, he shouldn't even be attending the club practices, yet he enjoyed them far too much.

After leaving the club, Ken and Hiroki walked back to the train station in silence.

Ken was feeling a little awkward since he'd roped Hiroki into the additional training before thinking about his circumstances. The guy had been supportive even through his slump, yet all Ken could think about was himself.

"How are you going man?" Ken asked, trying to sound casual.

Hiroki tilted his head in confusion, not expecting such a random question. However, seeing Ken's mood, he could guess that something was up.

"I'm good, as long as you don't try to set me up with Ai's friend again." He said, letting out a laugh.

"Pfft."

Not expecting the jab, Ken almost let out a big laugh as he thought back to the disastrous double date they had gone on earlier in the year.

"C'mon man, give her another chance! You looked good in your outfit." Yet he couldn't keep his laughter in anymore and began to clutch his sides.



Hiroki shuddered after remembering the costume he was forced to wear at the Comiket alongside Rie. He had never been so embarrassed in his life.

Not only did he have to go shirtless, he also had to wear the head of a boar. Hiroki had never cosplayed before in his life, yet he felt like he had no choice in front of the sparkling eyed woman.

"You should have told me beforehand and I never would have gone with you..." He muttered with a drab expression.

But in the next moment he smiled, seeing how his words had cheered Ken up. Usually Ken was the brightest star, blinding everyone with his genius, yet in this past year he had changed.

Yet that didn't change Hiroki's opinion of his friend. Ken was the reason why he had surpassed his own limits and was now on track to achieve his dream.

Silence stretched out between them for a while, but it wasn't awkward.

"The Saitama Cougars contacted my parents a couple of days ago..." Hiroki said, a small smile forming on his face.

Ken froze his footsteps, turning his head slowly towards his friend with a shocked expression.

"No way!? That's awesome man!" Ken basically jumped for joy as he heard the brilliant news. To be scouted before he'd finished High School meant that the organization definitely saw his talent.

Hiroki grinned, but he shook his head.

"It's just preliminary talks for now, they haven't decided if they want to draft me yet."

"But still... Congratulations man."

"Hehe thanks. Mom still wants me to apply for University in case it falls through, so we'll see what happens."

It seemed that Hiroki didn't want to get his hopes up just yet since nothing was confirmed.

The NPB draft would only take place in March next year and would require Hiroki to graduate from High School otherwise he would lose his eligibility.

Unlike the Major's, if a potential player entered University, they would have to graduate first before being eligible for the draft. Which meant if this fell through, Hiroki would have to wait at least 4 years before being able to join the NPB.

"Did they organize a work out for you?" Ken asked with curiosity.

While he knew the basics, every team had their own draft processes.

"It's not until January next year." Hiroki stated, seeming a little excited.

"Looks like you've got plenty of time to get in shape." Ken said with a grin.

With Hiroki's potential, 3 months was more than enough time to improve by leaps and bounds. Now that he thought about it, this extra training was exactly what he needed to make an impact in his work out.

The two continued to chat until it was time for Hiroki to get off the train. They bid their farewells and Ken continued home with a smile on his face the entire time.

'I can't believe Hiroki is going to turn pro...' Ken thought inwardly.

While it wasn't set in stone, he had unlimited faith in Hiroki's abilities and potential. If the Cougars staff couldn't see that, then they were blind.

Of course their staff didn't have a system to tell them everything they wanted to know.

'I could become a scout if things don't work out...' He thought, before quickly shaking his head.

"Maybe after I retire with 10 Major League trophies." Ken muttered, a wild grin on his face.

"I'm home." Ken said as he entered the threshold of his house.

However he received no response, causing him to tilt his head in question. He took off his shoes and walked in, only to see his father sitting at the dining table and blankly staring out the window.

"Dad?"

Ken called out, yet once again there was no response.

"Dad, what's wrong!?" Instantly, Ken felt a bad premonition overcome him.

Chris turned his head, only now registering that Ken was in the room.

"Oh hey Kenny, sorry I am just a little tired from work." He responded softly.

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

## Chapter 498 - 498: Rumors (2)

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Earlier that day, Chris was in his office going over some data for a presentation that was due the following morning. While some might find the task arduous, Chris enjoyed it thoroughly.

"Hey Chris, you got a minute?"

Chris turned to see the General Manager poking his head into his office.

"Yep, what's up?"

"Can you come into my office for a few moments?"

"Sure sure."

It wasn't unusual for the GM to approach him like this, so Chris had no reservations as he followed the middle-aged man into his large office.

"Can you close the door?"

Only after hearing these words did Chris feel that something was odd. The guy often worked with his door open, unless it was official business that required some form of confidentiality.

However, he had no choice but to agree.

"Take a seat."

Chris walked over and sat at the chair in front of the man's desk, feeling slightly uncomfortable. He tried to put on a brave face, but there was a large part of him that was filled with dread.

The middle-aged man also sat down, unbuttoning his suit jacket and letting out a small sigh. His earlier professional facade had been relinquished and he looked tired.

Massaging his glabella, the guy seemed to have aged considerably in those few moments.

"Chris, you've been with the Yokohama Warriors organization for over 15 years." He stated, raising his gaze.

Chris just nodded. Since it was a statement, there was no real need for a response. However, the statement seemed to contain an underlying insinuation, one that left him feeling anxious and exposed.

A few moments of silence spread out between them as the General Manager seemed to be looking for the right words to say.

"Hiro, we've known each other for so long, there's no need to beat around the bush." Chris stated, hardening his heart.

At these words, Hiro let out a deep sigh, his expression turning remorseful.

"Chris, there have been some rumors surrounding you... One's that our sponsors aren't happy with." He stated, sounding rather tired.

"Rumors?"

Hiro nodded, "Exortion, intimidation, kidnapping..."

Chris's face fell at these words, his expression darkening. Instantly he knew who was at fault for spreading such a rumor, however there was something fishy about it.

'How could she have spread the rumor to the sponsors? She doesn't have that ability.' He thought, feeling a pit in his stomach.

Seeing his expression change, Hiro felt that Chris knew something.

"Why don't you tell me what's going on?" He asked.

Chris paused, debating whether or not to air out the dirty laundry. Since it was a family matter, he did not want it to affect his professional life.

Yet it seemed as if he didn't have a choice.

After a brief pause, Chris began to detail how Daichi had entered their family. Sparing no detail, he spoke of the abuse his adopted son faced at his mother's house and how they had swooped in to save him.

The signing away of any parental rights and the cash he'd given Sachiko, followed by the whole adoption process. He didn't even hide that he'd expedited the process through some contacts he had in the government building.

The GM Hiro just sat back and listened, never interrupting throughout the whole explanation. In his position, he wasn't afforded the luxury of displaying his emotions, even when hearing something as deeply disturbing such as this.

When Chris finally finished, he felt as if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

While he was at home, Chris was the pillar of the family. In order to keep his family from worrying, he needed to shoulder all of the responsibilities, something that he thought he was capable of doing.

Yet only after speaking it out loud to a 3rd party did he realize that the pressure had been crushing him over the past 3 weeks. The stress and anxiety that he needed to endure by himself was like a knife, inching ever closer to his heart.

Now that he was able to unload his worries, he felt a sense of relief.

In reality, Hiro was shocked and appalled at the conduct of the woman Chris spoke about. As a family man himself, he could never imagine treating his children in such a way.

However, he was not standing in front of Chris as a family man in this moment. Although it pained him to do so, it was his job to ensure the future of the organization, especially since it involved hundreds of peoples jobs and livelihoods.

"Chris... Thank you for explaining everything to me." He stated softly.

Chris on the other hand, gazed at his boss and instantly knew that he wasn't going to like what the guy was about to say. His pained expression was a telltale sign of what was about to come.

"We were given an ultimatum for the continued sponsorship of the Yokohama Warriors..."

...

"Either we remove you from our staff, or we will lose our sponsorship."

Chris felt his body turn cold as the news was broken to him by a man he truly respected. Even after hearing the full story, Hiro had made the decision to stand by the company.

He would be lying if he said that it didn't hurt, but he was left with no choice but to accept the reality.

"I'm really sorry Chris... The board have made the final call. You're being let go, effective immediately."

With that, Hiro stood up and buttoned up his suit, waiting for Chris to stand up.

For Chris, the next few minutes felt like he was watching from an outsiders perspective. Everything turned gray as he packed up his things and walked out of the building.

Upon getting into his car, he sat there for a while, staring out the front window blankly.

30 minutes later he arrived home, not having any recollection of the drive back. Yuki had gone shopping for groceries and had not returned, leaving him sitting at the dining table, feeling numb.

"Dad, what's wrong!?"

Chris turned his head and saw the panicked expression on his sons face. He felt a lump form in his throat almost immediately as he tried to fight back his emotions.

"Oh hey Kenny, sorry I am just a little tired from work."

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

## **Chapter 499 - 499: Puzzle Pieces (1)**

A couple of hours later, Ken sat at the dining table and ate his dinner in silence. Every now and then he would look up at his father who seemed off.

He had barely spoken two words during the meal and any attempt to start conversation would end abruptly. Ken was growing increasingly worried as the night grew on, yet there was nothing that he could do to get his father to speak.

"Kenny, why don't you go to your room." His mother said, obviously wanting some alone time with his father.

Ken quickly scooped up the remaining rice in his bowl into his mouth and stood up from the table. It was clear that his dad wouldn't open up with him present, which meant it was probably something serious.

He wordlessly placed his bowl into the sink and went upstairs, leaving the two.

Yuki looked at Chris's plate of food which had hardly been touched and placed her hand on his shoulder with a worried expression.

"Honey, what's happened? Why are you like this?" She asked softly.

Chris was silent as he moved his chopsticks around the plate. Just as she thought he wasn't going to answer, her husband spoke up.

"I got let go from the Warriors today." He admitted, gripping his chopsticks tightly.

Yuki almost gasped in shock, yet she quickly reigned it in. It would only exacerbate the issue if she reacted strongly to the news, and she didn't want her husband to feel worse.

"Why?"

Chris took his time answering, though it was not to build suspense. He was doing his best to regulate his emotions, but it was far tougher than he expected.

"That woman somehow spread a rumor to the Yokohama sponsors and got me fired."

At the mention of Sachiko, Yuki's expression darkened as her anger rose.

"That selfish woman! First she tried to take Daichi back, and now she forces you to lose your job!? I'm gonna kill her!"

Ken who was laying on the ground at the top of the stairs quickly covered his mouth, trying not to let out a peep. His mind was racing as he heard the news, not believing his ears.

'Daichi's mom has been trying to get him back!? But why?'

Yet that wasn't the biggest piece of news. The fact that his father had lost his dream job at Yokohama Warriors was the absolute worst news. Without an income, their whole family dynamic could change in a heartbeat.

Ken retreated back to his room, crawling along the ground in order to not make any noise, all the while he was shaken by the news.

Only after slowly closing the door as quietly as possible did he relax.

He sat on the floor with his back against his room door feeling his anxiety levels begin to rise. Ken felt a mixture of emotions ranging from shock to rage.

'How could this happen?'

As his mind began to work, Ken suddenly felt a mountain of guilt weigh down on him, threatening to crush him into pieces.

'If I hadn't have gotten involved with Daichi, none of this would have happened...'

But in the next moment he shook his head violently, slamming his fist onto the ground. He couldn't say such a thing, not after seeing how Daichi had been treated so poorly by his mother.

In his previous life the guy always wore a fake smile, even listening to Ken's meager issues and giving him comfort. If anything, Ken owed Daichi much more.

But that was a price he needed to pay, not his father.

Suddenly Ken felt hopeless about the whole situation. There were too many unknowns since he had only heard a fraction of the story from eavesdropping earlier.

'What do I know so far?' Ken asked himself, trying to piece the information together.

'Daichi's mom wants him back and she spread rumors about Dad to the Yokohama Warriors sponsors which got him fired.'

The primary question was why Daichi's mom wanted him back.

From what he understood, she signed away her parental rights without any real resistance. This was backed up by the fact Daichi was adopted only a few weeks after he caught her in the act of abusing her son.

'Is it because he's on his way to becoming a professional athlete?'

Ken's initial thought was money, however that didn't seem to make sense. Daichi would be over the age of 18 by the time he signed for a pro team, meaning he would be an adult at that time.

Even if the adoption was annulled and she regained her parental rights, she wouldn't be able to touch his money.

Ken frowned.

'I wish I still had my Academic Trait...' He complained inwardly.

Even after thinking for a few minutes, Ken felt like he couldn't craft a decent theory since he was lacking too much information.

If he couldn't find out the why, his next question should be, how?



How could Daichi's biological mother spread rumors to the Warrior's sponsors? Even if she did, how could they take her word seriously?

From what he remembered, that woman worked at a hostess bar and could be considered somewhat of a floozy. What self respecting businessman would take such a woman's words at face value.

"Who is the sponsor for the Warriors?" Ken muttered, getting off his feet and walking over to his laptop.

He then proceeded to search the Internet for the answer.

"BeNA mobile games?"

The name didn't sound familiar, so Ken decided to do some more research. He then spent the next 30 minutes browsing through pages and articles about the company and how it rose to success.

Just when he thought that he'd reached a dead end, a photo appeared at the top of an article, causing his eyes to narrow.

"Is that...?"

As he moved his face closer to the screen, Ken recognized the figure shaking hands with the CEO of BeNA mobile games.

"That's the guy from the World Cup..."

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

## **Chapter 500 - 500: Puzzle Pieces (2)**

He looked to the text below the image and read it aloud.

"Tetsuhiro Suzuki..."

"Why does that guy keep popping up?"

Ken felt that it was too suspicious to be a coincidence that the Suzuki Corporation kept appearing recently. First it was the World Cup, and then they sponsored the U18 National Team, even forcing the coaching staff to select the team without a tryout.

Now he found out that they were involved with the Warrior's sponsor who had ultimately forced his father to be removed from his Assistant coach position.

Ken felt as if he was onto something, but he was just missing a crucial piece of information.

He closed his eyes and focused, taking a deep breath in through his nose and out through his mouth. Without the Academic Trait, he would need to focus completely if he wanted to get to the bottom of this.

After a few minutes of silence, Ken's brow furrowed.

'That guy was being weird with Daichi at the closing ceremony. It was only for a fleeting moment, but I remember the guy holding onto his hand for a lot longer than usual...'

Ken's eyes snapped open in the next moment, feeling as if his head had been hit by a sledge hammer.

"Suzuki... That was Daichi's last name before he was adopted..."

"No way right..."

He quickly entered Tetsuhiro's name into the search engine and began to scour the results. The 4th article showed a picture of his wife and child who looked to be around the same age as him.

After looking closely at their features, Ken slumped back on his chair with a confounded expression on his face. The two had a similar build and some features in common, enough for him to base his theory on it.

"Daichi is Tetsuhiro's illegitimate son?" Ken murmured in disbelief.

However, something seemed a little off. If he was Tetsuhiro's son, why didn't Daichi's mother collect some form of alimony or child support from the guy?

Suddenly, his well crafted theory seemed to be falling apart right in front of his eyes. Before it could slip away, Ken once more found himself scrolling through articles about the Suzuki conglomerate.

An hour later, his eyes were bloodshot as he continued to scroll through website after website, searching for some kind of information that he could use to tie Daichi and Tetsuhiro together.

Apart from the guy acting weird in front of Daichi and his company sponsoring their teams, Ken had no hard evidence to build his theory around. It was a stretch at best to say they were blood related.

After all, Suzuki was the 2nd most popular family name in Japan with over 1.8 million people sharing it. The odds of them being related were slim.

Just as he was about to turn in for the night, Ken saw an article that piqued his interest.

"Heir to Suzuki Corporation killed in a gruesome accident."

He clicked the link and saw the face of the man who died, his eyes widening considerably.

"Tatsuhiko Suzuki..."

The resemblance of this man to Daichi was uncanny. It truly looked like an older version of his best friend with a different hair style.

Just to be sure, Ken read the rest of the article and happened upon the date of the accident.

"January 2001. 2 months before Daichi was born."

Suddenly, everything seemed to line up in Ken's mind. It was as if he'd found the missing puzzle piece that brought it all together.

"Tetsuhiko is Daichi's uncle and must have noticed him at the U18 World Cup. He tracked down Daichi's biological mother and found out the details about the adoption."

Ken continued his murmurs, as if speaking it out loud was completing the puzzle.

"He convinced her to try and take Daichi back, threatening Dad in the process. When Dad didn't give in... He used his connections at BnA to have him removed from the Yokohama Warriors."

He let out a deep breath, feeling as if he'd just cracked the case. Yet there was no joy in his expression at this revelation. If anything, finding out Tetsuhiko's involvement in the plan had just made everything far more complicated.

A man with such power and authority would be a nightmare to go up against, especially with his wide array of connections.

To make matters worse, his father seemed to be truly despondent at this moment. Perhaps it was because he just lost his job, but he'd never seen the guy in such a state throughout his 2 lives.

"But what's his plan now?" Ken muttered.

It was one thing figuring out what had happened, but that was only half the battle.

What was Tetsuhiro's goal when he got Chris fired?

Ken began to feel a headache creeping up. Even if he found out all of this, it didn't change the fact that his father no longer had an income and would likely find it difficult to find work in the future thanks to the Juggernaut from Suzuki Corporation.

He grit his teeth, feeling helpless once more.

'If only I was a pro already...' Ken thought in his heart.

If he was a professional baseball player already, his income would easily allow his parents to retire, even if he entered the NPB. The problem was, he needed to graduate High School first in order to be eligible for the draft.

There was still 18 months until this could happen, yet his father didn't have that long.

If he were to make a conservative guess, his parents shouldn't have more than 3 months savings to last them. Which meant he needed to think of something fast in order to get money into the house.

While he could work a part time job, there was no way he'd be able to support the household. Not only this, he'd also lose valuable time needed for training his body.

Without a word, Ken retrieved his phone from the desk and scrolled through it before arriving at a name on his contacts.

RING RING

RING RING

"Hey Grandpa... I need your help."

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

