

Major League System

Chapter 61 - 61: War of Attrition (2)

Kouichi threw his pitch which was right on target, flying straight into Daichi's open glove.

"Nice pitch!" Daichi exclaimed, sending the ball back to him with a smile.

Kouichi was starting to gain back some of his confidence after giving up 3 hits. The next two balls were exactly where Daichi wanted them, bringing the count to 1-2.

He finally requested a two-seamer towards the outside which would break inward if thrown correctly. Kouichi nodded and sent the pitch right where he wanted.

DING

The batter made contact with the ball, sending it skidding along the ground to Kouichi.

"Home Home!" Daichi shouted.

Kouichi collected the ball easily and threw the ball to Daichi who caught it and stepped on home plate in one motion. Without stopping, he sent a rocket-like throw towards Kenta who was standing on 3rd base.

Kenta caught the ball and threw it directly to Hikaru who was waiting with his glove out at second base.

Pah

"Out!"

"3 outs, change!"

"Whoa! Triple play!" Big cheers came from the dugout and the players on the field when the play finally came to an end. Everything had happened so quickly that their opponents were in disbelief.

One moment they had loaded bases and no outs, in the next it was time to change over. Itakura's coach looked as if he was about to step on his hat out of frustration.

Daichi had been the one to orchestrate the whole play, directing the proceedings from the beginning. He backed the batter into a corner, almost forcing him to swing at a bad pitch with the allure of loaded bases and no outs.

Once he took the bait, Daichi knew exactly what to do in such a stressful situation. Something that most teenagers would struggle with.

This showed his poise and mental capabilities, as well as his knowledge of the baseball rules and fundamentals.

Ken couldn't believe that despite only playing the sport for a few months Daichi was already this good. It was no wonder why the Hanshin Tigers had recruited him just out of high school.

He couldn't help but smile as he watched the jubilant teen head back towards the dugout.

The game continued in a similar fashion with no additional runs being scored until the 8th inning. In true Daichi fashion, he managed to hit a home run, bringing the score 3-0 in favor of Seiko.

It was now the top of the 9th inning with Imai on the mound who had replaced Kouichi last innings. Imai was a solid pitcher who could throw a variety of breaking balls, perfect for small stints and relief pitching, yet he lacked stamina.

The count was currently 3-2 with two outs and 2 runners on base. Imai who had already pitched 30 times in this innings was starting to look fatigued. While he could easily get out the first two players, the one in the batters box right now was a tough nut to crack.

Ken's expression had fallen once the coach made the substitution, bringing in the young Hayato Yagi into the game. Despite being a 1st year at only 13 years of age, he had managed to foul the past 12 balls from Imai, bringing the game to a stalemate.

If the youngster was able to hit a home run, they would be forced into extra time without Kouichi. Since the Coach had substituted him and not moved him to another position, it was against the rules for him to enter the game once again.

This meant that they would have to play up to another 4 innings until a team won.

Obviously this was not something that the Seiko squad wanted, yet Hayato looked like he would never quit.

Daichi called a quick time out in order to give Imai a short breather. He was happy with how the relief pitcher was throwing, but seeing the signs of fatigue, he decided to have a chat anyway.

"He's a tough nut to crack isn't he?" Daichi commented, smiling softly.

"Yeah he just won't let up." Imai laughed, wiping the sweat from his brow. "What do you think we should do?"

"Have a look at him, he's also tired. While he's got a good feel for the bat, his muscles aren't developed enough to continue at this pace." Daichi said before placing his hand on the teens back.

"It will be a war of attrition. Think you can do it?"

Imai was a little taken aback, however he eventually let out a small chuckle. "It's just 1 more out, I won't let you all down."

"Good! Just follow my lead."

Ken watched on from first base with appreciation. While he couldn't hear what was being said, he noticed that Imai looked a lot more relaxed than before.

He gave a big thumbs up to Daichi in his mind and continued to watch the battle between Imai and Hayato.

"Foul"

"Foul"

"Foul"

Pitch after pitch was hit, flying into the foul zone. The two were like juggernauts as they continued to go back and forth against each other, neither one getting pushed back an inch.

Both the pitcher and batter seemed on their last legs. Ken had already lost count of how many pitches Imai had thrown by now, yet he could see a fierce determination in both of their eyes.

"Again!" Daichi called out, sending the ball back to Imai who then returned back to the mound.

Once more he threw the ball, aiming for Daichi's glove. The only thing on his mind this entire time was ensuring that he threw it to the open glove again and again, no matter how many times it took.

Dink

Hayato swung the bat once more, however there was a distinctly different sound than usual as the ball was kicked up a few feet into the air with tremendous back spin on it.

Daichi reacted in a flash, removing his face mask and diving backwards with an outstretched arm. The umpire also had good reflexes, managing to jump out of his path.

Pah

The ball entered Daichi's glove while it was still spinning, acting as if it wanted to break out of its confines. A stunned silence descended upon the field whose nerves had grown weary throughout the long battle.

"Out! Game Set."

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

Chapter 62 - 62: Seiko vs Fujimi (1)

"Out! Game Set."

The field was silent for a few moments before it suddenly erupted with cheers. The Seiko players came running at full speed to Daichi to celebrate, their joyful emotions evident on their faces.

The Itakura squad was crestfallen. Despite being held scoreless, there had been a few opportunities for them to reverse the lead in a single swoop. If Hayato had been in the starting line up, the end result could have been a lot different.

Ken saw Hayato grit his teeth and bow his head in frustration before leaving the field. He contemplated talking to the young teen, however eventually decided not to.

Losing was a big part of baseball, he believed that Hayato would grow stronger from this experience. After all, such things would have shaped him into the professional player he was in Ken's previous life. Who was he to meddle in such affairs that could change the youths trajectory?

Once the celebrations died down a little, Ken was finally able to approach Daichi. Yet instead of saying anything, he held out his fist and grinned widely.

Daichi returned the smile, fist bumping his brother. Some things did not require words to be verbalized since they were so close.

Seiko returned to the bus after some time, still jubilant from their win. Even Coach Yoshida seemed to be in a great mood after how the team had played.

Ken and Daichi returned home and broke the news to Yuki, the excitement of making it to the semi-finals of the Kanto tournament did not disappear even after a few days.

A few days later, Yuki could see a significant shift in her son. She noticed that he was no longer frowning or looking deep in thought, it was as if his worries had disappeared overnight.

Although she may not have verbalized it, she had been worried about Ken's behavior for a while now. Ever since he had that episode at the start of the school year, she felt as if there was something he wasn't telling her.

Almost like there was a burden hanging over his head that he was keeping to himself.

Yet now it was as if her son had returned to his former self. His face was carefree, lacking any stress or worries that he was carrying before.

She could now breathe a sigh of relief.

Ken was laying in bed staring at the ceiling of his room. He had been unable to remove the smile from his face for the past few days, still riding high from the victory over Itakura.

It was currently the beginning of July which meant that summer break was coming up. If they could defeat their next opponent Fujimi Junior High then they would be headed straight to the finals.

Just thinking about this filled him with excitement which made it difficult to fall asleep. However, persistence was key in such situations. After about 30 minutes of tossing and turning he finally entered a slumber, dreaming about playing on the big stage with his brother.

Having his mind focused solely on baseball, Ken had completely forgotten that finals exams were the following week. Therefore the next 4 days were a blur as he tried his best to cram and review the lessons from the past month and a half.

Thanks to his B+ Mental grade, his memory and cognitive abilities had been strengthened considerably, allowing him to study efficiently compared to before.

Then came Saturday, the day of the Semi-Final against Fujimi Junior High. They had been crowned champions in last years Kanto Tournament and still retained a solid player base despite losing some of their 3rd years.

This was the team that Seiko had lost to in his previous life. Not because of 1 player, but because the whole team was solid in both fielding and batting.

Fujimi's coach was also a large factor for their success, relying on small ball tactics in order to get runs on the board. Using such a tactic in middle school baseball helped drill efficient plays into the players at the cost of limiting their freedom.

Every play was designed to get the most of the innings, whether it was sacrifice bunts or pop-fly's into the outfield to secure runs on the board.

Despite Ken's best effort in his previous life, he still gave up 5 runs against their suffocating tactics.

'Things will be different this time.' Ken said inwardly, eyeing the opposition coach.

He was a man in his early sixties, garbed in the same uniform as the players and wore thick gold rimmed glasses. Everything about him screamed old school.

Even though he was wearing a smile during the handshake, Ken knew that the old man was a stern and steadfast coach that was similar to his own coach. He demanded perfection from his players, despite their young ages.

Coach Yoshida differed in his opinions while carrying a similar disposition. He still understood that his players were kids and therefore leaned towards guiding them rather than demanding what they would do.

This is why Ken liked their coach. This became even more apparent in this life now that he had already experienced the world as an adult for some time. Things that were lost or went unnoticed while he was a teenager became glaringly obvious.

He could see the joy on his Coach's face when the kids performed well, yet he never scolded someone when they made a simple mistake. His tough exterior and soft interior was perfect for nurturing a junior baseball team.

Ken felt the drive to beat Fujimi even more. He couldn't let the team that Coach Yoshida built be bested by such tactics.

Seiko lost the toss and was forced to bat first.

"Alright, this is the semi-final of the Kanto Tournament. We only need to win this game and then we're in the finals. I don't have much else to tell you other than do your best and have fun." The Coach gave a simple address to the team while the pitcher was warming up his arm on the field.

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

Chapter 63 - 63: Seiko vs Fujimi (2)

The Seiko team crowded around the coach their eyes shining with determination. Ken took the initiative and placed his hand in the middle of the group, prompting Daichi to place his hand on top.

The rest of the time did the same.

"SEIKO! FIGHT!"

"FIGHT!"

That little cheer seemed to fire them up even more as they returned to their places. Keisuke and Ken both grabbed their helmets and bats before heading up onto the field.

Keisuke walked over to the batters box, raring to go. He did his usual ritual of tapping the bat on the tip of each of his shoes before squaring up towards the pitcher.

The pitcher looked average in every way whether it was height or looks he was unremarkable.

'This guy would get lost in a crowd...' He commented inwardly, however he focused in the next moment.

"Play ball!"

A few moments after the umpire called the start to the game, the pitcher sent a fastball right down the middle, shocking Keisuke.

'Don't mind if I do!'

DONG

Keisuke noticed that the contact felt a little weird, yet he still ran as fast as he could towards first base. The ball skidded along the ground right back to the pitcher who casually picked it up and sent it to 1st.

"Out."

"What the hell?" Keisuke began his walk back to the dugout with a confused expression.

Ken's face turned solemn. This pitcher was one of those who pitched to contact, sending fastballs into the strikezone often and relying on the sound fielders to make use of their strong fundamentals.

He also noticed that the outfield had come in closer to the diamond, restricting the field and creating less options for batters. Unless a person was strong enough to hit a home run, or a deep hit into the outfield, they could only dream about getting onto base.

While this tactic had its obvious drawbacks, it was perfect for middle school baseball as teams rarely had players who were strong and talented enough to consistently send balls to the outfield.

Ken's gaze moved to the oppositions coach who was watching the game with a smug look on his wrinkled face. Out of everyone on the team, only himself, Daichi and Kenta had scored a home run this season.

He stepped up to the batters box and let the first couple of balls through to the catcher. They were both strikes, nearing the center of the zone. This backed up his conjecture.

Thankfully he had managed to get the timing down in those two balls, so the next one would be the pitch he'd go after.

DONG

Ken hit the ball with force, however he did not manage to hit it in the middle of the bat. The ball bounced off the dirt and skidded its way over to third base while he ran at full pace towards 1st.

"Out!"

He clicked his tongue in annoyance after having just been beaten by a fraction of a second by the ball. However, he made his way back to the dugout and passed by Kenta and Daichi.

"We need big hits from us 3. The outfielders are too close to the bases, as long as you hit it deep we'll get on base." He kept his voice low before wishing them luck and walking off the field.

Kenta was up next, his face looking more determined than ever. He had already decided he was going to break through the deadlock and get some runs on the board.

DONG!

The ball was smacked hard into the outfield, sailing over the center fielder with speed. Kenta threw his bat down and ran with all his might around the bases, lifting his head up to check on the status of the fielder every so often.

Thanks to the fielder being so far in, it took him some time to reach the ball which had ricocheted off the back wall. By the time he threw the ball back, Kenta had already reached 3rd base and was catching his breath.

Ken pumped his fist, inwardly praising the captain for his remarkable hit. As usual, Kenta's face was smiling widely as he sent a thumbs up towards Daichi who was making his way to the batters box.

It was now Daichi's turn to hopefully convert this into a run. He would have preferred that they didn't have 2 outs already, but there was nothing he could do about that.

Since Daichi couldn't rely on a pop-fly, he would need a big hit either to the outfield or a home run. If they didn't convert during this innings, they wouldn't get a chance until their next at-bat to put runs on the board.

Therefore, Daichi gripped his bat and waited for the first pitch.

DONG

'Damn, too early.'

The ball was slightly slower than the pitches that had been thrown earlier, causing Daichi's swing to come too early, sending it flying into the foul zone. Thankfully the ball reached the ground before the 3rd base fielder could catch it.

Daichi rolled his shoulders and waited for the next pitch with a serious expression. Ken gazed at his figure, clenching his fists and praying for a big hit.

'If he sends it to the outfield we'll have a run on the board.'

The pitcher threw another ball, this time faster than the last one, trying to throw off his timing. However, Daichi's reaction speed and coordination was top tier.

DONG!

The timing was immaculate, as was the placement of the bat. The sweet sound of the ball hitting the middle of the bat reverberated in everyone's ears, followed by cheers from the Seiko dugout.

Daichi could finally let out a smile after seeing the ball sail grandly over the outfielders heads, making a beeline towards the spectator seats. He ran around the bases with the cheers from a few spectators and the rest of his teammates.

With Daichi's home run the score was now 2-0 in favor of Seiko.

Ken let out a sigh of relief, a smile creeping onto his face. With this lead, he felt a little more comfortable going up against the small ball of Fujimi Junior High.

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

Chapter 64 - 64: No Fun (1)

Despite the 2 run disadvantage, Fujimi's coach did not seem agitated. His expression seemed as if he had expected such a result in the first innings. He didn't yell out any additional orders, nor complaints.

The players also didn't seem fazed, like robots they moved onto the next play without a word. Tatsuya who was up to bat had already been briefed by the others on what to expect, yet that didn't stop him from popping a ball over to 2nd base for an easy catch.

"3 outs change!"

Seiko made their way onto the field and took their positions. Kouichi was standing on the mound and warming up his arm with Daichi, sending controlled pitches to home plate.

The first batter that came up to the batters box was surprisingly the pitcher. He had to be the most average person Ken had ever seen, even his batting stance was orthodox.

Daichi had Kouichi throw a ball to the outside first to test the eye of the batter, only to be stunned when he swung and connected with the pitch. The ball went straight between 1st and 2nd base.

"Damn it." Ken quickly followed the ball and pounced on it, shifting his body and underarm throwing the ball to Kouichi who had run over to cover first base.

"Out!"

The umpire called the out and Ken breathed a sigh of relief. As long as he could underhand throw the ball, there shouldn't be any issues. He still hadn't regained his throwing capabilities, likely due to the systems interference.

If he were to have thrown it overhand then the runner probably would have been safe.

"Nice cover." Ken called out to Kouichi, giving him a thumbs up.

Thankfully, Kouichi knew exactly what to do when Ken had left the base. It could have been disastrous if no one covered first base when he left to gather the ball.

"Just doing my job." Kouichi winked before heading back to the mound.

Ever since he had taken Ken's father's advice, his pitching had improved by leaps and bounds. He was able to get more strength into his pitches and his control had become more consistent.

This in turn increased his confidence, giving him the aura of a true Ace pitcher. Although Ken had not used his Identify ability on Kouichi, he hoped that he would continue pitching and reach a higher level.

Kouichi threw the next two batters out fairly easily, however Ken noticed that they were able to make contact on majority of the balls, sending them into the foul zone.

The next couple of innings went by without any runs getting scored from either side. Fujimi's pitch to contact and constricted field proved effective, keeping Seiko's batters at bay.

Kouichi pitches were sharp and managed to get past the clean-up batters and the tail end of the batting order.

Despite not getting onto base, the players did not have any outward emotions of frustration or even disappointment from the outside. Seeming more like robots than actual kids.

He had not noticed this before in his previous life, but now that he was a little more aware of his surroundings, it was hard to miss.

Was it possible that their Coach's tactics had undermined the players love of the game? If he was in their shoes and forced to play a certain way, would he also turn out the same as these kids?

If he was honest, he would rather quit playing baseball if the only alternative was losing his love and passion for the game. This was saying a lot considering he already knew what it was like to lose baseball.

But to Ken, losing his love for the game and losing the ability to play were one in the same thing.

As he walked back into the dugout, his gaze landed on Fujimi's coach. A wave of disgust rose in the pit of his stomach as the old man looked back at him with an empty smile.

There was not much that he could do to an opposing coach. The only thing that would make it feel right was if his team could beat them soundly, rejecting his ideology and proving it wrong on the field.

Ken placed his hand on Daichi's shoulder as they walked back to the dugout, determination oozing from his pores.

"Let's destroy these guys." He said through gritted teeth.

"Huh? Ah, okay." Daichi seemed a little confused, but he still agreed.

Coach Yoshida could sense how agitated Ken was as he stared daggers at the Fujimi coach from his position in the dugout.

"Is everything okay Ken?"

"Oh, yeah sorry coach." He replied, originally intending to keep his feelings to himself. However, perhaps it was because he had the mind of an adult, Ken spoke his mind.

"It feels like all of the Fujimi players are emotionless robots." He stated, casting his glance over the players on the field.

"Hmm, I guess you could say that." Coach Yoshida nodded. "Can you guess why that is?" He asked.

Ken didn't have to think for long before naming the Fujimi coach as the sole reason for the kids behavior. It was clear as day that he was the perpetrator.

"The coach is definitely one of the reasons for this, he may even be the cause. However, it's not that these kids are emotionless robots..." The coach paused as his sympathetic gaze roamed over the field.

"Let me put it this way. Why do you play baseball?" He asked, turning his gaze back to Ken.

Ken was a little taken aback. It was such an easy question, yet he couldn't answer immediately. Did he play because he wanted to become a professional and make a living? Did he want to prove himself?

No, that wasn't it. His mind returned to one of the many nights that he spent alone in his apartment, clutching his shoulder and crying himself to sleep.

After a long pause, Ken finally answered the question. "Because I love baseball."

"And why do you love baseball?" The coach asked, his face turning up in a small smile.

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

Chapter 65 - 65: No Fun (2)

"Because it's fun." He answered. Yet the moment he said this aloud, a wave of understanding finally overcame him.

"That's right. We play the game of baseball because it is fun and we enjoy it. Those kids from Fujimi, you can see it in their faces... They're not having fun at all."

Ken's expression sank. What was baseball if it wasn't fun?

"So what do we do? I can't stand seeing kids miserable like this."

Coach Yoshida stifled a laugh. The situation itself wasn't funny, but seeing a teenager referring to those of his age as kids in such a tone felt a little too ironic to be ignored.

"I can't do anything about it, but maybe you can." He said, a mysterious smile forming at the corner of his lips.

"Huh? Me?" Ken was surprised. Originally he had thought that just beating this team may have an effect on them, however judging by their expressions, they may not even care if they lose.

"You can think about that later. For now, you're next up to bat." Coach Yoshida gave him a nudge on the shoulder, pointing at Keisuke who was dejectedly walking back to the dugout.

"Ah!" He quickly jumped up and grabbed his gear, Ken had been too preoccupied with the the situation that he had a complete brain fart.

"Sorry for making you wait." Ken bowed a few times to the umpire and the Fujimi players, however he didn't receive a response.

He squared up and was prepared to strike. Like in the first innings, he was aiming to hit the ball long.

However, to his surprise, the catcher stood up from behind him and took a few steps to the outside.

"Huh!?" Ken was flabbergasted. Were they really going to walk him? But why?

"Ball."

"Ball."

"Ball."

"Ball four! Walk."

Ken didn't know what was going on in this situation. This had not happened in his previous life, although the circumstances were a little different. They had not managed to score a single run whereas now they had 2 runs on the board.

He could only drop his bat down and walk over to 1st base with a confused expression.

It wasn't until Kenta came up to the batters box that he finally understood what was going on.

"Ball four! Walk."

Ken's gaze instantly turned to the Fujimi coach who was wearing his usual smile. He couldn't help but clench his fists in anger, this wasn't baseball, this was a joke.

Where were the rivalries? The drive to challenge your opponent and win with all of your might, no matter what.

Sure, this style of play may work in the professional league, but they were not professionals. They were middle schoolers.

The way this coach operated broke the players down into mere cogs within a system, erasing everything that made them unique.

"What a shame." Ken said loudly as he stepped onto second base, grabbing the attention of the few players around him. The pitcher turned around with an apathetic gaze and was about to turn back to pitch.

"Your coach must not have any faith in your pitching abilities if he's telling you to walk us all." His words were probing, attempting to get a reaction out of the pitcher.

The pitcher's expression twisted for a moment showing a flash of anger before it returned to normal. Ken could instantly tell that he was not walking them of his own volition.

"That's why I said that it's a shame. I was looking forward to facing your pitches head on after the first innings." He shrugged his shoulders, looking disappointed.

Frustration appeared on the pitcher's face but he held it in and turned to face Daichi who had already made his way to the batter's box. Ken was pleased by this reaction, it meant that at least one of the players were not satisfied with the Coach and his orders.

However, the pitcher still did as he was instructed by walking Daichi. Ken wasn't too surprised by this, but he finally felt as if he had found a way to perhaps help these kids enjoy baseball once more.

Next up to bat was Tatsuya who came out to one out and bases loaded. While this may seem like Fujimi were at risk, with their constricted field and play style, it would be difficult to convert the loaded bases into runs.

Coach Yoshida grabbed the tip of his hat, signaling for Tatsuya to perform a squeeze. A squeeze was a bunt that would allow the runner on third enough time to reach home, as long as it was executed well.

Ken saw the signal and got a lead from the third base, stalking the pitch and waiting for the bunt.

The pitcher threw the ball right down the middle, prompting Tatsuya to hold out his bat and bunt it towards first base. However, he used too much strength and practically fed it right into the 1st base fielder's glove.

He stepped onto the 1st base plate and threw to home, completing the double play.

"3 outs, change!"

Ken slowed down his run before heading back to the dugout, but not before letting out an audible sigh and speaking his mind.

"Man, what a boring game. It feels like I'm playing against robots with no personality or competitiveness."

His loud words drew the attention of the Fujimi players who were on their way to their own dugout. A few looked over with downcast expressions, while the catcher looked furious. He stormed over to Ken and got in his face.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

The catcher was short and stocky, only coming up to Ken's chin, yet he looked angry.

Ken raised his hands, not showing any signs of aggression in return.

"Hey man, I was just saying that a game like this isn't fun at all."

"Hah, fun? What's the point in having fun if you can't win? As long as we win the game then nothing else matters..." The short catcher scoffed, dismissing Ken's words.

"Those don't sound like your true feelings." Ken replied.

The catcher's face flickered for a moment before his anger rose once again. "Shut up, we'll beat you by any means necessary. Even if it's not fun."

After those words, he began to walk away back to the dugout before the umpire intervened.

Ken stared at his back for a moment before replying. "Then why did you start baseball? Was it only to win?"

These words made the catcher pause for a moment, yet he continued walking back, ignoring the question.

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

Chapter 66 - 66: Mission and Coup

DING

#NEW MISSION: Free the baseball slaves of Fujimi

DESCRIPTION: The Fujimi Junior High players have suffered under the dictatorship of Coach Ryoma Kitsui for far too long, ruining their experience of baseball. The system has deemed the Coach Kitsui is not worthy of teaching these teenagers and requests that you put an end to his dictatorship.

*Task 1: Reignite the Fujimi players passion for baseball

REWARDS:

>Skill: Charismatic Air

>B-grade Stamina Elixir

>Unlock potential Shiro Masuda (Catcher)

>Unlock potential Kenji Taguchi (Pitcher)

The moment that Ken sat down in the dugout, he heard a notification from the system, prompting him to open the window. As his eyes read the mission description it instantly resonated with him.

'It turns out the system also doesn't appreciate how this Coach has been treating his players.' Ken thought inwardly.

He had already decided to change the status quo and try and show the players that they could have fun, but this mission would be the icing on the cake.

'Unlock potential?'

"Ken, hurry up and get on the field." Daichi called out to him from the stairs, snapping him out of his reverie.

"Ah, one moment!" He called back, quickly grabbing his hat and glove.

At the bottom of the 3rd innings, it was the pitcher Kenji's turn to bat. No matter how many times Ken looked at him, the only word that came to his mind was average. Yet the system had mentioned his potential would be unlocked if he could complete the mission.

'Does this mean he has the potential to become a pro?' Ken thought.

DONG

The ball was sent flying into the right outfield while ken was busy thinking. It bounced just before the Seiko outfielder Shin could catch it. With a few quick steps, Shin threw the ball back to Ken who stretched out his glove and collected the ball.

"Safe"

Unfortunately, Kenji was able to make it safely onto first base before the ball landed in his glove.

Ken threw the ball in an arc back to Kouichi before turning to Kenji who was now on base. Now that he was close enough, Ken decided to use the Identify skill on the average looking boy.

This time however, there was no cost for using the skill. Which probably meant that there was little to no disparity between the two.

NAME: Kenji Taguchi

AGE: 15

TALENT ASSESSMENT: D+ (B-)

POTENTIAL: D (S+)

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: C+

>Pitching: B-

>Fielding: C+

>Game Intelligence: D (B-)

>Mental: E (B)

Note: Grades in brackets are before status modifiers.

Additional information: Played for Chiba City during elementary school with great success. Family moved before he had to settle with Fujimi in middle school.

KENJI TAGUCHI'S DATA HAS BEEN ADDED TO THE COMPENDIUM.

Ken was shocked. Kenji's potential was S+ but was currently only showing as D thanks to what the system referred to as a status modifier. However, the most glaring difference was probably his mental grade.

Although the system didn't explicitly say what was wrong with Kenji, he could guess that it was likely a result from being forced to play a certain way by Coach Kistui.

Ken once again felt anger that such a talent was being forced to rot away under this ignorant coach. He could understand why the system would issue a mission for him to intervene.

If Kenji was like this, then Shiro the catcher would also probably be suffering the same situation.

"Hey man, that was a nice hit." Ken said, keeping his raging emotions under the surface.

Kenji turned around and looked at him for a moment before thanking him in a small voice. The average looking guy seemed rather reserved, or perhaps that was also a result of the coach's influence.

"You're Kenji right? Didn't you used to play for Chiba City?" Ken asked inquisitively.

Only now did Kenji's expression change into one of shock. "H-How did you know that?"

Ken shrugged, "I have a friend who played in the same circuit. He mentioned a pitcher that looked like you, saying that you had some of the best controlled pitches he had ever seen. He also said that even though you looked average, it felt like he was facing a tiger whenever he was in the batters box."

Words spewed out of Ken's mouth, using the additional information from the system to weave a believable story. Of course they were all made up, however, he hoped that they would have some impact.

Kenji looked a little confused, but there was a hint of reminiscence behind his gaze, giving Ken a small window of hope.

"But it sounds like he was lying about the tiger part. I mean, your pitches are well controlled, but they lack any intent... Almost as if they're coming from a pitching machine." Ken finished.

He saw an imperceptible flash of anger on Kenji's face, however he hid it almost instantly. Without a word, he looked back at his coach and turned away once more, letting out a sigh.

"You're right. Those days are behind me now." Kenji looked tired and defeated, as if the once youthful and bright boy was now confined by invisible chains.

Ken didn't miss any of this, particularly the look he sent at the coach. He wasn't sure if this was the right time, but who knew when he would have the opportunity to talk to Kenji again whilst he was alone.

"Kitsui is a real apt name for your coach don't you think?" (this is a pun in Japanese, Kitsui means tough, hard, difficult)

"Pfft" Kenji almost burst out laughing, but managed to hold it back at the last moment. However, not before receiving a few curious glances from the rest of the Seiko squad.

Ken decided to strike while the iron was hot, placing his hand on the teens shoulder. "Why don't you bring that tiger back to the mound? I want to try hitting those scary pitches, it sounds like a lot of fun."

"Fun?" Kenji paused for a moment, his mind deep in thought. Why was this person always talking about fun? He had heard him speaking to Shiro before the changeover, complaining that the game wasn't fun.

Was baseball meant to be fun? When was the last time that he actually enjoyed himself while playing baseball? Was it 2 or 3 years ago... Certainly not after he had joined Fujimi and become the starting pitcher.

"Yeah, fun. Baseball is so much more exciting when you're having fun." Ken nodded, flashing a smile to the average looking youth.

"Strike! Out."

Kouichi struck out the next 3 batters despite Kenji getting onto first base in the beginning. Ken had wanted to continue talking, but it looked like he would have to leave it here for now.

He may not get to speak to the pitcher one on one again, but he hoped that his words had at least planted the seed of rebellion in his heart. As long as he got Fujimi's battery on board, they should be able to affect the other players.

Kenji began his walk back to the dugout, looking a little lost. Shiro who had been warming up to bat intercepted him, showing some concern.

"Kenji, are you okay? You look a little pale."

"Ah... I'm fine." He replied, however his face still seemed torn.

Shiro grabbed his shoulder and stopped him. "No you're not. Did that stupid 1st baseman say something to you? I won't let him bully you."

Kenji didn't reply for a while, staring at the ground. Yet when he lifted his gaze, there was something different about his expression.

"Have you ever had fun playing for Fujimi?"

Shiro turned his face up in question, "Huh? What's this crap about fun? That guy must have been talking in your ear that whole time."

Kenji slapped Shiro's hand off his shoulder and glared at his friend. "His words are true. Why the hell are we even playing baseball if we don't enjoy it? Will we be able to look back at this experience fondly when we grow older? What use is winning if we can't play our own way?"

Shiro was shocked. He had been friends with Kenji ever since they joined the team in the first year of middle school, yet he had never heard him raise his voice or talk to him like this. Usually he was meek and just went with the flow.

"W-What's gotten into you?"

"I love baseball... But I hate this kind of baseball." He didn't know how to articulate his feelings very well so these were the only words he could say that felt right.

However, Shiro understood him almost instantly. He too had lost something ever since joining Fujimi's team. He was still playing baseball, but he didn't really feel like he was playing, almost as if he was merely a cog in a machine, mindlessly turning.

Shiro's expression twisted for a moment before he nodded.

"So why don't we play our own game?"

"Our own game?"

A smile finally formed on the catcher's face as he once again placed his hand on Kenji's shoulder. "Let's play how we want to play."

Kenji was shocked, however he was suddenly filled with excitement. Yet his logical mind suddenly recalled something and his gaze fell back to the ground.

"But the coach will take us out of the game..."

"Not if we can get the whole team on our side." Shiro grinned.

Kenji lifted his head, as if wanting to make sure that his friend was not kidding. After confirming that Shiro was indeed serious, he finally broke out into a smile.

The two headed back to the dugout and grabbed their gear, avoiding the stare of Coach Kitsui who had been silent for most of the game.

The moment everyone walked out onto the field, Shiro called them all to the center of the pitch and had a quick meeting, keeping his voice low in order to ensure some privacy.

Ken had been keeping an eye on the pitcher and catcher duo the entire time and although he did not hear their conversation, he had a feeling that his words were having an effect. The fact that they held a meeting before the start of the 4th innings also backed up this theory.

When the team dispersed and got into position, Kenji looked over at Ken in the dugout and let out a big smile. This was the most emotion he had seen from the pitcher the entire game.

Ken felt a grin tugging at the corner of his lips, feeling his competitive spirit ignite inside of him.

"Show us what you've got." He muttered.

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

Chapter 67 - 67: Overthrown (1)

The next couple of innings went by in similar fashion, with Fujimi showing the same tactics, yet unable to get a run on the board. The controlled and consistent pitching of Kouichi kept them at bay.

However, Ken noticed a shift in the players body language. If before they were just going through the motions with expressionless faces, they now seemed more alert, making eye contact with each other and even being more vocal.

Kenji and Shiro were the proponents of this as they started to be more aggressive with their pitches. It was the top of the 6th innings and Keisuke was in the batters box, ready for the first pitch.

His expression was desperate. This was the first game that he had such little impact, not even able to get onto first base after 2 at-bats. He prided himself on being the lead-off batter for Seiko, yet he was being shutdown.

Keisuke had already resolved himself to swing for the fences, no matter what.

The ball came whistling towards him and he swung without hesitation, intending to send the ball into the stands. However, he missed completely, almost spinning around on the spot because of the huge force of his swing.

Ken's eyes opened wide before a smile formed on his face. That pitch was the first intentional ball that Kenji had thrown all game, filling him with excitement.

His gaze moved to Coach Kitsui who finally had a change of expression. His usual smile was nowhere to be seen, now replaced by a displeased frown. He had not even been upset when Fujimi had given up 2 runs, yet only after a single ball his face had contorted.

'Hahaha, so that coach can have this kind of expression too?' Ken felt a sense of pleasure seeing the reaction of Fujimi's coach. However, he had a feeling as if it was going to be a lot worse.

Unaware of the new dynamic, poor Keisuke continued to swing at the ball for the next two pitches, thinking they would be within the strike zone as Kenji had done all game. However, he was quickly struck out.

Ken stifled a chuckle and placed his hand on Keisuke's shoulder, giving him some condolences for striking out in 3 pitches. He walked up to the batters box and got into position.

The moment he got into place, the outfielders suddenly ran back, no longer sitting further infield as they had done last game.

"Hahaha, so you've finally decided to play your own way now?" Ken said, talking to Shiro who had already crouched down and was preparing for the pitch.

"We'll strike you out our own way." Shiro said, a smirk forming on his face.

However, before the first pitch could come he heard a voice on the field demanding for a time out. The umpires looked at each other before giving the signal and approving the time out.

Coach Kitsui stormed onto the pitch and went straight to the mound, getting close to Kenji with a furious expression.

"What are you doing? I told you to walk this batter and the other 2!"

He was at least a head taller than Kenji and was looking down at him intimidatingly, causing Ken to feel his anger rising. The poor boy was staring at the ground and clenching his fists tightly.

This was probably not the first time that the coach had talked to him this way, as even some of the other players looked away uncomfortably.

Shiro walked over to the mound, his chest puffed out ready to defend his friend.

"Don't listen to him Kenji. Just focus on what you want to do." He said, not even looking at the coach.

"What!?" Coach Kitsui was incensed. He hadn't expected to be so brazenly ignored during a match, so much so that he was at a loss for words momentarily.

Kenji finally raised his head and stared into the eyes of the man who had slowly squeezed the joy out of his beloved game.

"I won't do as you say anymore. After this game, I'll be leaving the team." His face was filled with resolution, wanting to break free from the shackles imposed on him.

Coach Kitsui's face turned bright red as the anger reached his head. "P-Preposterous! I'm banning you from the squad right this instant. I have no need for rebellious youths like yourself in my team."

He turned to the dugout and shouted out, "Satoshi, Kiyoto! You're replacing Kenji and Shiro, hurry up and get on the field."

However, the two both turned the other way as if they heard nothing. A look of confusion crept onto the coach's face before realization suddenly hit.

"Oh I see how it is... Yuji! Hiro! It's finally time for you to step up." He called to the two first years who were on the bench. Although he didn't want to use them, he needed to salvage some face.

Yet once again he was ignored, leaving him stranded on the mound with everyone's gaze upon him. He had never felt such embarrassment before, nor had he ever been disrespected this much in public.

"Y-You two!" The coach's face turned bright red as he pointed at Shiro and Kenji, about to take out his frustrations on the two youths.

"Coach, it's time to resume play. Leave the field now or you will be disqualified." One of the umpires walked over and sent out a warning, perfectly interrupting the meltdown that was about to happen.

Coach Kitsui felt as if he was going to tear out his hair, he had never experienced such a thing in his 20 years of coaching. Years of studying the game of baseball had allowed him to perfect his coaching methods.

He didn't need players that stuck out, all he needed was for them to listen to his orders. He was the general, the tactician and the emperor, and these were just his peasants who should never disobey him.

The redness in his face began to dissipate, yet his face twisted into one of scorn. "You two have really done it now. I'll make sure that you don't get into any baseball program in Japan in your life!"

Without waiting for the umpire, he walked straight off the field and into the dugout, slamming his hat on the ground and kicking it. After his tantrum, he stormed off, not even wanting to stay and watch the game.

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

Chapter 68 - 68: Overthrown (2)

However, instead of looking scared, both Shiro and Kenji laughed. It started out with some chuckles, but then it broke out into full side-aching laughter.

The umpire didn't know what to do in this situation, but he eventually reminded the players that it was time to play ball once again. The two quickly apologized and got back into position.

Ken saw the smiling face of Shiro as he walked back and couldn't help but let out a sigh of relief. Despite everything that happened and the threat of never playing organized baseball in Japan again, he was in good spirits.

"That was quite an expression your Coach had." Ken commented.

"Haha, yeah wasn't it fantastic?" Shiro replied.

"But aren't you worried about what he said at the end?" Ken couldn't help but ask. Inwardly he felt guilty, sure he might unlock the two teens potential, but what good would that be if they weren't ever able to play baseball in Japan?

"I'd rather quit altogether than play his kind of baseball." Shiro admitted, going quiet a moment later.

Ken let the boys words simmer in his mind, choosing not to reply as he faced Kenji. The average looking boy had a big grin on his face as he performed an exaggerated wind up and sent the ball blizzing towards him.

'Holy crap!' Ken cursed inwardly as he saw the ball break towards him at the last moment, causing his bat to completely strike air.

'That pitch was alive...!' He was shocked, yet inwardly he felt any sign of guilt fade away.

"Nice pitch!" Shiro called out, sending the ball back to Kenji.

The next pitch was a fastball to the outside which seemed to creep away from Ken ever so slightly. However, he still managed to get contact on the ball, fouling it away.

"Heh, this is more like it." Ken remarked, feeling a grin tug at the corners of his lips.

Now that Kenji had cleared his mental block, the pitches he threw were sharp, no longer like a lifeless pitching machine. It was as if he had a complete rebirth.

As if to back up this notion, the next ball that came his way bamboozled Ken greatly. He had been expecting the crisp and sharp fastball, yet he was fooled by the slower change up, mistiming his swing terribly.

"Strike. Out!"

Yet instead of being downcast, Ken sent a thumbs up to Kenji on his way back to the dugout unable to keep the excitement from his face.

Next up was Kenta. After seeing that they had chosen not to walk Ken, his depressed face had been replaced with his usual serious demeanor.

Ken sat down in the dugout and was approached by Coach Yoshida.

"It looks like whatever you did worked. Great job." He said, giving Ken a thumbs up.

"Thanks, but I'm a little worried for those two. I don't know if you could hear, but the coach was saying that he'd make sure they wouldn't be able to play baseball again in Japan."

Seeing as the Coach had been the one to prompt Ken to stir the hearts of the Fujimi players, he thought that he should know all the information.

However, instead of looking worried, the coach pointed to something within the dugout.

"Huh?" Ken moved his attention over and saw the video recorder on top of one of the beams which was pointed towards the field.

"Don't worry, we could hear everything from here. We even got the unfortunate tantrum that the coach threw before leaving. Once I submit the tape to the federation, he'll be banned from everything to do with competitive baseball." Coach Yoshida continued, with a cheeky smile.

Ken's eyes widened in surprise before he let out a hearty laughter. It turned out that he had been worried for nothing. Perhaps the coach had already thought such a thing would happen, because he certainly did not see a video recorder at the beginning of the game.

"3 outs! Change."

Kenta seemed to suffer the same fate as Ken and his out put an end to the top of the 6th innings. Seiko still led the game 2-0, with Fujimi yet to have scored a run.

The game continued, yet it felt as if both teams had entered a new gear. Fujimi played as if everything was on the line, dredging up every bit of energy and heart they could muster in order to claw themselves back into the game.

Shiro stepped up to bat and managed to send back a high fastball from Kouichi sailing over the back fence for a home run. He almost skipped around the bases, cheering as if he had just hit a walk off homer.

This made the score 2-1 in favor of Seiko, sending them into a frenzy. With the absence of Coach Kitsui, they celebrated greatly, sending out hi-5's and hugs as Shiro stepped on home plate.

However, this late rally did not last as Daichi on his 4th at-bat sent a screamer over the fence and increased the lead to 3-1. Imai finished off the bottom of the 9th with some masterful pitching, not even giving up a single hit with Daichi's leading.

Despite losing, the Fujimi squad didn't seem down. They were busy laughing and carrying on, a content look on their faces as if they had enjoyed every moment of their free reign.

"Thank you Ken. You showed me that baseball is fun again." Kenji and Shiro approached him, their faces still filled with grins.

Ken couldn't help but smile back, shaking their hands.

"I hope that we can play each other again in the future." He said.

Kenji shook his head, "Didn't you hear the coach? I'll probably be blacklisted from any baseball clubs in the future." Even though he said this, he didn't seem upset.

Shiro too nodded, a refreshed look upon his face.

Ken couldn't help but laugh, "What if I told you that we recorded everything and that Coach Kitsui will no longer be able to coach again?"

The two went silent as their jaws almost dropped to the floor.

"Y-You can't be serious... Please tell me you're not joking." Shiro was the first to speak up, moving closer and grabbing Ken by his jersey. The desperation in his face was enough indication of how much he loved baseball.

"I promise. No one will listen to a coach who got forcibly removed from organized baseball. You'll be free to continue playing so don't worry about that."

Shiro dropped to his knees, still clutching Ken's shirt. It was as if all of the strength had left his body as the wave of relief swept through him.

"Thank you..." Those were the only words that he could mutter before breaking into tears, overwhelmed with emotion.

Kenji seemed a little more reserved but he still came forward and bowed to Ken in thanks.

"You may have won today, but I still feel like we're winners as well." He smiled gently before picking up his friend and taking him back to the dugout.

"Let's meet again in High School." Ken shouted to them after a while, receiving a wave back in acknowledgment.

DING

Mission Completed.

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

Chapter 69 - 69: Final Week

Ken and Daichi returned home in high spirits. After having beaten Fujimi Junior High, they would now face the Seigakuin in the final this coming weekend.

"That's my boys!" A loud crackling voice echoed from the cellphone that Yuki was holding in her hand.

Yuki had called Chris straight after hearing the news. She had even walked away from preparing dinner, something that was rare for her.

"I'll be back from overseas by Friday, so your mother and I will be able to watch your final game of middle school." The excitement was evident in Chris's voice as he said these words.

Both Ken and Daichi's faces lit up upon hearing the good news. Daichi in particular felt a little nervous. This would be the first time that Chris and Yuki would see him play in an official match as his adoptive parents.

He had never experienced anything similar in his life before, which meant he felt a lot of pressure. However, Daichi would not let such pressure ruin such a precious moment.

"That's great Dad! Maybe we can go celebrate after we win." Ken said with a cheeky grin.

"Oho, confident are we? Daichi, make sure your brother doesn't become arrogant after you guys win. HAHAHA."

Yuki couldn't help but shake her head. Instead of telling their son to be modest, her husband was busy fanning his ego.

"Okay okay, that's enough excitement for today. You two need to go to bed early tonight so you can recover. You have final exams for the semester next week so I expect you to be studying all day tomorrow." Yuki said, unceremoniously hanging up the phone to stop the laughing coming from the other side.

At the mention of exams, both Ken and Daichi's moods plummeted. Whatever high they were riding on after winning such an important game was utterly destroyed beneath the weight of their academics.

Seeing the boys reaction, Yuki stifled a giggle. "Your grades have improved a lot Kenny, so maybe I'll let you both off with only half of Sunday studying."

Ken's eyes lit up, "Thanks mom!"

Yet a moment later a loud grumble filled the room, drowning out all other sounds. Both Ken and Yuki turned at the same time to stare at Daichi who went beet red after his stomach had let out such a noise.

"I think that's my queue to finish making dinner." Yuki said while trying to hold in a laugh. Ken however, was less tactful, choosing to laugh uncontrollably.

He held his sides and tried to speak between fits of laughter, "I thought Godzilla had come to life!"

Daichi's eyebrow twitched and he couldn't help but pinch his Big Bro to relieve some of his embarrassment.

"Ow! Oi what was that for?" Ken called out.

The two then began to scuffle just like real brothers, however despite being the little brother, Daichi was able to overpower Ken.

"Tap! I TAP"

Daichi felt vindication as he saw Ken panting on the floor after he had successfully wrestled him into submission. He didn't hold any hard feelings, in fact he felt safe and comfortable enough to behave in such a way.

This was just another indication that his life had changed for the better. He now had a real family that he could rely on, who he could laugh and joke around with and who he could share the successes and failures of life with wholeheartedly.

As Daichi's thoughts were full of gratitude and thanks, his stomach once again let out a voracious roar. Thus another bout of laughter ensued from the defeated Ken who was still upon the floor.

"Big Bro..." Daichi's face looked scary as he inched closer towards Ken.

"A-AH NO! I'm sorry!"

Another wrestling match took place, yet the end result was the same.

The three ate a sumptuous dinner and then the boys returned to their rooms for the night. Like Yuki had said, today was an exhausting one and now that they had filled their bellies, sleep was calling out to them like an old friend.

Ken laid in bed and fought off the desire to roll over and enter sleeps embrace. He had been waiting for a moment when he was free to check the mission rewards.

#NEW MISSION: Free the baseball slaves of Fujimi

*Task 1: Reignite the Fujimi players passion for baseball [Complete]

REWARDS:

>Skill: Charismatic Air [Claim rewards]

>B-grade Stamina Elixir [Claim rewards]

>Unlock potential Shiro Masuda (Catcher)

>Unlock potential Kenji Taguchi (Pitcher)

[Congratulations, you have been awarded 1x B-grade Stamina Elixir and the skill Charismatic Air]

[Charismatic Air: People are drawn to you and are more likely to listen to your suggestions.]

Ken read the small description of his new skill and felt a bit exasperated. While the name of the skill sounded good, the description did little to explain how it worked or what the effects were.

He didn't know if it was referring to just baseball, or even how useful the skill would be. Ken decided to just leave it be, focusing on the second part of his reward which was the B-grade Stamina Elixir.

Stamina was the one thing that he had trouble increasing. It had only increased by a single grade since he had been given the all those months ago.

Without hesitation, he selected it from his inventory and awaited the pain that usually came after using an Elixir. However, he was surprised a moment later when the expected pain did not come.

Instead, he felt his muscles vibrate individually on their own for a little while, causing him no discomfort at all. Yet after a few moments he suddenly felt a wave of exhaustion over his whole body, as if he had just run a marathon.

He was already dead tired, so he quickly fell asleep without the ability to check on the effects of the Elixir.

The next morning, Ken woke up to Daichi shaking him and calling out his name.

"Ken, it's time to get ready for school."

At first it was a gentle nudge but after receiving no response, Daichi used more and more strength until he was almost using his full force. If it wasn't for the loud snores, Daichi might have even thought that Ken had already gone ahead to the afterlife.

Finally Ken began to stir, feeling a bout of nausea from the constant rocking back and forth.

"W-What is it!?"

Seeing that he had finally awoken, Daichi let out a sigh of relief.

"It's already past 7, we need to get ready and head to school. It's finals today."

"HUH!?"

Ken quickly got out of bed, still looking half asleep. He searched around the room with a sense of urgency and quickly began to get dressed into his uniform before heading to the bathroom to brush his teeth.

Daichi tried his best to contain his laughter, seeing the frenzy that his brother was in now. He let out a whistle as he head down the stairs and sat down at the dining table for breakfast.

After only a couple of minutes, Ken raced down the stairs and said hello and goodbye to his mother before putting his shoes on.

"Where are you going?" Yuki asked with a confused expression, seeing that he was in his uniform.

Ken stopped in place and turned to his mother, before moving his gaze to Daichi who was sitting at the table. He could see a mischievous light in his eyes as he let out a laugh.

It was only when Ken saw that his brother was not in his uniform that things finally started to click into place.

"It's Sunday today isn't it?" He said in exasperation.

"Yes it is." Yuki answered.

She saw the amused expression on Daichi's face and began to put the pieces together. She stifled a laugh and turned back around to continue washing the dishes, not saying another word.

Ken took his shoes off and headed back up the stairs to get changed. It was likely that his 11 hour sleep was an aftereffect of using the Stamina Elixir the night before.

Since his body was not used to sleeping for so long, it made sense as to why he was so groggy and fell for such a petty trick. He opened the door to his room and couldn't help but grin.

As he was getting changed, he quickly brought up the system window and checked out his status.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 2 (1280/1000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 15

TALENT ASSESSMENT: B-

POTENTIAL: D (S+)

MAJOR POINTS: 1280

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

[Stamina grade has been increased by 4!]

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: B+

>Pitching: F (B)

>Fielding: C+

>Game Intelligence: C+

>Mental: B+

>Skills: 7

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. B+)

Balance and Coordination: B+

Agility: B-

Strength: A-

Stamina: B+

'Whoa, my fitness grade has been bumped up to B+ after taking the Stamina Elixir.' Ken felt a surge of happiness after seeing his stats. In the short span of 4 months he had managed to improve so much thanks to the system.

He also had enough Major points to level his system. Considering he would be spending the whole day studying and the finals were only a week away, he decided now was the best time to do so.

#SYSTEM ALERT

>The user has chosen to upgrade the system.

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

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

[Would you like to commence the upgrade now?]

[YES/NO]

He selected the Yes option without hesitation.

#SYSTEM ALERT

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

>1000 Major points have been deducted.

SYSTEM UPGRADE INITIALIZING

SHUTTING DOWN TO INSTALL UPGRADE...

Ken waited for a few moments before trying to access the system. Yet no matter how much he tried, nothing would pop up. Despite this, he didn't feel any different which filled him with confidence.

He was worried that his capabilities would return to normal once the system shut down which was why he had been putting off this upgrade for so long.

Once he was changed, Ken headed back downstairs and had a delicious breakfast with his family. Daichi could still be seen chuckling every now and then, seemingly pleased with his little prank this morning.

The two then spent majority of the day studying together. Since they were in the same grade and same class it made things even easier.

It was a tedious day, but they were able to make it through the grueling study sessions with each others company. Daichi was pretty smart and never really struggled even in high school, whereas Ken was quite the opposite.

However, with his improved mental capacity he found it much easier to memorize and understand the important parts. This was reflected on his mid-terms which he had performed well on, even his mother had been surprised by his improvement.

Soon enough it was time for bed after hours of cramming. Ken did not waste any time considering the system was still shut down so he couldn't do any image training even if he wanted to.

He soon fell asleep, imagining the kind of changes the system would undergo after successfully upgrading.

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

Chapter 70 - 70: System Shop

Ken woke up to his alarm buzzing in the morning like usual, feeling refreshed. Unfortunately his system was still shut down since 24 hours had yet to pass since he chose to upgrade it.

Since it was the first day of final exams today he likely wouldn't have a chance to check it out until he returned home tonight. Although it was a bit of a bummer, he didn't mind too much.

The two boys went for their morning run and had breakfast before heading off to school. While they were sitting in the train, Ken noticed something weird.

Was it just his imagination or were people looking at him? Whenever he raised his head he would see people turning around after presumably staring at him while he wasn't looking.

"Is there something on my face?" Ken turned to Daichi and asked, feeling a little self-conscious.

"Nothing more than usual." Daichi replied without missing a beat.

Ken's eye twitched at these words. It seemed as if his cute little brother was turning into a smart ass as of late. This was very unlike Daichi in his previous life, which begged the question, what would have happened if his family didn't adopt him?

He knew so little about the Daichi of his previous life, only that he was a true friend. But the fact that he felt comfortable enough to play pranks and joke around with him was a positive thing.

Ken let out a sigh, he shouldn't be thinking about such things when he was just about to go through 5 full days of exams.

They finally made it to school and walked in through the gates. He could tell that it was not just himself who was dreading the final exams this week. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Keisuke who looked as pale as a ghost walking into the school.

Once again Ken felt as if he had more eyes than usual on him, sending goosebumps up his arms.

'What the hell is going on? Is this some kind of prank?' He looked around only to see the same thing that had transpired on the train this morning.

He dealt with the feeling until finally making it to the classroom and letting out a sigh of relief. Ken didn't think that he would ever be thankful to make it safely to class, especially on exam week, yet here he was.

What came next was what he had expected, one test after another, each as mind-numbing as the last. They finally had a reprieve when the lunch bell rang.

After handing in the test, Ken couldn't help but sigh loudly. He and Daichi got out their lunch boxes which held a note from Yuki.

'Do your best!'

He felt a smile pulling on the corner of his lips after seeing the note and felt a little better. However, just as he was about to dig into his lunch he saw a girl approach the both of them.

Ken who currently had his mouth wide open and was about to place a load of rice into it suddenly put his chopsticks down, feeling a flicker of nerves in his stomach.

'Ai Koyama...'

A wave of memories flooded his brain as he saw the younger version of the woman he had chased after in high school in front of him. She had long black hair and wide blue eyes that flashed with intelligence.

Although she was only 15 and not yet matured, she was beginning to show signs of the beauty that she would turn into in the future.

Ken was troubled by the mix of emotions that his younger body was currently going through. Considering his mental age was already that of a young adult, he should have no feelings for a woman this young.

However, perhaps it was his teenage hormones and past life's yearning that had made him want to be close to this girl.

'What is she doing here? Isn't she in class 1?'

"Hi Ken, I heard you made it to the finals of Kanto Tournament." Ai said, twirling her hair around her fingers.

"Uhh, yeah." He replied awkwardly.

"I'll be there to cheer you on, so do your best." She said, her soft cheeks turning a light shade of red. After saying this she walked out of the room, leaving Ken stunned into silence.

His mind was empty, yet his teenage hormones caused his cheeks to also flush in embarrassment. In reality he couldn't be blamed for his reactions, since Ai had never even acknowledged his existence in his previous life.

"Oh? Someone has an admirer." Daichi's couldn't help but poke at Ken verbally, enjoying his big bro's expression.

Ken shook his head, trying to get the weird feelings out of his mind.

"I don't even know who that is." He lied, inwardly thinking that he needed to stay away from Ai in the future as it was too weird.

Daichi let out an exaggerated sigh, "My big brother is already so popular only after 2 games this season. I wonder when girls will start looking at me." He lamented, however Ken could tell that he was just making fun of him.

Ken's eye twitched in response.

'This guy had his own female fan base when he made it to the NPB in my previous life yet here he is complaining about me getting the attention of 1 girl...' He felt the whole situation was bizarre, if not a little funny.

As soon as they finished lunch the bell rang and it was back to exams once again. By the time they were done for the day, Ken's head felt as if it was going to explode.

He had never been good at mathematics and although he could memorize the formulas, it was still tedious answering all of the questions.

There was no club until Friday which Ken was thankful for. The two made their way home on the train, looking like zombies since they were mentally drained.

Once arriving back home Ken went straight up to his room and laid on the bed. Now that the day was over and he was alone, it was time to open up the system and see what had changed.

#SYSTEM ALERT

SYSTEM HAS SUCCESSFULLY UPGRADED TO LEVEL 3.

SYSTEM SHOP IS NOW UNLOCKED

SYSTEM LEVEL: 3 (280/10000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 15

TALENT ASSESSMENT: B-

POTENTIAL: D (S+)

MAJOR POINTS: 280

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS

-SYSTEM SHOP

-LOTTERY (Locked)

-IMAGE TRAINING

-IDENTIFY

Ken's eyes widened in surprise. Without hesitation he opened up the System Shop with a sense of anticipation, wondering what kind of treasures it held.

#SYSTEM SHOP

>Lottery Tickets

>Elixirs

>Skills (locked)

'Yes! This is what I've been waiting for.' Ken had an abundance of Major points which he had only been able to save for upgrading the system. Now that the system shop had been unlocked, he could finally find somewhere to use them.

Yet his thoughts quickly turned sour as he saw the prices.

#Lottery Tickets

>Bronze Lottery Ticket - 500 Major Points

>Silver Lottery Ticket - 1000 Major Points

>Gold Lottery Ticket - 5000 Major Points

'So expensive!' It seemed that getting the lottery tickets through missions would be a lot easier than buying them from the system shop, which probably meant that Elixirs and Skills would be the same.

It was as he expected. B-grade Elixirs were priced at 1000 Major points, whereas A-grade's were 5000 which was the same price as a Gold Lottery Ticket.

Ken was a little disappointed, but at the same time it changed his perception of the rewards he received from missions. If he were to win the Kanto Tournament the reward

was a Gold Lottery Ticket and 500 Major points. This meant his total reward would amount to 5500 Major points, which was huge.

He had been hoping he would be able to improve his skills before the finals this weekend and thought that the upgrade may help facilitate this. However, it turned out that he was poor and could not afford the goods in the system shop.

But there was one thing that he could do in order to get stronger. After having dinner and getting ready for bed, Ken returned to his room and a look of determination flashed onto his face.

DOES THE USER WISH TO ENTER IMAGE TRAINING?

[YES/NO]

"Yes."

Ken entered the image training and went straight to batting. It was quite tough against the upgraded pitcher who was sending 140km/h fastballs at him, but as long as he persisted, he would be able to get the rewards.

He continued the same routine for the entire week, taking exams during the day and completing image training at night. Unfortunately, thanks to the supreme pitching of his older self he was only able to complete one of the missions.

> Hit 1000 bunts successfully - 250 Major points + Silver Lottery ticket [COMPLETE]
Claim rewards

[Congratulations, you have been awarded 250 Major points 1x Silver Lottery ticket]

Without waiting, Ken went straight to the Lottery wheel and spun.

'Please something good.' He prayed inwardly as the wheel began to spin slower and slower, finally coming to a stop.

[Congratulations, user has drawn an A-grade Balance and Coordination Elixir.]

'Jackpot!'

Ken jumped out of bed and couldn't contain his joy, pumping his fists in the air as if he had just scored a home run. Of course he couldn't vocalize his joy, but the dance and jubilation was enough to see how happy he was.

'I didn't even know that the silver lottery gave out Elixirs' he thought.

His balance and coordination grade was directly tied to his ability to see and hit the ball when batting. It was currently sitting at B+ which allowed him to track most, if not all pitches from middle schoolers.

However, now that he had gotten his hands on the A-grade Elixir it should shoot into the A grade and increase his batting prowess by leaps and bounds. This would allow him the ability to clear the batting missions in his image training a bit easier also.

Thinking of being able to hit every ball thrown at him caused a grin to tug at the corner of his lips.

"Would I be as good at batting as Daichi after this?" he mumbled.

Yet remembering the almost supernatural ability of his little brother, he quickly shook his head. Although he couldn't see his physical grades, Ken had a feeling that Daichi was at least an S rank in balance and coordination despite his age.

Ken quickly got into bed and chose to consume the Elixir. In his excitement, he forgot the potent side effects of the Balance and Coordination Elixir, causing him to feel nauseas almost immediately.

BLURGH

Without warning, Ken sat up and almost emptied the contents of his stomach into his hands. At the last moment he managed to hold it back, preventing a terrible situation.

He was forced to crawl on his knees towards the toilet where he spent the next hour hugging the porcelain throne.

Thankfully no one bothered him for the duration of his stay. Only after brushing his teeth about a dozen times did he head back to his room and fall into bed, quickly entering the embrace of sleep.

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

Chapter 71 - 71: Eve of the Finals

Ken felt his stomach rumbling in protest to the alarm that had woken him up. Since he parted ways with the remnants of his dinner last night, he felt the full effects of his hunger this morning.

He quickly turned the alarm off and opened the notification waiting for him.

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

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

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. B+)

Balance and Coordination: A+

Agility: B-

Strength: A-

Stamina: B+

Seeing the blue screen in front of him, Ken's eyes sparkled. He finally had a grading of A+, filling him with pride and a sense of achievement. This was probably the highest he would be able to reach with the A-grade Elixirs.

Ken had never seen S-grade Elixirs even mentioned before by the system, but perhaps they would appear once he upgraded the system to a sufficient level.

Either way, he felt another layer of confidence after his Balance and Coordination had increased. He needed to perform well in the finals and get the attention of Toin or another famous baseball school.

There would be a few high school scouts who would offer scholarships for talents who played in the finals. Ideally, he and Daichi would be able to shine on the field and move on to an established team which would set them up for a professional career in baseball.

With these grand thoughts in his mind, Ken left his room to start his morning routine. Today was the last day of final exams which ended at 12pm. From there he would go to the last baseball practice before the Kanto finals against Seigakuin tomorrow.

When he arrived at school, everyone seemed to be in a much better mood than they were on Monday. That was to be expected since it was the last day of school before the summer break started.

Ken and Daichi were both more excited for the final game of the Kanto Tournament which would take place tomorrow. Chris was due back from overseas sometime today which the two were looking forward to.

As he walked towards class, Ken could still feel the stares directed at him from the other students. A few girls walked up to him in the hallway and stopped in his path, looking as if they wanted to ask him something.

"Hey Ken, what are you doing after school today? Did you want to go shopping in Yokohama with us? Your friend can come too."

Ken almost couldn't believe his ears, turning to Daichi as if to ask him if this was an illusion. However, Daichi's face was beet red and filled with panic.

Now that he thought about it, he had never seen Daichi talk to another girl before apart from their mother. His nervousness caused Ken to let out a mischievous grin as he had finally found out his brother's weakness.

Thankfully, Ken didn't share the same feelings he had for Ai with these girls, so he was easily able to decline their invitation. The reason he was so shocked in the first place was because he had never been invited to such things even as the Ace of Seiko.

"I'm sorry, we both have baseball training after school today. We'll be playing in the finals tomorrow after all." He replied with an apologetic face.

Seeing the girls look so disappointed, Ken's eyes flashed for a moment as a wicked idea entered his mind.

"How about you exchange email addresses with my brother here and we can go shopping during summer break?"

Daichi felt a shock run down his spine as he slowly turned to Ken with a horrified expression.

'This is what you get for bullying me little bro.' Ken laughed inwardly, snatching Daichi's phone from his pocket and handing it to the three girls.

They all entered their email addresses and turned to Ken expectantly.

"Ah sorry, my phone is out of battery. But don't worry, you can reach me through my brother here."

Outwardly Ken looked apologetic, however inwardly he was cackling like an evil villain from one of those Anime's. Even after the girls walked away and his phone had been returned, Daichi had yet to recover from the whole ordeal.

Ken didn't bother to collect Daichi, choosing to walk straight into class in case he was stopped by anyone else.

'Have I gotten more handsome or something?' He thought, humming a merry tune as he went and sat down at his desk.

"Ah..." Ken exclaimed, finally thinking of a reason for all this unwanted attention. His reward from the mission against Fujimi was that weird skill with hardly any description.

Everything started to make sense now. Charismatic Air seemed to not be limited to the baseball field, working in his everyday life. While it wasn't a lie to say that he was enjoying a little extra attention, it might turn out to be annoying in the future.

While he was deep in thought, Daichi finally managed to collect himself and sit down at his desk next to Ken. He was staring at his phone in a daze, looking at the 3 new entries in his contacts list.

They were easy to locate because he only had 3 contacts on his phone to begin with. Ken, Yuki and Chris.

The bell was what finally woke Daichi up from his mood, prompting him to put his phone away. When he looked over at Ken all he could see was a giant toothy grin, giving him the feeling of wanting to wipe it right off his face.

Once the teacher walked in, the room went silent and the final block of exams for the semester commenced. Since the final subject was English, Ken was able to finish the paper in record time.

While it may have been a breeze for himself who could be considered fluent, the rest of the class was in crisis mode. Daichi seemed to have a better time considering he had been actively trying to learn with Ken at home.

Since the two wanted to join the Major league in the future, he would be best to learn the native language as soon as they could.

Once the bell rang, there was a collective celebration around the room. Summer break had officially started and they wouldn't have to return for 6 weeks.

Ken and Daichi quickly left the classroom and headed down to the baseball club. This was the last training session before the final tomorrow.

When they arrived, everyone seemed to be in high spirits.

The coach took the players through some warm ups and a light training session. Considering the game was tomorrow, he didn't want to push them too hard, yet he was a little worried that since there hadn't been training all week that their might be some game shape issues.

However much to his surprise, everyone seemed to be in good shape. That was especially the case for Ken and Daichi who looked like they could run laps around the rest of the team if asked to.

After a little over an hour, Coach Yoshida called for everyone to gather around.

"You've all done well this summer and I couldn't be more proud as a Coach. This is probably one of the strongest teams we've had at Seiko, but none of that matters if we can't win tomorrow."

He moved his gaze over his players, stopping on Daichi for a few moments longer than the others before continuing.

"Seigakuin are a tough team, they've blown out most of their opponents thanks to their strong batting line up. Kouichi, Daichi, you will need to work your magic in the battery for us to have a chance."

Kouchi and Daichi both nodded, their faces solemn.

"Keisuke, Ken, your job is to get on base no matter what it takes. It's going to be a high scoring game so we'll need all the advantages we can get from the very start of the match."

The two also nodded, understanding their roles. As long as they could get on base, Kenta and Daichi their two big hitters would have a chance to send them all home and maximize the run total.

"I won't say too much else. All I ask is that we do our best and have fun while doing it."

Coach Yoshida then extended his hand, prompting the players to place them on top.

"Captain, take it away."

Kenta had a serious expression as he called out.

"SEIKO!"

"FIGHT!"

Everyone else shouted the word fight as loud as they could, raising their hand together in unison. Afterwards, the Coach sent them to get changed and headed home, reminding everyone to be at the stadium an hour early for tactics and warm-ups.

Keisuke walked next to Ken and Daichi with his hands behind his head, he seemed in a weird mood.

"This will probably be our last game in middle school." He said solemnly.

"Yeah. We'll be too busy with entrance exams for High School to participate in the Autumn Tournament." Ken replied, feeling a little nostalgic.

However, he was even more excited for High School baseball and the chance to return to Koshien. The real Koshien, not the empty stadium within his image training.

"Where are you going to apply for?" Daichi asked Keisuke curiously.

Keisuke smiled wryly, "My number 1 choice is Sendai, but I'm not sure if I'll be accepted into the baseball team. If that doesn't work out I'll probably just go to Yokohama High."

"It's always good to aim high. We'll be trying for Toin." Ken replied, his face full of determination.

"Wow. Daichi probably has a good chance of making it, but you?" Keisuke scrunched his face, squinting as he looked at Ken.

Thud

Ken sent a quick kick to Keisuke's behind, propelling him forward a few steps and almost causing him to trip over.

"Eek! I'm kidding!" He yelped, causing the other two to break out into laughter. Keisuke soon joined in, feeling his nerves calm down significantly.

If he was honest, he didn't think that he was good enough to make it into one of the large baseball schools with his current talent. However, seeing Ken work so hard to make it into Seiko after giving up pitching made him want to better himself.

He would never admit it out loud, but he was thankful to Ken for giving him the motivation to improve his skills this season.

His gaze moved to the person in question and he couldn't help but take a closer look.

'Did this guy get better looking or something?'

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

Chapter 72 - 72: Mad Rush (1)

Chris was currently pacing back and forth, a look of panic on his features. He checked his watch multiple times every minute before turning towards the electronic sign which hung up on the wall.

He had been in the airport since 12pm because today would be the day he would be returning back home. As long as he made the flight, he would arrive back in Japan on the Friday night.

However, his plane had been delayed for almost 14 hours now. At first he was a little annoyed, but after being delayed again and again, he turned frantic.

It was almost 2am, which he had been told would be the next update about the flight. Chris could only pace around to calm himself down, thinking that he may miss out on his son's baseball final.

He was constantly doing the math in his head, trying to figure out when he would arrive into Japan if they left now from LAX airport. Japan was 17 hours ahead of California, and the flight would take around 12 hours.

If he went directly from the airport, then there might be a chance of arriving by the start of the game. But that was only if the flight left within the hour. Just as he was about to go ask the staff for an update, he heard an announcement from the speakers.

[All passengers for the International flight to Japan please proceed to the boarding gate and board the aircraft. We apologize for the delays and any inconvenience that you have experienced.]

Chris felt a wave of relief overcome him as he heard the scratchy voice over the PA system. To others it might have sounded shrill to the ears, but to him it was like the voice of an angel.

He quickly grabbed his suitcase and motored his way to the departure gate as fast as possible. Once he finally entered his seat, he felt the fatigue that had built up from the entire trip, threatening to put him to sleep.

Before giving into the fatigue, Chris sent his wife a message that he had finally boarded after all of the delays. It was currently 7pm in Japan which meant she should be able to tell the boys before they go to bed.

Once the plane took off, he briefly closed his eyes before entering the sweet embrace of sleep. He was only jolted awake by the shaking of the plane as it touched down on the ground.

Disoriented, Chris quickly flipped his phone open and noticed that it was already 8:45am on Saturday.

'Damn it! The game starts at 9am, I'll never make it in time.'

He was filled with despair for a moment before his face suddenly flashed with determination.

"I might be a little late boys, but I'll still make it." He muttered, clutching his phone.

Perhaps it was because they could see he was in a rush, or because Chris was a frequent visitor to the airport, but he managed to make it through customs in record time. He hailed a taxi and got into the front seat.

He turned to the driver and produced a few bills, "Please take me to Yokohama stadium as fast as you can."

The driver was an older gentleman, however his eyes seemed to sparkle after being given the task. "Please place your seatbelt on and hold tight Mister."

In the next moment he sped off, causing Chris to almost let out a cry of surprise while he did his best to hang onto something. Yokohama stadium was only 25 minutes away when there was no traffic.

With the old man's surprisingly deft driving skills, they made it to the stadium in just under 20 minutes. Chris left the taxi with shaky legs, grabbing his suitcase from the back seat and thanking the driver.

After his legs finally started working properly, Chris jogged with his suitcase trailing behind him towards the stadium. As he walked up the stairs to the seats, he could see the game in full swing.

Looking at the scoreboard he let out a gasp of surprise.

Seiko 5

Seigakuin 3

Seiko was currently in the lead, yet as Chris looked down at the field he saw that Seigakuin were up to bat and currently had the bases loaded with only 1 out. Instead of finding his wife in the stadium, his eyes were focused on the match.

He saw the Seiko pitcher throw a ball which was promptly hit to 1st base where Ken was waiting. Chris felt his heart jump into his throat and he couldn't help but yell out.

"THROW HOME!"

Ken who was currently running towards the ball felt as if all his surroundings had become silent. He picked up the ball in motion and instinctively threw the ball towards Daichi who was waiting at home plate with his glove in front of him.

Chris watched on in shock as the ball floated in a slow and high arc in the air towards Daichi. The runner from third easily managed to outrun the throw, cruising onto the home plate and putting a run on the board.

By the time Daichi caught the ball, the other runners were already safe on base.

"What the hell was that throw?" Chris was dumbfounded. He had seen Ken play plenty of times since elementary school and he had always had a great throwing arm, which was why he became a pitcher in the first place.

A myriad of thoughts ran through his mind, ranging from his sons weird behavior to his sudden change from the pitchers position.

"Has he injured his shoulder?" he murmured.

There was a group of men around Chris's age around 20 meters away who were all equipped with a pen and notepad, furiously writing after witnessing the play.

"Ahh, what a shame. He was such a good batter too." One of the men said after placing down his pen.

"Yeah, we can't afford to have such a large gap in the defense." Another replied.

"But that catcher on the other hand... He's not only holding Seigakuin to a small run total, he's also hit a triple and home run in his at-bats."

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

Chapter 73 - 73: Mad Rush (2)

Meanwhile, on the field Daichi called a time out and walked up to the mound to where Kouichi was standing before waving Ken over.

Ken was still depressed after he made such a bad play and allowed a free run. They were now in the same situation with loaded bases and only 1 out, putting significant pressure on the team.

He expected to receive a grilling from Daichi, however it was the opposite.

"Kouichi, why didn't you cover first base?"

'Huh?' Ken who was busy looking at the ground suddenly raised his gaze and looked at Daichi oddly.

"A-Ah sorry. Everything happened so fast that I didn't react in time." Kouichi replied, also a little perplexed that he was the one being scolded.

Daichi looked over his shoulder at the opposition coach who was currently chatting with the next two batters. His intuition was telling him that they would likely try the same thing after seeing Ken's throwing issue.

He let out a small sigh and turned back to the two. "It's okay. The next batter will hit it to Ken again. This time I need you to preemptively run to first base and receive the underarm throw from Ken. Once you stand on the base, send it straight back to home."

"As long as we can get this right, we'll get out of this mess while we're still on top." Daichi held out his fist, prompting the other two to bump it.

Neither Ken nor Kouichi said a word of complaint, returning back to their positions. Ken especially trusted Daichi's feel for the game, considering he knew how much of a prodigy his little brother really was when it came to baseball.

The next batter came into the batters box with a smug look on his face. He had just finished talking to the Coach and couldn't help but look at Ken a few times.

Kouichi also noticed this and couldn't help but be amazed at Daichi's ability to predict what the other team was going to do.

Daichi requested a fastball to the outside to which Kouichi nodded in response. He sent the ball directly to the spot, only for the batter to make contact and send a grounder towards first base.

As soon as he threw the ball, Kouichi already sprinted towards first base, giving him the head start over the batter who still had to hit and run. This paired with the fact that the mound was closer to first base than home plate, made it so he arrived way ahead of time.

Ken pounced on the ball and quickly threw it underarm to Kouichi who was standing on the base already. Thankfully his throw was on point, allowing Kouichi to send a lightning fast throw back to home.

"Out!"

"Out!"

"Changeover."

"Nice throw!" Ken sent a thumbs up to Kouichi before turning to Daichi with a smile. Things went exactly how his brother had predicted, allowing them to escape a pinch just before the clean up batters arrived.

The batter who had been run out at first seemed to be shocked. He slowly made his way back to the dugout with a sour expression, not having expected this outcome.

Chris who was in the stands finally felt as if he could let out his pent up breath. Now that Seiko had gotten out of the pinch, he could finally search for his wife in the stands.

He looked around for a little while, only to hear his name called out from somewhere.

"Hey Chris, is that you?"

He turned to the sound of the voice and instantly recognized one of the men sitting in the middle of the group.

"Naoki? Hey what are you doing here?" Chris replied, making his way over.

Naoki Hachimura stood up and held out his hand, giving a firm handshake. "I'm here on business, scouting middle schoolers for Osaka Toin." He responded, giving a small smile.

"How about you? Don't tell me that the Yokohama Warriors are so starved for talent that they need to come watch a middle school game?" At these words the other two men couldn't help but let out a chuckle.

Chris also thought it was funny, but he corrected them. "My sons are playing so I'm here to watch them."

"Sons?" Naoki was a little caught off guard.

"Yeah, Ken and Daichi. The catcher and 1st baseman."

The three men's eyes widened at these words. It just so happened that the best players on the Seiko team were this man's sons.

"It looks like you've been training them well then." Naoki complimented.

He had been a scout for Yokohama in the past, which was how he knew Chris. It had been many years since he left the position, hence why he was surprised that Chris's sons were already 15 years old.

Chris smiled widely. There was nothing that would make a father happier than hearing his sons be complimented in such a way. His mood had improved so much that he had even forgotten he missed the first half of the game.

One of the men next to Naoki suddenly spoke up, "Your son on 1st base, can you tell me a little more about him? Particularly in regards to his right arm."

Chris frowned a little, since Ken had never told him there was an issue, he did not have much information. "I don't know much unfortunately. You know how teenagers are with

their secrecy and all. But I can say that he used to be the best middle school pitcher in the country."

His eyes were resolute, implying that he was telling the truth. Naoki also knew that when it came to baseball, Chris was always serious.

"Ah what a shame. It looks like he's probably injured his shoulder from pitching." The man said, shaking his head.

Chris's expression flickered for a moment, however he managed to keep his composure.

"It's nice seeing you Naoki, gentleman. I'm off to find my wife so we can enjoy the game, best of luck." He said, turning his body and heading in the other direction.

"You can expect a letter from us about your other son Daichi." Naoki called out, wanting to at least give his old colleague some good news.

Chris stopped in place for a moment, before waving and heading off.

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

Chapter 74 - 74: Setback (1)

Chris finally spotted his wife in the stands and made his way over. Seeing her after so long put a smile on his face, despite the earlier interaction with the High School scouts moments before.

"Sorry I'm late honey." He said, leaning in and kissing her on the cheek.

"All that matters is that you're here now." She replied with a smile.

Yuki could see that her husband had something on his mind when spotting him from afar. His creased brows was one of his telltale signs that he was thinking about something deeply.

"A penny for your thoughts?" She said softly, leaning her head onto him.

Chris was silent for a moment as he looked out onto the field where Seiko were about to bat. Letting out a sigh, he asked her a question.

"Did Ken tell you why he wasn't pitching this season?"

Yuki was a little surprised, however she shook her head in response. "No, he didn't seem to want to tell me. But I said that as long as he was happy and healthy, I wouldn't pry. I was worried he might be embarrassed for getting kicked out of the position."

Hearing this, Chris pulled his wife in and embraced her tightly. This woman had a heart of gold, always worrying about them all while doing her best not to step on their boundaries.

Once again Chris let out a heavy sigh, feeling a bitter taste in his mouth.

"I think Kenny has hurt his shoulder..." he stated.

Yuki almost jumped out of her seat in a panic, "W-What do you mean!?"

"Did you see his throw back to home plate? I've never seen Ken throw like that even since before elementary school. It was as if he was afraid that throwing too hard would cause him pain." Chris replied, seeing the worry on his wife's face.

"We can't let him play if he's injured. You need to do something."

Chris grimaced. He knew how stubborn his son could be, especially when it came to baseball. They would have better luck of winning the lottery than convincing Ken to leave this game, especially since it was the finals.

Now that he thought deeper about it, the decision to move to 1st base was likely because it required the least amount of throwing out of all positions on the field. It was rather likely that Ken had known about his injury for a long time and came up with this solution.

The High School scouts had commented on how good his batting was, so that was a large indicator that Ken had been doing what he could to improve his game.

What kind of parent would he be if he were to trample on all of his son's hard work this year to make it back into the team in a different position. Sure, he was wrong for not telling his parents that he was injured, but seeing his wife's reaction, he could understand Ken's thought process.

Letting out his 3rd sigh in as many minutes, Chris leaned back in the chair and shook his head.

"This is his last game in Middle School. He won't be able to play during the Autumn tournament because of entrance exams. Let's let him play with his brother one last time."

"Huh? One last time?" Yuki was immediately confused, tilting her head in response.

Back on the field, Kouichi was up to bat after both Aki and Shin, the 7th and 8th batters had been struck out. Unfortunately, batting was not his strength and his fate was the same as his two predecessors.

Seiko once again walked onto the field, their faces filled with determination. It was currently the bottom of the 6th innings and they were up against the clean-up batters of Seigakuin.

These were the best batters in the tournament so far and a big reason as to why Seigakuin had managed to make it to the finals. Considering this was their 3rd at-bat, Kouichi was filled with some nerves.

As a rule of thumb, batters tended to hit well in their 3rd at-bat considering they would have had enough time to acclimate to the pitcher. This was especially true in the professional baseball scene.

The third batter for Seigakuin now stood in the batters box, holding his bat out and preparing for the pitch.

Ken leaned forward off his base, preparing for anything that came his way. Since being exposed last innings, he was much more aware of his shortfall.

DONG

The ball flew from the bat and flew over his head. Ken tried his best to reach the ball, however it was just out of his reach, heading towards Shin in the outfield.

Ken spun towards the outfield and held out his glove, awaiting the throw from Shin. Yet the batter managed to make it before the ball landed in his glove.

"Don't mind." Ken said, lobbing the ball back to Kouichi on the mound.

It was a little unfortunate that the batter made it onto base, especially since this next batter was the real headache. Ken had performed Identify on this teen and could tell that he would be hard work to beat.

While his potential was capped at A+, his physical attributes were high. He was also the reason for 2 of the 4 Seigakuin runs on the board, hitting a 2 run home run in his 2nd at-bat.

Daichi too felt some danger when facing this player, however he had confidence in his pitcher. He held his glove right down the middle of the strike zone and called for a two-seam fastball.

Kouichi nodded. As long as he threw this right, the ball would break towards the batter, hopefully jamming his shot and giving an easy catch.

He wound up and threw the ball, yet he could tell from the moment that it left his hand that it was a dud. The ball which was meant to curve inwards, kept its straight trajectory down the middle, causing both Daichi and the clean-up batters eyes to light up.

DONG!

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

Chapter 75 - 75: Setback (2)

Everyone couldn't help but follow the ball as it flew into the air with terrible speed.

"Damn it." Kouichi cursed, kicking the dirt in frustration.

'How could I offer up a meatball to the best batter on the team...' he admonished himself, falling into a depressed state.

The two Seigakuin batters waltzed around the bases as the ball finally decided to fall into the stands.

One of the assistant coaches spoke up to Coach Yoshida, "Kouichi has already pitched 120 balls. Should we replace him?"

Coach Yoshida didn't answer right away, watching on as the boys body language told him all he needed to know. Just as he was about to make the substitution, he saw Daichi and Ken both head up to the mound and talk to him.

Despite being teenagers, both Ken and Daichi seemed to be more mature than the others for some reason. Ken seemed as if he was already an adult with his rational thinking and mannerisms, while Daichi felt steady as a rock. It was as if he had already weathered terrible storms and withstood the tests of time.

Seeing Kouichi perk up a little after being talked to, the Coach shook his head. "We can't abandon our Ace. We're only at the bottom of the 6th innings."

"B-But Seigakuin has just taken the lead. If we lose anymore runs we might lose." He rebutted, his face filling with worry.

The number 5 batter stepped up to the plate next, his face filled with a smile. He'd just been told that the pitcher was on his last legs, filling him with confidence.

"Come on Kouichi! You've got this."

"Strike him out!"

"Let's go! One out at a time."

The Seiko squad called out words of encouragement one by one, causing a smile to tug on the corner of Coach Yoshida's lips. He turned to the assistant coach and pointed to the team on the field.

"Not even our players are giving up on the Ace. How do you expect me to replace him now?"

"Ah..." The assistant coach couldn't respond. Perhaps he had been too hasty to request a substitution at this time when even the players had faith in him.

Kouichi's eyes flashed with determination, the voices of his peers filling him with strength. He adjusted his cap and faced down the mound towards Daichi's outstretched glove.

"I just need to follow his lead... Just like always." He murmured.

WHOOSH

"Strike."

"Whoa that one had some heat on it." Naoki commented, glancing at the scoreboard. His gaze was focused on the bottom left corner which had the word "speed" written with two blank displays.

The other two people with him were also staring at the same thing as if they were waiting for something to happen.

"85mile per hour? That's almost 140km/h!" Naoki called out in shock, almost not believing his eyes.

Yet when he looked again, he could still see the red numbers which clearly read 85.

"How many pitches has that boy pitched so far?" Naoki asked one of his colleagues.

One of the men flipped a few pages in his notebook and responded a moment later, "That should be his 123rd pitch this game."

"Let's put him on our shortlist. It would be good if we can get him to join along with Daichi as they've already got some chemistry." Naoki said, making a few more notes in his notebook.

"Nice pitch!" Ken was the first to call out. He was insanely impressed by the speed at which the last pitch had gone.

"Strike"

"Out!"

"Out"

"Out"

With his renewed determination, Kouichi seemed to have risen to a level in which he had never reached before. Spurred on by Daichi and his other teammates, his pitches were like literal fireballs as they burst their way into the catchers glove.

Coach Yoshida turned to the assistant coach and let out a smile. "Just remember, we're here to guide the players in the right direction. As long as someone still has fighting spirit and is capable, we should do our best to support them."

"Yes Coach." The assistant coach nodded, feeling as if he had learned a valuable lesson. This was also the finals of the Kanto Tournament, substituting the Ace at such a juncture would also likely have an effect on the teams morale.

"Nice work Kouichi. Don't worry about the score, we'll get the runs back for you." Ken placed his hand on Kouichi's shoulder on the way back to the dugout and said a few words.

"Mmm. I'm counting on you guys." He said, heading over to the bench and regaining his stamina. Since it was summer, players burned through their stamina quickly. This was especially true for the pitcher who was the one doing the most work.

Kouichi took a few swigs of water and calmed down his breathing. His gaze was on Keisuke who was preparing to go onto the field and lead off the innings for Seiko.

Keisuke was all fired up, swinging his bat around like a lunatic and warming up. Once the signal was given, he calmed down significantly and stepped up to the batters box.

In truth, he was upset with his performance thus far in the final game of summer. His first two attempts were a grounder back to the pitcher and a strike out, something unfitting of the lead-off hitter for Seiko.

He stared at the pitcher with determination, nothing else in his mind except for hitting the ball and getting onto base.

DONG

The moment he struck the ball, Keisuke kicked off the ground and bolted towards 1st base. The ball flew towards the outfield in the space between the center and right outfielders.

Since he had been running as fast as possible, Keisuke decided to fly past second base and sprint towards third, much to the surprise of everyone on the field.

"THIRD!"

The second baseman called out towards the center outfielder, calling for him to throw it as soon as possible.

Keisuke locked eyes with the third base coach and could see the panic in his eyes as he made the signal to slide.

"ARGH!"

He threw himself forwards and slid along the ground on his stomach as fast as he possibly could, placing his hand on the base a fraction of a second before being tagged on the helmet by a glove.

"Safe!"

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

Chapter 76 - 76: Climax (1)

"Safe!"

"Whoa! I can't believe he made it all the way to third base with that run."

"Keisuke is fired up"

The Seiko dugout whooped and cheered as they saw the exciting play. They were now in a position to score so early into the innings. All they needed was a pop fly into the outfield and there would be a guaranteed run.

Ken headed up to the batters box, turning his gaze to the Coach and awaiting instructions. Coach Yoshida tapped his left shoulder and tilted his hat, giving the signal for him to do as he pleased.

"Kyaa! Go Ken! Hit a home run for us!"

A group of girls in the stands called out, they were the girls from his school who had approached him earlier in the week to go shopping with. Despite having the mind of an adult, Ken still felt some embarrassment at the extra attention.

Not far away from the girls was Ai sitting with a few of her friends. She was a little more reserved, but she looked cute in her Seiko colors and seemed to be watching intently.

Ken shook his head, trying to remove any distracting thoughts. It was a critical point in the game since they were down by a single run at the top of the 7th.

The pitcher seemed to be annoyed that he had given up a triple, Ken could see it in his body language. That was the problem with teenagers, they often let their emotions guide them in most things.

An idea flashed through Ken's mind and he quickly glanced at Keisuke on third base, making a small signal with his left hand. Keisuke's eyes widened in surprise, but he quickly composed himself and nodded.

Seigakuin's pitcher managed to calm down after a few moments and peeked over at the runner on third base. The pitcher brought his two hands to his chest before throwing an inside ball, just within the strike zone.

Ken picked it the moment the ball left his hand. It was the perfect pitch to limit the distance that a batter could hit into the field. Unfortunately for Seigakuin, he had other plans.

He leaned forward and placed his bat out in one smooth motion, tracking the ball all the way up until it made contact with the bat. Then with practiced ease, he pushed the ball towards first base before sprinting as fast as he could.

"Squeeze!?" Naoki called out in shock as the play unfolded in front of his eyes. He had not expected to see such a tactic being employed, especially since Ken had the capability to hit big.

Seigakuin were caught off guard as both the pitcher and the first baseman went for the ground ball. The pitcher managed to get there first and was about to fire it to home plate when he heard the call from the catcher.

"FIRST!"

He spun around in one motion and threw the ball to first base as fast as he could. However, his face twisted in shock and confusion when he lifted his head and saw that there was no one on there.

Since the ball was hit towards the first base, the pitcher should have been covering the base instead of fielding the ball. So while he may have been the first one to get to the ball, the entire field was in disarray because of it.

Ken took advantage of the mayhem to continue his run past first base and onto second. Only a few seconds later, the ball finally made its way over to the base from the right outfielder.

"Safe."

Naoki and the other two gentleman were speechless. This was not the sort of tactics that they would have expected from a middle school game at this level.

"Was it the coach's decision, or was it Ken's?"

"Surely it couldn't have purely been that boy's decision to bunt it." One of the men commented.

"I'm not sure. But all I can say is that bunt was masterful. It had the perfect strength and distance so as to draw in both the pitcher and 1st base fielder, causing chaos on the field." Naoki stated, flipping through his notes once again.

"He's so versatile and has great acceleration between the bases, he would be a huge boost to our batting lineup next season."

There was silence for a few moments before a sigh broke out.

"It's just such a shame about his throwing."

A helpless smile formed on Naoki's face as he closed the notebook. "I think we've seen enough to make some informed decisions."

The other two stood up and were about to head out of the exit. However, Naoki told them to go ahead as he had something that he wanted to do.

The two agreed and Naoki began looking in the crowd for someone. It wasn't long until he was able to track him down, considering the foreign features and tall build of the man.

"Chris, Mrs. Takagi." Naoki bowed.

"Ah, is that Naoki? Nice to see you." Yuki smiled, she recognized the old colleague of her husbands from many years ago.

"The pleasure is all mine. I wanted to talk about your sons if you have the time."

Chris held his hand up, telling him to stop. "Daichi is up to bat, let's wait a moment."

Naoki nodded and turned around to watch the game once again.

DONG!

A wide smile appeared on his features as he saw the ball sailing into the distance, followed by a loud cheer from the dugout and audience. Naoki felt even more confident in his decision and therefore turned back around to the husband and wife duo.

"I want to offer Daichi a full scholarship to Osaka Toin for next season. I hope you can do your best to convince him to take our offer." Naoki bowed, waiting for a response.

Yuki's eyes lit up, however she deferred to her husband in such situations, since he was the head of the family.

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

Chapter 77 - 77: Climax (2)

Chris frowned. The fact that Naoki had only brought up Daichi could only mean that they had passed on Ken for whatever reason. He had probably asked for Chris's help because they were worried Daichi would decline if they didn't select his brother.

He didn't have to think for long before giving an answer.

"My two boys are both old enough to make decisions for themselves, I won't interfere." Chris stated, his tone cold.

Inwardly, he was devastated that Ken was being left out, not because he was his real son. But because he knew how much Ken had worked to improve himself in the span of a year after taking a step back from pitching.

Now that he knew the reason for for him changing positions, it was even more heartbreaking to hear.

However, Ken had gone this far on his own merit, so Chris decided not to pity him. He would continue to support him in the background, no matter what decision he made.

His gaze moved to the field where both his sons were celebrating the home run with giant smiles on their faces. He wondered if they would ever get to play together on the same team again in the future.

Naoki seemed to have expected the response as a wry smile formed on his face. He had no doubt that if he offered both of his sons a scholarship, Chris wouldn't have hesitated to put a word in for him.

However, the reality was that they only wanted one of the sons.

He produced a card from his coat pocket and respectfully handed it to Chris. "We will send the letter to your residence, but here is my card in case you need anything."

Daichi and Ken who were celebrating on the field, happened to look up into the stands where their parents were. They saw an unfamiliar man handing over a business card before walking away.

Ken's eyes lit up while Daichi seemed to be confused.

"Who was that man talking to Mom and Dad?" He asked.

"I think it might have been one of the scouts!" Ken exclaimed, feeling a sense of excitement flood through his body.

"But why would they be talking to our Dad?"

"Maybe it's about us? Dad knows a lot of people in the industry so I wouldn't be surprised."

Daichi was a little skeptical, however he chose to humor his big brother for now. They had still yet to win the game considering it was the top of the 7th innings.

After Daichi, Tatsuya came up to bat and got out on a flyball to center field. Takeshi was struck out in quick succession while Shin managed to get onto first base. However, Kouichi kept up his bad batting appearance and hit a grounder straight back to the pitcher for their 3rd out.

Since Seiko's batting innings had taken a while, Kouichi had managed to regain his stamina. He was like a true ace, blitzing through the tail end of Seigakuin's batting order with ease.

While his pitches weren't as fast as his 140km/h fastball in the previous innings, they were still very much alive. Along with Daichi's leading, they managed to shut down the opponents to end the 7th.

The score was currently 7-5 in favor of Seiko middle school.

This didn't change until the 9th innings when Kenta hit a 2 run home run to send Ken and himself around the bases. Daichi hit a double afterwards, but was promptly given out after a grounder from Takeshi resulted in a double play.

Thus the score jumped to 9-5 with Seigakuin's clean-up hitters up to bat in the bottom of the 9th innings.

Despite the 4 run advantage, none of the Seiko players looked complacent. Kouichi especially seemed as if he had walked onto the battlefield. He looked like a solitary hero as he stood upon the mound, his tall frame casting a long shadow on the field.

Daichi stared at him upon the mound and could only let out a smile. He knew that this man didn't need any words of encouragement, he was primed and ready to decimate the opponent.

All he needed to do was lead properly for one more innings and they would be crowned the champions of the tournament.

Kouichi didn't disappoint, sending a fireball straight into Daichi's outstretched glove. The sound of the ball striking leather seemed to echo in the playing field, sending the batter into despair.

'W-What the hell is this guy on? Hasn't he pitched for 8 innings straight already?'

The batter felt incredulous, seeing that Seiko's pitcher was still able to throw so fast and accurate despite pitching over 150 balls in this game. He tried to foul off some balls in order to drive up the pitch count, however a two-seam fastball zoomed in and caused him to swing wide.

"Out!"

A cheer rang out from the crowd and dugout in response.

"Just two more outs Kouichi!"

"You can do it Ace!"

Spurred on by the words of his teammates, Kouichi's eyes glimmered. The next 3 pitches were deadly strikes, making the main clean-up batter look as if he was an elementary schooler.

The entire Seigakuin team looked dejected as they watched their best batter retreat to the dugout with his head held low in defeat. There were already tears of frustration welling up in his eyes.

The final batter wasn't in any better condition, approaching the batters box with his shoulders slouched, seemingly already defeated.

"KEEP YOUR HEAD UP! ITS NOT OVER YET!"

A shout came from the Seigakuin dugout. A middle aged man who Ken could only assume was the coach was yelling out on the edge of the field.

His face was serious, yet tears were welling up in his eyes, belying his true emotions.

In response, the other Seigakuin players roared out, showcasing their fighting spirit and unwillingness to give up. The coaches words were like a spark which ignited the fire within the team.

Ken couldn't help but feel for these people. He had been in the same situation many times, yet there could only be one winner in the end.

PAH

"Strike"

PAH

"Strike"

PAH

"Game!"

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

Chapter 78 - 78: Celebration and Reward

"Game!"

The Seiko dugout stormed onto the field, shouting and hollering in celebration at the victory. The crowd also raised their voices and applauded, cheering for the winners of the Kanto Tournament.

The first place that Ken ran was straight to Daichi with his hands in the air, joy evident in his features. Daichi too felt a rush of excitement as he ran towards his big brother to celebrate.

They embraced each other on the field, needing no words to express their current feelings of accomplishment.

Yuki and Chris who were in the stands stood up and cheered loudly. Yuki saw their two boys embracing on the field a wave of emotions overcome her, causing tears to well up in her eyes.

Chris on the other hand felt bittersweet. He was happy for what his boys had accomplished, however it was marred by the knowledge that things were bound to change in the near future.

His protective instincts wished that this moment would never end, yet on the other hand he didn't want to get in the way of their lives. If Chris were to dictate his kids lives, it may protect them in the short term, however they would come to resent him.

He stopped himself from sighing, shaking his head to remove the negative thoughts threatening to overcome him. Now was not the time to dwell on such depressing things, it was a time of celebration.

Chris and Yuki eventually made their way down to the field and greeted their kids, as did the other parents who were in the audience. Of course this was after the presentation of the Kanto Tournament flag and the ceremonies were over.

Ken finally laid down on his bed after an exhausting day. The team went and celebrated by going to a buffet pizza joint not far from the stadium and stuffing their faces. Remembering the antics of his teammates brought a smile to his face as he stared at the ceiling of his room.

'I hope Daichi and I did enough to get the attention of some scouts.' He thought inwardly.

While winning the Kanto Tournament was a great achievement in itself, Ken's main priority was to get entry into a High School with a prestigious baseball program like Osaka Toin.

Once he stepped into High School, he would be able to test himself against the best players in the country at nationals. But he had to be on a team that would allow him to make it to the nationals in the first place.

In his previous life he had only gone once in his first year which had ended rather quickly. Remembering the despair he felt on the mound that day filled him with a burning desire to redeem himself.

"I will make it back to that stage" He murmured, gripping his fist tightly.

He was filled with confidence, no matter where he went to school he would fight his way back to Koshien with his new skills.

The reason for his confidence was currently displayed in front of his face, the .

CONGRATULATIONS

You have completed mission "Kanto Tournament

->Mission Summary

*Task 1: Get on base 20 times (24/20 bases; A+ Grade)

*Task 2: Hit 3 home runs (3/3 bases; A Grade)

*Task 3: Make the finals of the Kanto Tournament (Completed; A Grade)

*Task 4: Win the Tournament (Completed; A Grade)

*Task 5: Win player of the Tournament (Incomplete; B Grade)

Overall mission rating: A

Bonus rewards: 200 Major points

REWARDS:

>Task 1 rewards - B-grade Agility Exlir [Claim Reward]

>Task 2 rewards - Silver Lottery Ticket + 300 Major points [Claim Reward]

>Task 3 rewards - Silver Lottery Ticket + 500 Major points [Claim Reward]

>Task 4 rewards - Gold Lottery Ticket + 500 Major points [Claim Reward]

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

Ken's eyes shined as he read the mission summary, trying his best not to scream out in joy. It was a little unfortunate about the final task, however Daichi had been way more deserving of the accolade than him.

Now that the semester was finished, it was currently summer break, yet Ken could not wait for baseball training camp. Even now despite being tired, he couldn't wait a single day before retrieving his rewards.

It seemed that now he had regressed, he turned into an even bigger baseball idiot than before.

[Congratulations, you have received:

1300 Major points

1 x B-Grade Agility Elixir

2 x Silver Lottery Tickets

1 x Gold Lottery Ticket]

Like someone who had a serious gambling problem, Ken jumped straight into the lottery wheels and stared at the small Golden wheel with passionate eyes.

The last time that he had used a Golden Lottery Ticket he had been given the Identify function, allowing him to peer at the abilities and potential of other players. If everything on the wheel was as good as this ability then he would have hit the jackpot.

"Here goes nothing." He murmured, pressing the spin button without hesitation.

The sweet sound of the wheel spinning entered his ears, filling him with expectation.

Finally, the wheel began to decrease in speed until it finally stopped in place.

[Congratulations, user has acquired the skill "Fine Motor Control"]

[Fine Motor Control: Grants you the ability to intricately and effortlessly control your body, improving all aspects of your game.]

At first Ken had been deeply disappointed, however after reading the skill description he suddenly had a change of heart. While it may not sound very helpful, body control was directly tied to his balance and coordination.

It could help him control his throwing form better, which could increase his speed, control and even prevent him from getting injuries in the future. He could also make minor adjustments to his batting form and improve his power and accuracy by leaps and bounds.

As Ken's mind was wandering, another notification suddenly appeared in front of him, snapping him out of his reverie.

[With the addition of the new skill, Balance and Coordination grade has been adjusted accordingly.]

[Congratulations, user has acquired his first S grading and has been awarded 1 x A-grade Mental Elixir]

"Huh? What!?"

Ken quickly went to his status windows and investigated.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 3 (1580/10000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 15

TALENT ASSESSMENT: B+

POTENTIAL: D (S+)

MAJOR POINTS: 1580

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: A-

>Pitching: F (B)

>Fielding: C+

>Game Intelligence: C+

>Mental: B+

>Skills: 9

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. A-)

Balance and Coordination: S

Agility: B-

Strength: A-

Stamina: B+

"Holy crap, it really is S grade..." Ken mumbled, staring at the blue screen with awe.

Originally he had thought that he would have to wait a long time in order to ascend to the S Grade in any of his attributes. However, it turned out that skills could also have an effect on his attributes, at least those picked up in the Golden Lottery.

There was also the additional reward of the A-grade Mental Elixir which he had coincidentally missed out on thanks to not winning the player of the tournament accolade.

If Ken's mood could be summed up in one word right now, it would be blissful.

A big dumb grin was currently painted on his face, showcasing how truly happy he was right now.

"I can't wait to get on the field and try it out..."

However, he still had a few rewards left to use and then it was time for bed. He brought up the silver wheel and used up his two lottery tickets.

[Congratulations, user has acquired the skill "Clutch Player"]

[System has deemed that the skills Clutch Player and Focus are similar, would you like to combine the two? It will cost 100 Major Points to complete.]

[Yes/No]

"Combine?" Ken was a little confused, however the system would probably not have mentioned it if doing so was not beneficial. So after a moment of hesitation, he clicked the yes button.

[100 Major Points have been deducted. New skill Crunch Time has been created.]

[Crunch Time: Increase all grades by 2 during moments that have significant impacts on the game.]

"Oh. My. Goodness." Ken's jaw opened wide, suddenly feeling giddy.

It was almost human nature to crumble under enormous pressure, with only a select few being able to perform above and beyond their abilities in such situations. With this Crunch Time skill, he would be one of those players, an indispensable team mate who could pull his team from the fire.

Ken's heart could almost not handle all of the dopamine that was currently rushing through his body at this moment. Winning the Kanto Tournament first, now being granted these incredible skills.

He felt as if he had somehow won the lottery. Well, that might actually be the case.

There was still one Silver Lottery ticket left so he clicked the spin button and stared strangely at the wheel. No matter what skill he received, it would not change his current mood.

[Congratulations, user has acquired the "Forkball" skill.]

"Ah..."

It seemed as if his luck had finally run out after all of these months. However, he wasn't too disappointed despite not being able to use the skill just yet. In only 7 months he would be able to return to the mound.

Just thinking about being able to pitch again filled Ken with a burning desire. Originally he was completely against the idea of taking a break from pitching, however he was already a much better player than he was in his previous life.

With his batting skills, he would no longer be a liability to any team that he was on. Ironically, his current weakness was his throwing abilities, pigeon-holing him to play only first base.

Ken let out a big yawn, feeling the effects of the dopamine wear off and revealing his fatigue. It had been a long day full of stressful moments within the game, then there was also the celebrations afterwards.

It was time to get some sleep. But first, he decided to take the Agility Elixir. He didn't exactly feel like taking the Mental Elixir at this moment, preferring not to experience an excruciating headache right now.

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

[Yes/No]

"Yes."

As soon as he selected the yes option, Ken felt the familiar pins and needles in his legs. He grit his teeth knowing what was about to happen next.

As he expected, his leg muscles began to cramp and squirm causing him short but immense bursts of pain. No matter how many times he went through this situation, it never got easier.

Only after around 5 minutes of torture did Ken finally feel some sort of relief. Wiping the sweat from his brow, he turned over and greeted sleep like it was a long lost friend.

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

Chapter 79 - 79: Apology and Punishment

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

[Agility grade has been increased by 3!]

Ken woke up to the sweet news of his increase in Agility and felt refreshed. It was as if he was a carp that had turned into a dragon with the sharp increase in his abilities over the past few months.

He had entered a period of growth in his year before High School. However, Ken had a feeling that increasing his abilities would not be as easy in the future. The absence of S-Grade Elixirs were an indication that he would stagnate at some point.

Yet Elixirs were not the only way that he could improve how he played. There was also position specific work he could do, as well as his game intelligence which was still sitting at a modest C+.

Ken hopped out of bed and let out a big stretch, his eyes focusing on the now A- Agility grade with a smile on his face.

In a good mood, he made his way down the stairs and into the kitchen, seeing his mother and father sitting at the dining table.

"Morning Mom and Dad." Ken said in a chipper tone.

"Good Morning."

Ken felt that his father's tone was a little odd, but he quickly shrugged it off.

"Is Daichi awake yet?"

"He's just finishing up in the bathroom. Are you going for your morning run?" Yuki replied. Her tone sounded even more forced, causing Ken some alarm.

He turned to his mother and gave her a questioning look, however her expression was giving nothing away. Even moving his gaze to his father gave him no indication of what was wrong.

Feeling his anxiety peak, he wanted nothing more than to leave the room as soon as possible. Just as he was about to leave without Daichi, the teen in question emerged from the bathroom with all smiles.

"Morning Big Bro." He said sweetly, lacking the undertone that his parents had.

"Let's go..." Ken said, grabbing Daichi by the arm and ushering him out the front door.

"A-Ah, okay. Bye Mom and Dad, we'll be back later."

"Bye Daichi dear." Yuki responded, her tone sweet as usual.

'What the hell!?' Ken shouted inwardly. They must be mad at me for some reason then...

Seeing as how it was only himself that they were being weird with, his mind began to race about all the things he had done wrong. Could they have found out he wasn't a teenager at all?

No, that was ridiculous. Could it be because of him hiding his injury? But how could they have found out, they had only watched one of his games on first base.

As soon as he thought of this, he remembered the lofty throw he sent back to Daichi at home plate. Since his father lived and breathed baseball, there was no way that he wouldn't have been able to make some assumptions.

This paired with the fact that he had stopped pitching so abruptly meant that it was easy enough to make a plausible theory.

Ken was so caught up in his inner thoughts that he put his shoes on the wrong feet and had already left the house. Daichi tried to get his attention, however Ken was already jogging forwards while his mind was preoccupied.

By the time he returned, Ken was filled with dread about the upcoming conversation that would likely take place after breakfast. He tried to dodge the looks of his parents and retreated to the bathroom, however that would only delay the issue.

Ken shook his head and slapped his face while staring at the mirror.

'I'm an adult for goodness sake. Why am I shirking my responsibilities like a child right now.' He thought inwardly, taking in his youthful features.

Once he was cleaned up, he decided to be a man and tackle the situation head on.

When he arrived at the dining table, everyone was already waiting for him with food on the table. He turned to his father and bowed his head at 90 degrees.

"Dad, I'm sorry!"

Chris's face lit up in surprise for a moment, not expecting the sudden apology. However, he regained his composure, not yet sure of where this was going.

"Oh yeah? For what?" He inquired in a lazy tone.

Ken knew that this gesture would not be enough to get him off the hook, so he dug deep and got everything off his chest.

"I'm sorry for not telling you that I injured my shoulder. I'm sorry for being selfish and continuing to play without your consent. I should have come straight to you when I knew something was wrong, that was very immature and reckless of me."

With his head still bowed, Ken listed his crimes and owed up to his mistakes. Of course it was too little and too late, but he hoped to at least ease some of their anger with this gesture.

"Mmm. What do you think honey? Does he sound sincere?" Chris had a playful look on his face as he turned to his wife.

Since Ken still had his head bowed he was unable to see the exchange between the two, therefore he was inwardly sweating bullets.

"HmMMM."

Yuki placed her finger on her chin and creased her brows as if she was thinking deeply, however this gesture caused Chris to lose his composure as he began to laugh out loud.

"Hahahaha."

Daichi who was originally shocked that Ken had chosen to come clean like this, soon began to inwardly cheer for his Big Bro. He had seen how hard Ken had worked to make the team, so he didn't want him to suffer too much.

However, this situation was a little out of his expectations. Seeing that Yuki had also joined in on the laughter while Ken had his head bowed, caused him to feel confused.

The laughter only died down a few moments later.

"Go sit down and eat breakfast." Chris said, a smile still tugging on the corner of his lips.

Ken felt his body flood with relief as he heard these words. Despite this being the case, he still solemnly walked over to his chair and sat down, waiting for his father to begin eating.

Seeing his son being so obedient, Chris felt a wave of incredulity wash over him. Was this really his teenage son who used to fight tooth and nail over every small detail?

Chris could only smile and shake his head, picking up his chopsticks and grabbing a mouthful of rice.

Ken breathed a sigh of relief and went to dig into the food.

"Don't think you're off the hook yet even with that apology." Chris commented off-handedly, causing Ken to drop his chopsticks in response.

"Hahaha." This time it was Daichi who couldn't help but laugh at the situation. Ken's reaction and his expression was enough to make him feel weak with hilarity.

It wasn't long before both Chris and Yuki were swept up by Daichi's contagious laugh, joining in on the fun.

Ken inwardly sighed, reaching down to grab his chopsticks with his left hand. On his way up he pinched Daichi's elbow with the chopsticks, causing him to let out a yelp of pain.

"Hahaha." Now it was Ken's turn to laugh, experiencing the sweet taste of revenge after dealing out some punishment.

However, he stopped merely a moment later and stared at the chopsticks in his hand. His left hand to be exact.

'How was I able to use my chopsticks with my left hand? Could it be?' Ken's mind raced as he made his way to the kitchen sink in order to wash the chopsticks which had been left on the floor.

After returning to the table, he began to eat with his left hand wielding the chopsticks. He was shocked to see that he was able to freely use them just as well as he could with his right hand.

'This must be the Fine Motor Skills ability that I got last night...'

His mind began to work, thinking about all the possibilities that had just opened up for him. Could it be that he was just as dexterous with his left arm as he was with his right now?

'Does that mean I can pitch again? As a lefty?'

Ken's spirit surged, feeling a wave of ecstasy threaten to overcome him. However, he quickly reigned it in. He didn't want to get his hopes up just yet.

"Daichi, let's go play catch after breakfast." Ken said, his tone serious.

"Huh? Ah okay."

"Not so fast Mister. We haven't discussed your punishment yet." Yuki stated, her gaze a little fiery.

"Y-Yes Mom." Ken murmured in response. Despite being an adult mentally, he still found it tough to face his mothers stare when she was in this mood.

Once everyone had finished breakfast, Daichi excused himself from the table, not wanting to be embroiled in the ensuing punishment talks.

Around 20 minutes later, the two boys went to the backyard with glove and ball.

Ken had a small smile on his face after the talk with his parents. The punishment that his parents had come up with was quite superficial, at least by Ken's standards.

In addition to some extra chores, he now had a curfew of 9pm during the summer break. However, if his final semester exam results were bad, they would reassess the punishment once more.

There was no talk about forbidding him from participating in the summer training camp, nor stopping him from playing baseball.

He had a feeling that the punishment was only so light because he had come clean by himself and not made any excuses for his actions. If it was his previous self, he might have copped it a lot worse.

Thankfully, he had taken the right actions by owning up to his mistakes like a man should. This probably garnered some sympathy from both his parents which in turn worked in his favor.

"Why were you so serious about playing catch?" Daichi asked, placing his catchers glove on his left hand.

"I just want to try something." Ken replied, placing his glove on the ground and walking to the other side of the backyard.

Daichi raised his eyebrow in question, wondering why Ken wasn't wearing his glove.

In the next moment, Ken brought his hands together and lifted his knee in the air close to his body, beginning his wind-up for a pitch.

"Ah! What are you doing?" Daichi called out in confusion.

However, Ken ignored him and continued. Although it felt a little foreign, he lunged forward with his right foot before planting it on the ground and whipping his left arm in a throwing action.

Daichi's eyes widened, feeling a strange aura flowing from his brother. He suddenly regretted not putting his face mask and chest guard on for this.

He sharpened his concentration and braced himself for the ball that would surely come blitzing towards him in a moment. Yet he could only open his jaw wide in the next moment as he saw the ball blazing through the air.

"Ah..."

The two both watched on silently as the ball rocketed straight through the air as if it was a JAXA spacecraft on its way to the International Space Station.

Ken felt his face heat up in embarrassment. "Maybe I need a little bit of practice."

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

[- Chapter 80 - 80: Scholarship Offer](#)

Chapter 80 - 80: Scholarship Offer

Time flew by for the two best friends who made the most of their shared interest in baseball to help each other improve. Ken had been putting his new Fine Motor Skills ability to good use, trying everything with his off-hand.

While it was difficult at first, he finally managed to find some success with pitching. The skill paired with his S grade balance and coordination allowed him to do the previously unthinkable.

He was originally worried that pitching with his left arm would cause him to fail his shoulder recovery mission, however he was pleased to find out that this was not the case.

However, despite training for the better part of 6 months, he felt as if something was missing. Ken could feel that it lacked the speed and liveliness of his old pitching even though he was going through the same actions.

This had been a source of concern for Ken, but he could only accept the situation. He decided to look on the bright side, at least he could now throw a decent ball instead of lofting it into the air.

It was currently February which meant it was time to take entrance exams for high schools. In his previous life he had gone to Yokohama High School which was local, but this year he had other plans.

Since he and Daichi had yet to receive any scouting offers, they had made plans to travel to Osaka and attend the open tryouts for Toin.

Ken and Daichi returned home after another successful afternoon at baseball practice. Since they were in the last year of middle school and needed to focus on entrance exams, today was their last one with Seiko middle.

The two had thanked Coach Yoshida for his tutelage and Ken could swear that he saw a tear forming at the corner of the middle-aged man's eye. As if sensing that he was going to be emotional in front of the players, he quickly shooed them away.

The moment Ken stepped through the threshold, he let out a sigh of relief. Since it was the middle of winter, the air was far too cold outside.

Ken did not like winter, at least in his previous life. Every time it was cold he would feel a bone-deep throbbing in his shoulder, making his brain associate winter with misery and suffering.

Of course this was no longer the case now, but for some reason Ken still held the sentiment.

"We're home." Ken said aloud, taking off his shoes.

"Welcome home you two. Come to the dining room, we need to talk." Chris's voice rang out. Though he tried not to sound serious, Ken and Daichi both looked at each other with trepidation in their eyes.

"What did you do this time?" Daichi murmured, wondering why he was getting dragged into this.

"What do you mean!? I should be asking you."

"You're always the troublemaker..."

"Ah." Ken couldn't really retort because Daichi was always so well behaved whereas he was a little more liberal.

"None of you are in trouble." Yuki said, peeking from behind the wall.

Ken felt a little more at ease, at least until he saw the serious look on his fathers face. He suddenly had a bad feeling.

"Take a seat."

The two did as they were told and sat down. Daichi was fidgeting, feeling a little uncomfortable with the situation. While Yuki and Chris had treated him very well, perhaps he still had some unseen trauma from his previous living arrangements.

"I'll cut to the chase." Chris said, producing an envelope and handing it to Daichi.

Before the two could hazard a guess at what the contents were, Chris spoke up.

"This is a letter from Osaka Toin, offering Daichi a full scholarship to attend their baseball program in High School."

Ken felt his heart shoot up to his throat at these words. His initial reaction was one of confusion, quickly followed by despair and anguish. However, he quickly managed to reign in his wild emotions before anyone could see them on his face.

Or at least he thought so. Yuki who was in the kitchen saw the hurt flash through his features before they were hidden, causing her heart to ache. She couldn't stand to watch her son in pain so she turned around and continued with making dinner, leaving the task to her husband

"Wow! That's awesome Daichi. Congratulations." Ken pushed down his disappointment and wrapped his arm around his brothers shoulders which seemed to have grown even wider.

Daichi didn't react initially, merely staring at the letter in front of him. This was the first time that he had been recognized for his abilities, filling him with some strong emotions that he didn't know existed.

However, seeing Ken so excited for him filled Daichi with guilt. This was his brother who had quite literally saved him from the depths of despair. Thinking about everything that Ken had done for him, even introducing him to baseball, his face turned resolute.

"I won't accept." He said, pushing the envelope away, not even bothering to open it.

"What!?" Ken cried out in surprise, looking at Daichi as if there was something wrong with his head.

"I said I won't do it."

Ken felt a burning frustration from deep within, mixing with the pain and disappointment of being overlooked. The feelings twisted and churned until he couldn't help but raise his voice.

"Don't be so selfish! This is what we wanted. If you attend Toin then you'll have a straight pathway into nationals and eventually the pro's."

Yuki spun around hearing her son raise his voice, however Chris gestured for her to keep quiet. Although they were the adults in the room, they needed to let the two boys discuss their future.

Daichi turned to Ken and frowned, "I won't go unless you're going too. Dad can speak to them and let them know my conditions."

Ken let out a laugh, however there was no humor in it. "Now you're just being childish. Do you think that they will listen to you? Why would you throw away such an opportunity for such a crappy reason?"

Ken was too emotional to sugarcoat his words, so he didn't realize how harsh they sounded. Daichi who had never gotten into a fight with Ken suddenly began to get angry.

He was doing this so Ken would also have the opportunity to attend Toin, so why was he being yelled at. Just as he was about to retort, Chris spoke up to ease the tension.

"Daichi, I think what Ken is trying to say is that this is an amazing opportunity for you and he doesn't want you to throw it away because of him."

His words were soothing, removing the taut emotions that were driving the argument earlier. Ken sent his father a look of appreciation, his interference had allowed him to regain his composure.

"Yeah, and who said I won't be able to get into Toin? There's still the open tryouts next week remember?" Ken smiled, placing his hand on Daichi's shoulder.

"Y-Yeah..." Daichi still felt a lingering feeling of guilt, however after looking at both his father and big bro, he felt that he didn't have much of a choice.

Of course he was thrilled at being invited to join Osaka Toin and if Ken made it into the team it would be even better. Slowly his face began to morph into a smile and he slapped Ken on the back, causing him to let out a yelp of surprise.

"It's a promise. Let's both win at nationals with Toin." He said, holding out his fist.

"You bet!" Ken exclaimed, bumping fists with Daichi.

After dinner, Ken headed up into his room and laid down on his bed. Even though everything had been resolved, he still felt some lingering emotions from the whole ordeal.

He would be lying if he said that he wasn't somewhat jealous of Daichi receiving a full scholarship to Toin, one of the best High School baseball teams in the country.

Hearing Daichi wanting to decline the opportunity had made him lash out in anger, saying some things that he regretted. However, now that he was by himself he felt warm on the inside knowing that Daichi valued him so much that he would decline a full scholarship unless they could play together.

Of course Toin was not such a place that would bend to Daichi's will. Yet the sentiment was enough for him to know that he was a true friend, his little brother.

Ken couldn't help but let out a deep sigh. Out of habit, he brought up his system window and looked at his stats.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 3 (2730/10000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 16

TALENT ASSESSMENT: A-

POTENTIAL: C- (S+)

MAJOR POINTS: 2730

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: A

>Pitching: C+ (B)

>Fielding: B-

>Game Intelligence: B-

>Mental: A+

>Skills: 11

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. A)

Balance and Coordination: S

Agility: A-

Strength: A-

Stamina: A-

After over 6 months of training, Ken's stats had hit a plateau. Since he hadn't been playing any organized baseball, there had been no new missions which meant that he had not acquired any additional Elixirs.

Ken had managed to complete all of the Amateur batting missions in the image training apart from the home run goal. Despite having an S grade in Balance and Coordination, it was difficult to hit a home run against such intense pitching.

He was also disappointed upon seeing that the pitching function within the image training was still locked, even though he could now pitch with his left arm.

Looking at the status in front of him, Ken began to regain his confidence. He was sure that he could pass the trials for Toin and join his brother, even if he didn't get into the starting lineup right away.

With these thoughts in his mind, Ken turned over and went to sleep, dreaming of making his Koshien debut.

The following week, Ken took the bullet train from Yokohama to Osaka to participate in the open tryouts. The trip took just over 2 hours, yet it felt a lot shorter. He was riding by himself considering Daichi had no need to join the tryouts as he already had an offer.

Since the school was quite a way from the station, Ken had to catch another train before walking another 20 minutes. By the time he arrived, he could already see around 30 teenagers on the field going through various drills.

He looked at the time and breathed out a sigh of relief after confirming he was still 30 minutes early. Thankfully he had arrived on time despite the long trip.

Ken stood in place for a little while, staring at Toin sign with a sense of determination.

"I can do this." He murmured, clenching his fist.

Whatever happened here had the potential to shape his entire future.

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