

# Major League System

## Chapter 641 - 641: Finals Begin (1)

"Where is Steve and Ken?" Coach Wyatt asked, a hint of panic in his voice. To be missing their battery so close to the game starting was not ideal.

"I think they went to warm up on their own." Latrell replied, shrugging.

The coach didn't seem at ease with this answer and pointed to Latrell, "Go and find them quickly, we don't have time to waste." He commanded before beginning to pace.

Since it was the final game, they were on the largest field, yet the seats were already filled to the brim. In fact, people even lined up around the cage since there wasn't enough room in the seating area.

Coach Wyatt looked into the crowd and saw a few familiar faces of scouts that had already approached him over the past few days. His nerves increased, turning his attention back to Latrell's retreating figure.

'Why now of all times?' He thought.

Back in the clearing near the parking lot, Ken and Steve were beginning to wrap things up.

"Dude, your pitches are perfect... Why didn't you tell me sooner?" Steve complained, getting to his feet after receiving the last pitch.

Ken shrugged, "I had to change my pitching form around 6 months ago and I wasn't sure if I'd still be able to throw them." He answered casually.

"Eh? You changed pitching forms?"

"Mmm. After the World Cup my pitching went downhill, it wasn't until around a year later that I found out it was because my mechanics were off."

Steve wore a confused expression, but he shook his head dismissively. "Anyway, I guess all that matters is we now have some more pitches to work with. Those Dodgers won't know what hit them."

"Ken, Steve! The coach is about to blow his top if you don't get back now." Latrell called out from some distance.

"Ah... Yeah we should probably get back now." Ken said, feeling a little sorry for his coach. He rolled his shoulder a few times, a smile forming on his face.

'I feel light... I wonder how many of them can hit my pitches?'

Since this team had beaten the Elite Squad, it meant that they had an even better lineup. Ken would be satisfied if he could strikeout every one of them.

The trio made their way back to the field, only for Ken's eyes to widen in surprise. "There sure are a lot of people." He remarked.

"Dude, it's the finals... What do you expect?" Steve said out of the corner of his mouth.

"Of course it doesn't compare to Koshien, but its more than I expected for such a small tournament." Ken continued, ignoring his friend.

"S—Small tournament!?" he exclaimed incredulously. But when Steve thought about it, Ken had played on the biggest stage for U18 players, so he shouldn't be too surprised at the turn out.

"There you guys are!" Coach Wyatt came storming over, a hint of relief creeping onto his face. But there was some frustration mixed in, as if he'd been worrying for quite a while.

"Sorry coach, Ken wanted to show me his slider and forkball." Steve replied, making sure to put the blame solely on the Ace's shoulders. Since Ken was the golden goose, the coach was less likely to scold them.

"Eh!? Slider and Forkball!?" the coach's expression turned to one of confusion as he turned to Ken, wanting to confirm it.

Ken merely nodded in response, not elaborating.

"You've had those pitches this whole time? Just what were you—" The coach cut himself off, letting out a sigh filled with defeat, "Nevermind. Just get yourselves ready to play."

"Yes sir!"

Around 10 minutes later, a gentleman walked into the center of the field with a microphone in his hand and addressed the crowd.

"Welcome everyone to the finals of the WWBA National Tournament. I trust you've all been entertained watching the best teams in the nation compete for glory." His voice echoed across the field, eliciting a cheer in response.

The man was rather charismatic and was able to hold everybody's attention with ease.

"Today, we have our two finalists, both hailing from Texas. Please give it up for our first finalist, Dulin Dodgers!" He said, pointing to the right side of the field.

The team dressed in white and orange arrived onto the field at the mention of their name, receiving applause from the crowd.

"Their opponents for today are the dark horse of the tournament, the Adidad Gladiators!"

Upon his announcement, Ken and his teammates wandered onto the field. Steve held his hands in the air to receive the cheers from the crowd, like a seasoned veteran. Ken on the other hand merely plodded along, wanting the game to start already.

Once everyone was on the field, the announcer addressed the crowd once more, "Remember, there will be a ceremony after the game so please stick around to watch the proceedings. I'll now leave things with the umpires for the coin toss. Please enjoy the game!"

With that, he left the field and everyone turned their attention to Max and another figure standing next to the umpire.

"Heads."

The coin was tossed into the air before landing on the pitch.

"Heads it is." The umpire said, pointing to Max.

"We'll bat first."

"Gladiators have won the toss and elected to bat first! Dodgers, please take the field."

"Tch." Ken clicked his tongue, but he returned to the bench anyway. He'd just have to wait his turn to pitch once more.

"Don't be so impatient." Steve said, wearing an exasperated expression. He knew that Ken was a pitching maniac, but this was just getting absurd.

"You'll never understand just how much I love pitching." Ken stated, brushing his friend off.

Steve rolled his eyes, "Show me some respect, just remember who has to catch those damn pitches of yours."

Ken couldn't really refute the words. If anyone else was catching his pitches, he couldn't guarantee that they'd be able to do so properly. It had taken Shiro quite a lot of pain and suffering to do so, and that was while Ken didn't have the system.

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

## Chapter 642 - 642: Finals Begin (2)

As for Daichi... It was best if he didn't think about that guy. When it came to natural talent and reflexes, Daichi was just leagues above anyone that he'd met in the same age bracket.

"Batting 1st, Short Stop, Nico." The announcers pleasant voice called out over the speakers.

"Oh? They're announcing us in this game?" Ken muttered in surprise.

"Makes sense I guess. Since there aren't any other games going on right now." Steve replied matter-of-factly.

The two watched the field as the right-handed pitcher warmed up. He was a little shorter than Ken, but his frame was filled out more.

"Someone check that guy's birth certificate..." Steve remarked.

"Yeah, are we sure he's still in High School?" Ken added. The guy's build reminded him of Makoto, but he was at least a head taller than the guy.

"Heh, maybe he got held back a couple of years?"

Ken shook his head, "Impossible. This is an 18 and under tournament."

"Tch, you ruined my fun."

"Shh. The game is starting."

"Play ball!"

After the umpires announcement, the large fellow on the mound started his wind up. He took a large stride forward, his powerful frame sending the ball towards the catchers glove with authority.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

Ken let out a whistle of appreciation. The pitcher's form was brilliant, making effective use of his large and powerful frame. "That guy is good." He remarked.

"His pitches might be close to yours." Steve said, sending Ken a smug look.

"Impossible. I'm still much faster." Ken stated, not having any of Steve's antics.

Steve shrugged, "I dunno man, they look around the same speed to me."

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

Ignoring his friend, Ken brought his hand up to his chin and thought deeply. It was true that the guy's pitches looked fast, but there wasn't as much movement as he might have expected.

Of course it was a bit hard to tell from his vantage point on the bench, but that was his first impression. As long as this was the case, once Ken could grab the timing, getting a hit shouldn't be too difficult.

PAH

"Strikeout!"

Before Steve could say anything, Ken got up and moved to grab his helmet and bat. With Nico getting out, he would be next after Latrell's at-bat.

"Good luck out there~" Steve said with a playful tone.

"Batting 2nd, Center outfield, Latrell."

Ken walked onto the field and felt the weight of the bat, taking a few casual practice swings. He hadn't properly gotten used to the wooden bat just yet. Just because he'd

managed to hit a couple of home runs, didn't mean that he was comfortable with the change.

Apart from the added weight and the feedback from hitting a ball, the biggest difficulty was striking the center of the bat. Since the sweet spot felt a lot smaller, it required even more precision than he was used to.

His Balance and Coordination which affected his batting ability was still stuck at the SS+ grade. While this might be enough to go through High School competition unimpeded, once he played against College level players, his efficiency would go on a downward trend.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

While Ken was deep in thought, Latrell already swung and missed at one of the pitches. The crisp sound of the ball entering the catchers glove was an indication of just how fast the ball was traveling.

Discarding his train of thought, Ken focused on the next ball. The more opportunity he got to see the pitches up close, the more chance he would have to hit the ball when it was his turn.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

Ken's eyes lit up after seeing the wicked slider snake through the air and into the catchers glove. The speed wasn't the issue, it was the movement on the ball.

He wasn't surprised that Latrell had swung at the pitch, hell, he would have too. By the time it reached the glove, it was already almost a foot outside of the strike zone.

Ken made an internal note to watch out for the slider since it broke so much more than usual.

The next ball came, this time a two-seam fastball. Latrell's body lurched as he swung the bat with intent. But as the ball approached, it crept inside, making the adjustments difficult for Latrell to put into place.

WHOOSH

CLICK

"Crap."

Latrell threw the bat down and ran towards first base with all of his might. The ball which he'd made contact with had been hit high into the air within the infield.

"Alright mine!" The pitcher shouted, his eyes glued to the ball high in the air.

It floated for a while before descending into his glove.

Pah.

"Out."

Upon hearing this, Ken let out a small sigh. The mix of pitches had made it tough for Latrell to see the two-seam fastball coming, causing him to be jammed.

"Next time man." Ken said, consoling the guy as he walked back towards the bench.

"Mmm, hit a big one for us."

"Heh. I'll try."

As Ken stepped into the batters box, he went through his batting ritual. Tapping the plate with his bat, before moving to each of his cleats. For some reason it helped him maintain a calm demeanor before hitting.

"Batting 3rd, Pitcher, Ken."

The announcer called his name, giving him flashbacks of the U18 World Cup. He could still remember how the announcers had butchered the pronunciation of his Japanese teammates.

Upon thinking about this, an amused smile touched the corner of his lips.

"Heh. You won't be smiling for long buddy."

Ken's ears perked up as he heard the catcher chirping at him from behind. He turned around and looked at the guy, only to scoff in response.

"We'll see about that."

Ken turned his attention back to the pitcher and waited, his eyes locked onto the guy.

'I'll swing at the fastballs and avoid the slider.' He thought, tightening the grip on his bat with anticipation.

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

## Chapter 643 - 643: Tactics (1)

PAH

"Strike."

Ken frowned, watching as the slider went into the catchers glove. He briefly glanced at the umpire before holding his tongue. It was clear to Ken that the pitch was a ball, but he wasn't in the position to argue.

Quelling his annoyance, he tapped the plate and his cleats once more, getting into position.

'If the sliders are getting called strikes, I might have to change my game plan.' He thought, gripping his bat tightly.

He patiently eyed the pitcher, waiting for the next ball. The guy lifted his leg and burst forward, sending a rocket towards him.

'Fastball!'

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

"Hehehe, hook, line, and sinker." The catcher said, grinning from ear to ear.

Ken frowned, feeling his face heat up slightly in embarrassment. He had fallen for the changeup, swinging far too early since he'd been expecting a regular four-seam fastball.

'Is this how my opponents feel after seeing my changeup?' Ken thought, saying a silent prayer to all those he might have embarrassed.



However, he soon began to think deeply. 'It's clear that the catcher knows my game plan of targeting the fastball. Otherwise he wouldn't have started with a slider before following it with a changeup.'

Ken shook his head, feeling a little stifled. This was the first time in a long while that he'd had to participate in this kind of mental battle between himself and a catcher.

'Stay calm, trust in your gut.' He said in his heart, taking a deep breath.

After tapping the plate and his cleats once again, Ken got back into position, his face resolute. It didn't matter which ball was next, he was going to just try and hit it. With an 0-2 count he currently had his back up against the wall.

The pitcher started his wind up and sent the ball flashing towards him.

Ken's eyes widened, 'Slider! I can hit it.'

He planted his front foot, digging his heel into the dirt and swinging with his tremendous strength. He chased after the ball which looked to be heading towards the outside.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

The slider evaded the bat, missing the tip by a couple of inches as it flew past.

"Strikeout!"

"3 outs, changeover."

'Damn it.' Ken cursed inwardly, but he didn't let his frustration show. Without a word he left the batters box and headed back towards the bench.

"Not smilin' now are ya mate?" The catcher taunted.

Ken froze, turning around slightly. His face was stoic, but his eyes burned the image of the catcher's features into his mind. "Alright, I've remembered you." He said before continuing on his way.

"Yeah you'll remember me... In your dreams." The guy said, flashing a grin.

The umpire looked towards the catcher weirdly, "What does that even mean?"

"Ah, you know... After he loses the match or something..." The catcher stammered in reply.

Hearing the stupid explanation, the umpire shook his head, obviously not impressed with the trash talk. He didn't even feel like giving the guy a warning after such a poor display.

"Haaah, this generation truly is hopeless." He muttered.

After ignoring the odd words, Ken wordlessly made his way back to the bench to drop off his bat and helmet. His mind was replaying his at-bat over and over again, analyzing what he'd done wrong.

From the beginning, it was as if the catcher had full control over his thoughts. He had only felt like this when facing Daichi before, though it was not as pronounced.

If anything, it was like a rudimentary version of his brother, the Maestro. With the first pitch, the catcher had framed the slider perfectly, getting an early strike into the count. The second was a changeup, easily mistaken for a fastball.

Once he was behind in the count, the finishing blow was a wide slider. With his mind focused on the very first slider being called a strike, there was no way he was going to let it go through to the catcher.

Unfortunately for him, even with his long limbs it was impossible to hit that ball.

'Formidable...!' He thought, feeling a tingle run through his body.

Without realizing it, a smile tugged at the corner of his lips. Despite being struck out in dominating fashion, he seemed to be happy.

"Bad... Luck?" Steve said, feeling his body shiver after seeing the smile on his friend's face.

Over in the Dodgers bench, the catcher Brady Sandford sent a high five to the pitcher Cade Ball. "Bro, that dude is shaken by us already. I don't think he'll be putting up much of a fight this game." His words were confident, yet the pitcher didn't seem to be as convinced.

"It's still only the first inning, don't count that guy out yet." Cade replied.

Before Brady could respond, the coach of their team spoke up. "Okay, good start everyone. Remember what we talked about earlier regarding the Gladiator's pitcher."

Cade let out a scoff, "You mean the fact he can only throw 3 pitches?" he said with amusement, causing the rest of the team to chuckle in response.

Coach Roberts frowned, causing everyone to quickly shut their mouths. "They made it all the way to the finals on the back of those 3 pitches. Out of all the team's he's faced, none have managed to score a run on him... Do you think it's funny now?"

The coach's words were like a cold bucket of water poured over their heads. While it might seem outlandish, the fact of the matter was, the guy had a perfect record in this tournament.

Seeing that his team had lost their earlier arrogance, Coach Roberts nodded in satisfaction. "Now, we didn't come all this way to lose in the finals. Try and time his fastball in the first at-bat, I want to see you making contact by your second at-bat."

"Yes coach!" The team called back in unison.

With that, their first two batters got ready to face the pitches of the Gladiators.

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

## **Chapter 644 - 644: Tactics (2)**

Ken slowly walked up to the mound, his eyes moving towards the Dodgers bench. His gaze locked onto the catcher who was talking trash earlier, a small grin forming on his face.

'I wonder when that guy is batting. Hopefully he's one of the clean-up batters so I can use showdown on him...' Ken thought excitedly.

But he quickly shook his head, now wasn't the time to be hyper focused on one individual. After receiving the ball from Steve, Ken began to warm up his arm.

After his usual 10 or so warm-up throws, Ken nodded towards the umpire to let him know that he was ready.

The umpire nodded, gesturing towards the player waiting not far away.

"Batting first, Center outfield, Michael."

The announcer called for the first batter. Despite his average height, the guy looked like one of those athletic types that one saw in the track and field events. Though Ken didn't like to judge a book by its cover, it was clear that this guy would have some speed.

Ken looked to Steve who was calling for a two-seam fastball. He nodded, getting into position a moment later. Ken paused, taking a deep breath as he gathered his focus. This would be his 9th game after only 4 days of the tournament.

Even though this was more games than the U18 World Cup, the matches had felt rather easy-going. Perhaps it was because the level of competition was lower, or maybe the stakes weren't the same.

Either way, his arm felt light and he felt a sense of excitement that he hadn't felt in a very long time. 'Please don't disappoint me...' Ken thought, turning his gaze to the batter.

He raised his front leg, bringing both his hands up to his chest. Kicking off with his back leg, he strode forward, opening his hips and generating a ton of torque.

Everything flowed naturally from his legs to his arms, creating a beautiful display for those watching. Before they knew it, the ball had already left Ken's fingertips.

WHOOOOSH

CLICK

"Eh?"

Ken was surprised when he saw that the batter had managed to make contact with the ball. He stared as the ball flew up into the air, directly above him.

"Catch it!" Steve called, seeing as how Ken was unmoving, merely staring at the ball headed towards him.

'Hmm... I didn't expect him to hit the very first pitch.' Ken thought, frowning.

In the midst of his deep thought, he nonchalantly swiped his glove out, easily securing the ball that had floated towards him.

"Out."

Steve let out a sigh of relief after seeing Ken secure the out. At first he thought that the guy was daydreaming and would miss out on the easy catch, but thankfully that didn't happen.

It still didn't stop him from calling for a timeout though.

While the batter was leaving, Steve jogged up to the mound and confronted Ken. "Dude, we're in the finals, you can't be daydreaming like that." He stated.

Ken raised an eyebrow, "I'm not daydreaming... I was just thinking about something."

"Isn't that the same thing?" Steve replied incredulously.

Ken shook his head in response. "I think they're aiming for my fastball..."

This time, Steve looked completely dumbfounded. "You've literally thrown a single pitch... How can you make such an assumption?"

"Intuition." He responded simply.

Seeing that his friend was having a hard time believing him, Ken chuckled. "Mix up some fastballs outside the strike zone and we'll see."

"Hmm? But you hate wasting pitches..."

"It won't be a wasted pitch if they swing... Now go back before they think something is up." Ken said, waving him off.

Although he was a little skeptical, Steve still did as he was told, though he mumbled some things on the way back to home plate. He turned to the umpire and thanked him before getting into position.

"Batting 2nd, Short stop, Kyle."

Steve briefly glanced at the next batter and thought for a few moments. Eventually, he called for a fastball just above the strike zone, in order to test Ken's theory. Of course he thought it was far too early to make such an assumption, but there was no harm in trying.

'It's his arm that will get tired anyway...' Steve reasoned.

Ken nodded, flashing him a grin. In the next moment he entered his wind up and sent the ball flying towards the outstretched catchers glove. Due to the spin, the ball felt like it was rising gradually the closer it got to the plate.

WHOOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

The batter almost lost his balance, having thrown everything into the swing. He looked a little confused, but quickly recovered.

Ken's eyes lit up, tipping his hat towards Steve as if to say "I told you so."

But Steve shook his head in response. Just because the guy had swung on one of his fastballs, didn't mean that his theory was true.

Thinking this, Steve called for another fastball, this time on the outside, intending to disprove Ken's words.

Ken merely smiled and nodded, getting into position.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

'Eh? Are they really only swinging at fastballs?' Steve thought, his expression filled with incredulity. He didn't know who had given them this tactic, but it could easily be countered once they learned about it.

To make matters even worse for the Dodgers, Steve had just learned that Ken also had an additional 2 pitches in his repertoire, making their tactics even more useless.

Steve grinned, feeling as if they now had an edge. Not wanting to give up their advantage and have the Dodgers suspect something, Steve called for a changeup towards the inside of the strike zone.

Ken couldn't help but let out a small chuckle, seeing the dastardly lead. At this point they were just playing with the batters emotions.

But he wasn't complaining. If anything there was a small sense of vindication when he thought back to how hard he'd failed in his previous at-bat.

He wound up, sending his killer changeup directly towards Steve's outstretched glove.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout!"

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

## Chapter 645 - 645: Chance (1)

Ken sat down on the bench and let out a small sigh. Glancing at the scoreboard, neither team had been able to score in the first 3 innings. As he had expected, the Dodgers were going after his fastballs.

Even with this knowledge, Steve had carefully called for pitches that would not make it obvious that they knew about the tactic. While this was all well and good, Ken couldn't help but feel a little stifled.

'Kind of feels like they're underestimating me...' He thought.

However, he had dug his own hole in this regard. After analyzing his previous games, it would be obvious at first glance that 90% of his fastballs were thrown in the strike zone. If one could time the blistering speed, it should be simple to hit the pitches.

"Why are you so gloomy?" Steve asked, sending him an incredulous look.

"No reason." Ken lied, sitting back and getting comfortable.

Steve couldn't help but grin, "You really are a prideful person..." He said with a chuckle. To him it was obvious that Ken was not used to pitching in such a way, usually choosing to blast through the opponent.

While this might be fine against the lower end of the competition, Steve knew better. Despite his seemingly whimsical attitude to training, there was a reason why he chose to become a catcher.

Ken frowned at him, but seeing the knowing look on the guy's face, he couldn't help but feel a smile tugging at the corner of his lips. "I guess you're right." He replied in amusement.

Steve shook his head in exasperation, "Look man, your pitches are good, great even. But there's more to pitching than just throwing the ball fast and accurately."

"Oho? You're sounding like a real catcher now..."

"Well, it's my job right? All you need to do is focus on accurately following my leads, and I'll do the rest of the leg work." Steve replied, sending him a thumbs up.

Ken raised an eyebrow, "And what's got you so motivated?"

"Hehe, they dare to underestimate my pitcher? Of course I'll fight back." He said matter-of-factly.

"Mmm. But if you make me give up a home run, I'll add 50 more modified burpees to your training schedule." Ken replied, patting his friend on the shoulder.

Steve paled, but he doubled down, "Make it 100!"

"Strikeout!"

Steve's voice was drowned out by the umpires call from the field, prompting Ken to stand up from the bench. He turned to his friend and grinned, "It's a deal. I'll go get us some runs first."

"Alright alright, good luck~"

Ken let out a chuckle, grabbing his helmet and bat nearby. It was all well and good preventing the other team from scoring, but the game would drag on if they weren't able to get any runs on the board.

Stretching his limbs, Ken casually walked out onto the field and practiced his swing a couple of times. He sent a perfunctory consolation to Nico who was heading back to the bench after being struck out before turning his attention to Latrell.

"Batting 2nd, Center outfield, Latrell."

'It's his second at-bat, so he should have a better chance of picking the pitches.' Ken thought, locking his gaze onto the athletic looking figure.

As long as Latrell could get onto base, with Ken and Max coming up, they should have a decent opportunity to score.

The pitcher entered his wind-up, his strong body striding forward and sending a quick ball down the lane. Latrell planted his lead leg and swung hard, creating a crisp noise as the bat flew through the air.

WHOOOOSH

WHACK

The moment the ball made contact, Latrell threw his bat to the side and pumped his muscular legs towards first base with his head down.

Ken's eyes trailed the ball which had flown into center right field, between the two fielders. For a moment, the ball looked like it would carry for long enough for the players to make it in time.

Ken unconsciously held his breath, gripping his bat tightly. 'Drop drop!'



The right outfielder dove, stretching his glove to the maximum in an attempt to get to it before it hit the ground. But as if lady luck had intervened, the ball touched the ground, bouncing over the outstretched glove of the fielder.

By now, Latrell had already reached first base, but he didn't stop there. Without looking, he lowered his head once again and powered through towards 2nd base.

Because the fielder had committed to his dive and failed to field the ball, it provided the additional time he needed to secure the 2nd base. By the time the center fielder got to the loose ball and threw it back, Latrell had already slid onto 2nd.

"Nice!" Ken pumped his fist, his spirits soaring.

"Awesome hit Latrell!"

The Gladiators bench went into a cheering frenzy, joined by the larger than usual crowd. This was the first hit in an otherwise uneventful game, waking the crowd up from their slumber.

Latrell raised a thumbs up towards Ken, as if to tell him that he'd done his job. Ken chuckled, receiving the message loud and clear. Now that the guy was on base, it was Ken's job to send him home. Search\* The website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"Batting 3rd, Pitcher, Ken."

With his name announced, Ken slowly walked towards the batters box. He briefly locked gazes with the catcher and sent him a dark smile.

The guy shrunk back, his earlier bravado nowhere to be found. After experiencing Ken's pitches in the 2nd inning, the guy had realized that he probably shouldn't piss the opposing pitcher off.

Steve happened to call a couple of inside fastballs, scaring the living daylights out of the guy.

With a sense of vindication, Ken turned towards the pitcher after performing his pre-batting ritual. Getting into position, he focused his eyes on the figure.

'It's time to go all out.' Ken thought, activating his vast mental capacity. This was something that caused a lot of fatigue, so he only used it sparingly.

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

## Chapter 646 - 646: Chance (2)

But with Latrell now on base, it would be silly not to use it at a time like this.

In an instant, he felt throbbing in his mind as his eyes perceived everything around him. Since he was focused on the pitcher, he saw every twitch of the guy's muscles as he strode forward and whipped his arm out.

From the time the ball left the pitchers fingertips, Ken's gaze was locked onto the ball, analyzing the velocity, the spin as well as the environmental effects.

'Ughhh' Ken felt a piercing pain in his frontal lobe from the information pouring in, almost causing him to lose concentration. It seemed that the increase in mental capacity had caused him to overestimate his ability.

He quickly rescinded his mental capacity before his brain exploded. Thankfully he had already managed to ascertain the trajectory of the pitch.

Ken planted his foot and twisted his body, sending the bat flying into the strike zone.

WHOOOOSH

WHACK

'Crap.'

Ken cursed inwardly. After hearing the sound and the jarring feedback on his wrists, it was clear that he'd missed the center of the bat. However, he still threw the bat aside and ran towards first base.

The ball sailed above the short stop's head for a base hit. The left outfielder was quick to the ball, preventing Latrell from sprinting his way past 3rd base and back home.

"Nice hit Ken!"

As Ken stepped back onto first base, he felt it was a little regretful. He had yet to work out the kinks for his now SSS- Grade mental capacity, leading to the previous situation.

Now that it had upgraded, he could collect even more information than before. He had naively unleashed it all, not realizing that it would cause such an effect.

'Next time I'll need to narrow my focus on specific things.' He thought, massaging his temples.

The headache shouldn't last long, or at least he hoped so. Ken turned to Max who was now making his way up to bat. With 1 out, all they needed was a sacrifice fly in the outfield to secure a run and get ahead in this game.

Judging by how Max had been playing lately, Ken had a lot of confidence in his Captain.

"Batting 4th, 3rd base, Max."

The guy walked up to the batters box, his expression stoic. With his build and demeanor, it almost looked like he was entering the battlefield, rather than a High School baseball tournament.

However, seeing this only filled Ken with more confidence. A small grin appeared on his face as he slowly began to take a lead from first base.

Max let out a deep breath, training his focus onto the pitcher.

'I won't miss...'

All thoughts of scouts or colleges had been removed from his mind. The only thing that he wanted to do right now was capitalize on the situation his teammates had worked hard for.

Judging by the pitcher and catcher duo for the Dodgers, it was clear that opportunities like this would be few and far between, unlike in their other games.

Gripping his bat, Max was ready to rumble.

The pitcher began his wind up, striding forward with his lead leg and sending a nasty slider towards the outstretched glove of the catcher.

PAH

"Ball."

Max didn't even flinch, his eyes not leaving the ball the entire way. There was no doubt in his mind that the ball would be outside the strike zone, showing just how focused he was in the box right now.

"Tch."

Brady clicked his tongue in annoyance since his bait had failed. This was how they got into a good position in Max's first at-bat.

With their plan now foiled, he needed to come up with something better.

'I've still got some pitches to play with. How about we see how he goes against a curveball.' The guy thought, sending the lead to hit pitcher and placing his glove below the strike zone.

Cade nodded, satisfied with the call. He had been pitching to Brady for a few years now and was already used to his leads. He felt that only this guy was able to bring the best out of his pitches.

Such was the trust of a battery. One could have the best pitcher and best catcher in the world together, but without a foundation of trust, they would simply fail.

As Cade began his wind-up, footsteps entered his ears, almost throwing him off. Thankfully he was able to keep focused long enough to send out his pitch.

"Second!"

Ken had already sprung off to the races before the pitch left Cade's fingertips. He wasn't about to stay passive, not when 2nd base was free.

'Damn it!'

Brady cursed, watching the slow curveball make its way towards home plate. It looped, starting off high but dropped quickly as it neared the plate.

"Ball."

By the time the ball arrived and he picked it up, his eyes snapped towards Ken's figure who had already made significant ground towards 2nd base. It only took a moment to evaluate that the throw would be 50/50.

His eyes darted to Latrell on 3rd base who already had a significant lead, causing the latter to halt in his steps. It was clear that if he'd thrown to 2nd, the guy would have tried to steal home in the next moment.

Seeing that he'd been caught in the act, Latrell retreated back to 3rd base letting out a small chuckle. "So close." He muttered.

Ken slid feet first onto 2nd base, flashing a grin towards his Captain in the batters box. They were in an even better position now with a 2-0 count and runners on 2nd and 3rd.

A simple double would net them two runs, essentially blowing the game wide open. Search the \* website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Max nodded to Ken, his stoic features turning up in a slight smile. Ken didn't often get base hits, but he did run a lot after getting walked so often in these tournaments.

Having such a threat on base just added another layer of worries for the defense.

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

## Chapter 647 - 647: Thief (1)

'That bastard...!' Brady thought, gnashing his teeth.

With only 1 out for the inning, Ken had taken a risk by stealing 2nd base. If it had been any other pitch apart from the curveball, Brady was confident in reacting to the steal in time, netting them an easy out.

He was even confident that Landon on 2nd base would be able to throw back to him in time to prevent the runner on 3rd from stealing home.

Unfortunately, this series of events just happened to not go in their favor. Now the Dodgers were behind in the count with both runners in scoring position.

Brady thought for a while, his eyes moving to Max in the batters box.

'First base is open, we may as well walk this guy.' He thought, throwing the ball back to Cade on the mound. In the next moment he stood up and held his glove out to the right, indicating for an intentional walk.

"Eh? He's walking Max?" Ken muttered, feeling a little surprised by the action. He knitted his brows, trying to figure out a reason why he would want to load the bases, before remembering his neglected Game Intelligence grade.

However, a few of the scouts nodded with appreciation in the audience.

"It's a good decision, especially since this number 4 batter for the Gladiators has been hitting well lately." Tony remarked, jotting down some notes in his notepad.

"Mmm, it seems like that catcher is a smart one. If he continued, Max would have sent one over the fence." Lorenzo commented, a small grin on his face.

"I take it he's the one you've got your eye on?" Tony replied, not even sparing his cousin a glance.

Lorenzo let out a chuckle, "What gave it away?"

Not even responding, Tony turned his attention back to the game.

"Ball four, take your base."

Max was a little disappointed, but he threw his bat to the side and leisurely made his way over to first base.

With the bases now loaded, a simple grounder would likely result in a double play, putting the pressure back on the Gladiators. It was a brilliant decision by Brady who seemed to possess great game intelligence for his age.

"Eh? This isn't good..." Steve said, feeling a sense of foreboding creeping up.

"Go get ready to bat." Coach Wyatt said, slapping him on the back.

Steve flinched, but he quickly did as he was told. Part of him hoped that he wouldn't have to go up in this situation, but it didn't seem like he had a choice.

"Batting 5th, Left outfield, Dion."

As Dion approached the batters box, he looked a little nervous. He had struck out in succession in his last at-bat, but now the pressure was amplified. One slip up and they could lose the opportunity that the others had worked so hard to create.

He gripped his bat tightly, staring at the pitcher who had already begun his wind-up. In a flash, he threw a fastball to the outside.

PAH

"Strike."

Feeling sweat run down his back from the pressure, Dion didn't even get a chance to swing at the first pitch.

"You can do it Dion! Swing big!" Steve called out from the side of the field. He tried his best to sound confident, but inwardly he just wanted the guy to at least secure a sacrifice fly so he wouldn't have as much pressure.

Dion was like a drowning man who'd been thrown a life jacket. He turned to Steve and nodded, determination appearing on his features. Perhaps it was because it was the final game of the tournament, but he felt much more nervous than usual.

'It's my job to send the runners home...' He thought, gripping his bat tightly.

He turned to the pitcher once more, this time with a fire in his eyes.

WHOOOSH

CLICK

"Foul."

"Ah, crap." Steve muttered under his breath.

Now that the count was 0-2, things were not looking good. The worst case scenario for the team was for Dion to hit a grounder and put an end to the inning with a double play.

Yet for Steve, the worst case would be if Dion were to strike out. This would mean that all of the pressure would be on him.

'Please hit the ball... please hit it.'

Steve crossed his fingers, not even wanting to watch the play unfold.

CLICK

PAH

"Strikeout!"

Dion held his follow through for a few moments before his shoulders drooped. He had failed to convert, putting their team in an even more precarious position.

As he walked over to the bench he placed his hand on Steve's shoulder, "Sorry man, it's all up to you."

Steve was wearing an unreadable expression on his face, but Dion felt that it looked determined. As he went past, he felt confident that the guy would be able to convert at least one run for them.

'It's over...'

Steve on the other hand was having a crisis. He felt all of the eyes on and off the field turn to him, creating a looming pressure that threatened to crush him.

"Batting 6th, Catcher, Stephen."

Hearing his name called, Steve flinched before quickly coming up to the batters box. He briefly looked at the pitcher before seeing his teammates on each of the bases.

His eyes turned to Ken who looked to be trying to get his attention.

However, he was too distracted by the pressure to properly pay attention to what he wanted to communicate. As he turned his gaze back to the pitcher, the guy began his powerful wind-up, striding forward with intent.

The ball snaked through the air, ending up towards the outside of the strike zone.

PAH

"Strike."

Steve sucked in a cold breath of air. There was no way that he could hit the wicked slider from this pitcher, not without seeing it a few more times.

He looked up once more, only to see Ken's dark gaze locked onto him.

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

## **Chapter 648 - 648: Thief (2)**

'W-What the hell does he want?' Steve thought, confused. 'It's not like I could have hit that ball.'

However, as Ken looked down at his hands by his waist, Steve finally understood.

'He's giving me signs??' Steve's eyes lit up as he saw the sign for another slider. He turned to the pitcher, only to see the guy begin his wind-up again.

PAH

"Ball."

Sure enough, another slider was thrown, this time outside of the strike zone. Steve felt a bomb go off in his mind, 'How could he have figured out their signs already?'

Ken had only been on 2nd base for around 6 pitches so far, so it didn't make sense that he would already have deciphered their signs. Unless he was a genius of course.

Steve's mind wandered, remembering the almost perfect score on the SAT's that Ken was able to achieve. 'I guess it makes sense...' He thought.



'If I know what's coming, maybe I'll really be able to convert some runs...'

Suddenly, the pressure surrounding him disappeared. His frame felt light as the confidence surged from within. He turned to Ken, waiting for the next sign.

However, this time instead of giving him the signal, Ken simply shrugged his shoulders.

'EH!? WHAT THE HELL DO YOU MEAN?' He screamed inwardly.

But there was no time to think since the pitcher had already begun. The ball left his fingertips a few moments later as the ball came whipping into view.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

'A curve!? Damn it! Who throws 3 breaking balls in a row?' Steve complained, his annoyance going through the roof. The count was now 1-2 and they were potentially 1 pitch away from coming away with nothing in this crucial 4th inning.

Steve turned his gaze to Ken and was about to glare at him, but this time he received another signal.

'A fastball? I should be able to hit this...' He thought, gripping his bat tighter.

'Is it inside or outside?'

Steve's mind filled with possibilities. Just knowing what type of pitch it was going to be should help a lot, but he still needed to work on the timing and placement in order to get a good hit off.

If it was anything short of an outfield hit, they would be done for.

Steve tried to swallow down his nervousness, his attention placed solely on the pitcher. The surroundings seemed to quieten down as he honed his focus.

From the lifting of his front leg to the stride, all the way to the release of the ball, Steve's eyes were wide open.

'Outside!'

His whole body jerked into action. Steve's front foot planted before he twisted his body and threw his arms into the swing. He could already see the trajectory of the pitch, he just needed to time it correctly.

Time seemed to slow down for him as the ball and the bat neared each other.

WHOOOOOSH

Then, Steve felt probably the best feeling in the world run through his hands and up to his arms.

THWACKK!

Steve followed through, his eyes glued to the ball which had sprung off his bat. Just from the feeling of hitting it, he knew that it had hit the sweet spot. But that didn't mean they were out of the woods just yet.

With a sense of anxiety, he watched silently as the ball traveled into the right outfield, its trajectory unknown.

"Run around the bases you idiot." Latrell said in an amused voice as he crossed home plate.

These words seemed to snap Steve out of his reverie. He had been too focused on where the ball would end up to remember he needed to run.

'Crap...!' Steve quickly surged forward towards 1st base, trying to make up for lost time. His eyes were still trying to pay attention to where the ball was going, only to see the right outfielder running with all of his might towards the fence.

"Catch it Caleb!" The center fielder shouted desperately. Having a Grand Slam hit against them in the 4th inning was a sure-fire way of losing a game. Especially when facing a pitcher like Ken.

Caleb's frame was athletic, not to mention he was rather tall. When the guy arrived at the fence, he turned his body towards the oncoming ball, his face filled with focus.

He bent his legs before leaping high into the sky and throwing his glove up to catch the ball. A collective hush washed over the field as everyone's attention was on the outfielder.

Pah~

The ball hit the tip of the glove, and just when it looked like it was going to bounce off, the fielder tightened his grip. Like this, the ball barely managed to stay locked into the webbing.

However, due to the speed in which the ball was sent into the glove, the fielders arm was knocked back into the fence.

"C—Crap!"

Despite how tightly he was gripping the ball, hitting his arm against the top of the fence was enough to dislodge the teetering leather ball. Caleb watched on in horror as the ball left his glove and floated over the fence.

Silence fell over the field as everyone tried to understand what had happened in the outfield.

"Y—YEAH!"

Coach Wyatt was the first to break the silence, a husky roar sounding out from the Gladiators bench. It was soon followed by the cheers of both the crowd and the Gladiators players themselves.

Steve who had almost stopped in place after seeing his ball wrestled from the air, suddenly felt dumbstruck.

"It went over?"

A feeling of elation surged from within as he just realized what he'd done.

"GRAND SLAM!" He jumped into the air, pumping his fist in triumph. Feeling overwhelmed with a sense of achievement, he almost forgot he needed to keep running around all the bases.

With his emotions running high, Steve practically skipped like a schoolgirl around the bases towards home. When he arrived, he saw his 3 teammates waiting to celebrate with him.

'Ah, this is the best...' he thought with satisfaction.

SLAP

SLAP SLAP

"A—AH! What are you doing?" He squealed in fright, now covering his backside.

"Nice homer!"

SLAP

"H—HELP."

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

## Chapter 649 - 649: Ace in the Hole (1)

"Wow that kid got lucky." Tony exclaimed after seeing the misfield.

"Mmm, it's rare that Caleb makes a mistake like that." Lorenzo added, "He was another player that we had our eye on, but the guy didn't want to leave Texas."

Tony nodded, since the professional leagues were so competitive, it wasn't uncommon for a player to be highly sought after by many teams. Unless one could offer a ridiculous contract, no one could guarantee that the player would choose their team.

This was why Tony had learned from early on to never get too attached to anyone. Even if he were to pull in favors from everywhere, the final say would come from the organization itself.

Thinking about this, his gaze moved to the freakish Junior celebrating with his teammates on the field. 'He has the potential... But will the organization see it that way?' He mused inwardly.

On the Dodgers bench, Coach Roberts let out a sigh. He could feel the mood on the field drop instantly after giving up the grand slam.

His eyes moved to Cade who seemed to be his usual stoic self on the mound and felt a little better. But upon seeing Brady with his head lowered, Coach Roberts could tell that he was affected by the play.

Without a word, he walked up onto the field and addressed the umpire, "Timeout please."

With a quick glance, the umpire nodded and made the gesture, allowing for the timeout. Since the Gladiators players were still leaving the field, it wouldn't disrupt the game play too much.

"Brady, lift your head." Coach Roberts said, placing his hand on the teen's shoulder. "It was a lucky hit, there's no use in beating yourself up about it."

Brady flinched, lifting his head slowly. He looked a little confused to see the coach out here, but he slowly understood. "I'll take the blame." He replied resolutely.

The coach shook his head, "You made the right decision walking the 4th batter. 9 times out of 10 it would have worked in our favor," he said matter-of-factly, "Now you need to move past it, we'll get the runs back somehow."

"Mmm. Don't worry coach, I won't let them score again this game..." Brady replied eventually.

Seeing the resolute expression on his catcher's face, Coach Roberts nodded in satisfaction. "Good. Leave everything out here on the field, I don't want us to have any regrets after this game ends."

With that, he walked away, thanking the umpire on his way back to the bench.

Brady watched his retreating figure, feeling a surge of determination flow through him. He turned to Cade on the mound, only to see the guy staring back at him. Letting out a small chuckle, he sent the guy a thumbs up.

'That damn Cade, does he ever feel any emotion?' He mused inwardly.

While the Dodgers were overcoming their crisis, the Gladiators had only just begun to calm down after the unexpected grand slam from Steve. The man of the moment was currently rubbing his backside, his face turned up in a pained scowl.

"You heartless bastards, why did you attack my poor derrière" He complained bitterly.

Ken let out an amused chuckle, his mood great. "What do you mean man? We're just showing our appreciation for your amazing play."

"Yeah," Latrell added, "We had so much appreciation that we just needed to let it all out." .

"Hahaha!"

The group were feeling jolly as they settled on the bench together. The coach was probably the most animated out of all of them, his grin almost a permanent fixture on his lips.

"I'm gonna need some ice tonight..." Steve muttered, feeling his backside throbbing from all the slaps.

"Ah, yeah you should probably grab some extra for when you use the toilet too." Ken replied, stifling an evil laugh.

"Eh? What do you mea—" Before he could finish his question, Steve's face paled, remembering the copious amount of hot sauce he was forced to eat at lunch today. Even now he could still feel the remnant sting on his lips.

Seeing this, Ken's lips turned up into a mischievous smile, "Let's just hope you don't need to go before we get back to the hotel. There's still the award ceremony after the game finishes as well."

This time, Steve turned to his friend, grabbing the front of his uniform, "N—No way man! We need to end this quick!" He exclaimed, almost pleadingly.

Ken shrugged, "Unless we're up by at least 8 runs by the 5th inning, we'll have to play the whole 9."

"Strikeout!"

"3 outs, changeover."

The sound of the umpire calling an end to the inning sounded, prompting Ken to pry Steve's hands from him and stand up. He casually fixed his uniform and grabbed his glove and hat, ready to take the field once more.

On the opposite bench, Coach Roberts began rounding up his players. While he had already had a chat to Brady in order to put out the immediate fire, he still needed to speak to the team as a whole.

"First of all, great effort in the outfield Caleb. If anyone else tried to grab that ball, they wouldn't have even been close." He said, nodding towards the tall outfielder.

At his words the team let out a resounding agreement. Though it sucked that they weren't able to prevent the Grand Slam, it was a fact that if any of them had tried, they would also fail.

Caleb felt a little better after the words of his coach, his head rising a little in response.

"Let's move past this inning and really focus. You've all had a chance to face the pitcher now, so like I said earlier, I want to see you making contact with the fastballs this time around." He said, his eyes scanning the players.

"Yes coach!"

"Mmm. Very good, it seems like you all haven't given up just yet. Bring it in." A small smile crept onto the man's face as he held his hand out.

"3, 2, 1"

"DODGERS!"

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

## Chapter 650 - 650: Ace in the Hole (2)

Ken and Steve walked out to the field together, the latter looking a little on edge.

"We can't wait any longer... These guys will be targeting your fastballs like crazy from now on since it's their 2nd at-bat." He said, narrowing his eyes.

Ken shrugged, "You're the boss, I'll throw whatever you tell me to."

Steve nodded, his mind deep in thought. Once he had it in his mind to end the game early, he became extremely motivated. Although it might seem a little unorthodox, Ken was on board nonetheless.

By the time Ken arrived on the mound, the first batter for the Dodgers was already waiting by the side. Based on his determined and fierce expression, even Ken could tell that the guy would come out swinging.

Ken turned to Steve and felt a new sense of appreciation for his friend. He was surprised at the guy's intuition, despite his seemingly lazy persona.

'I guess he's an EX- potential for a reason... ' Ken mused inwardly.

Ken bent down and collected the rosin bag, rolling it around in his right hand for a bit as he waited for the game to resume. His eyes moved to the opposing bench and could feel all of the Dodgers team staring at him menacingly.

'Heh, I guess I'm their biggest obstacle to get back in this game... ' Ken thought, a small grin tugging at the corner of his lips. Unfortunately for them, he had an extra motivated catcher who was going to make their lives tough.

"Batting 1st, Center outfield, Michael."

The announcer called up the next batter, prompting him to enter the batters box. His athletic frame was like a coiled python, ready to strike at the perfect moment.

But Ken didn't feel a shred of pressure, his eyes already moving to Steve behind home plate. Seeing the lead, he nodded.

Ken entered his wind-up with ease, bringing his hands to his chest and his leg up in one smooth movement. After kicking off his back leg, he took a long stride forward before twisting his body and sending the ball rocketing forth.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

Like Steve said, the Dodgers would be attacking his fastball from the get-go. Despite the ball sailing over the strike zone, Michael still swung hard at the ball.

'They're desperate... Things won't end well for them if they keep this up.' Ken thought, feeling a small hint of pity. But that quickly disappeared after remembering the haughty catcher from earlier.

He received the ball back from Steve who had called for another fastball. Ken merely nodded, letting his friend make all the decisions. Like Daichi, Steve was someone that Ken trusted to make the right calls when it mattered.

Especially now since they were already up by 4 runs.

WHOOOOSH

CLICK

"Foul."

A hint of frustration crept onto Michael's face as he watched the ball fly to the right of first base. Making contact with the ridiculous fastballs was hard enough, but trying to score a hit felt almost impossible.

'If I only swung a little earlier...' He complained inwardly.

Steve sent the ball back to Ken and crouched down, his face pulling into an imperceptible smile. He sent the signal to Ken who merely nodded in response. They were ahead in the count, which meant this next ball would have the most impact.

'I can't wait to see their faces...' Steve thought, his mischievous personality being roused.

Ken began his wind-up, striding forward with power. Once the ball left his fingertips, the spin on the ball caused it to wind through the air like a serpent slaking along the ground.



WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout!"

"What!?"

A few voices around the field shouted in surprise as the pitch went through to the catcher. Coach Roberts, Tony, Lorenzo and a couple of others in the crowd exclaimed in shock, not believing their eyes.

"Was that a slider?" Tony muttered, his eyes wide in shock as he stared at Ken on the mound like some sort of anomaly.

"I think so? Wait... Couldn't he only throw a fastball, curve and changeup? Were we given the wrong information?" Lorenzo asked, looking around in confusion.

Coach Roberts within the Dodgers bench suddenly turned solemn. His game plan was to make use of Ken's limited repertoire of pitches and his habit of not throwing outside of the strike zone to get some hits. However, the addition of a single slider was enough to overturn his tactics.

'This is a problem...!' He thought. His hand raised to his mouth subconsciously as he began to chew on his nails.

But no one was more confused than the batter Michael, who had timed his swing perfectly. He had been expecting to feel the impact of the ball during his swing and therefore had tensed accordingly.

But upon following through, he hit nothing but air. To someone who had never played baseball, it might not seem like much, but to those with experience, they knew the stifling sensation all too well.

It took him a few moments to steady himself during the follow through, but eventually Michael left the field and returned to the bench.

"How did I miss it by that much?" He muttered, taking a seat.

During his reflection, he didn't notice the solemn atmosphere of the bench who looked as if they'd just witnessed a crime. Only after raising his head did he find out everyone was silent.

"W-What's wrong with you guys?" He stammered, placing his hand on Brady's shoulder to get his attention.

Brady turned his head, his eyes looking rather lifeless. "Do you know what he just pitched to you?" He asked, sounding defeated.

"Y-Yeah, it was a fastball right? I just mistimed it." He stated, as if trying to convince himself.

But Brady shook his head, "He threw a slider, a nasty one at that..."

"Slider!?" Michael's eyes widened in confusion, "I thought he could only pitch 3 balls?" Search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"So did we..." Cade replied, his usual stoic expression looking a little stifled.

"So what now?"

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

## **Chapter 651 - 651: Unleashed (1)**

Unaware of the bombshell that he'd just dropped, Ken rolled his shoulder a few times wearing his usual grin. Meanwhile, word seemed to have spread within the crowd thanks to the shock of the scouts.

By now, everyone understood that Ken had been holding back throughout the tournament. In such a prestigious National Tournament, this guy had sealed his slider until the final game.

Some might call it arrogance, but in truth, it seemed like the guy hadn't needed it at all. In fact, he had not given up a single run despite holding back.

"I don't know whether to be impressed or annoyed..." Tony said, his tone full of exasperation.

"Yeah... Kids these days are brutal." Lorenzo chimed in, his eyes falling on Ken before drifting to the Dodgers players on the bench. It was clear that they weren't taking the revelation of Ken's slider very well.

"Does he even care about being scouted?" Tony murmured, tapping his pen on his notepad. Usually, players would try to showcase their talents in events like this as much as possible, increasing their odds of being seen by scouts and the like.

Yet Ken seemed to be the opposite.

'Wait... Maybe that's not the case?' Tony's eyes narrowed as he stared at Ken deeply. His mind was working, trying to figure out the guy's intentions.

'Why would he hold back until now? Is it some sort of tactic?' He thought, his gaze moving to the coach on the bench. But upon seeing the blank expression on Coach Wyatt's face, he frowned.

'Even the coach seems surprised...'

As he stewed on the matter, his figure finally froze. "No way..." He muttered, as if the revelation was too shocking.

The grin on Ken's face made it seem like he had everything planned. Like some sort of genius who had carefully laid out everything in advance to lull the competing teams into a false sense of security.

Yet now that the final game had begun, he decided to unleash his true potential.

'This guy... All he cares about is winning.'

As the revelation struck Tony, he felt a shiver down his spine. He looked at Ken's tall figure with a new sense of appreciation. When all the other players showcase their abilities to secure scholarship opportunities, Ken alone wanted nothing more than to win.

While it might be a means to an end for others, it was Ken's only goal. He didn't care about the eyes on him, all he wanted was the trophy.

A wide grin crept onto Tony's face as he came to this conclusion, "This competitive spirit... I truly never thought I would see it here."

"Hmm? Why do you look so happy?" Lorenzo asked, hearing his cousin mumbling.

Tony ignored him, all his attention trained on Ken. 'Is this what they call the Japanese fighting spirit?'

Back on the field, Ken's mind was preoccupied. 'Man it feels good to throw the slider again, I can't believe I forgot to tell Steve...' he thought, feeling a little embarrassed.

'Now that we've shown them the slider, their plan should be in shambles.'

"Batting 2nd, Short stop, Kyle."

As the next batter's name was announced, Ken watched as the guy walked up to the batter's box. Just from the guy's body language, it was clear that he had no confidence to hit the ball, especially after what had just transpired.

But just when Ken was feeling a little sorry for the guy, he saw Steve crouch down into position and call for a forkball.

Ken's face froze, 'Damn, this guy really wants to break their spirit...' He thought, stifling a laugh.

He eventually nodded, getting into position for the pitch. Performing his fluid wind-up, Ken sent the ball flying towards the plate.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

Tony's eyes practically jumped out of their sockets as he witnessed the next pitch.

"W—What the hell was that!?" He exclaimed all too loudly.

A few people in the vicinity looked at him oddly, but they soon ignored him. He didn't even notice their presence since he was too busy being utterly shaken.

"Splitter? No... That was a fork." He muttered, feeling explosions go off in his mind. Just how much had this guy been holding back during the tournament?

"Man, I give up. This kid is just too diabolical." Lorenzo said, feeling some pity for the Dodgers. It seemed that he'd kept not one, but two pitches sealed during the tournament, only to reveal them in the finals.

Coach Roberts who had done his best to recover his team's morale, suddenly paled. Ken was their biggest obstacle on the Gladiators, and that was even before he revealed the slider and forkball in his arsenal.

What would have been a tough match regardless, had turned out to be much worse than he had anticipated. If he had been given a couple of weeks to study and research the guy's pitches, it might have been a different story.

'Damn it... Is there nothing we can do?' He thought, biting his nails subconsciously.

The rest of the inning went just about how everyone expected. Since the Dodgers now had to worry about an addition two breaking balls, they began to crumble.

Their original game plan of attacking Ken's fastballs was now no longer viable, leading to the decline of their morale.

Soon enough, Ken struck the other two batters out in quick succession. The 4th inning for the Gladiators had been enough to stomp out any hope that the Dodgers had of making it a close game.

First it was the Grand Slam, followed by the reveal of Ken's 2 hidden pitches. It wasn't surprising that the High School team would be in a sorry state afterwards.

Unfortunately for them, their luck had yet to turn.

After getting the Gladiators 8th batter Nicolas out on a ground ball to the pitcher, their bad luck continued.

WHACK

The right fielder Adam managed to get a good base hit into the outfield, stopping just before the center outfielder could get to it.

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

## **Chapter 652 - 652: Unleashed (2)**

With that, the Gladiators were back around to Nico, the lead-off batter in their line up.

"Batting 1st, Short Stop, Nico."

As the guy came up to the batters box, his face was filled with determination. He was the only one of the starting batters to not get a hit yet which didn't sit well with him. Now that they were in an advantageous position, he wanted to keep the pressure on.

'Just a single will be enough...' He thought.

The catcher Brady seemed to be a little out of sorts compared to the previous innings. Perhaps if they weren't down 4 runs already, he might have been able to change gears, but the scoreboard was bearing down on him.

"Come on Cade! You can do it!"

"Let's go Dodgers!"

A few shouts from the crowd broke through Brady's concentration, or lack-thereof. Yet for some reason, the cheers only added to the pressure he was feeling.

He crouched down and called for a slider, wanting to get ahead in the count.

'As long as we can control the count, we can stop hemorrhaging runs.' He thought, steeling his resolve.

Cade nodded, his powerful frame entering the wind-up. In the next moment, his wicked slider came out, snaking through the air as it targeted Brady's glove.

Nico's eyes lit up, his body surging into action.

"Not. This. Time" He exclaimed, twisting his body and sending the bat flying towards the outside of the strike zone.

It seemed as if he was expecting the slider, but it was surprising that he would go for such a pitch.

WHOOOOSH

WHACK

Nevertheless, the bat made contact with the ball, catapulting it into the gap between first and second base. Adam was almost cleaned up by the errant ball during his run towards second. Luckily his athletic frame allowed him to leap over it, avoiding the most painful outcome.

"Nice hit Nico!"

The Gladiators cheered out in elation after seeing the guy had secured a base hit. They were now in a great scoring position once more with the clean-up batters showing up soon.

Brady let out a sigh, his body language showing his disappointment. Even Cade who was usually stoic, began to show signs of fatigue.

They couldn't be blamed. Not only had they played a lot of games over the past 4 days, but their situation also seemed rather hopeless. The Gladiators seemed to be a step ahead throughout the whole game.

"Battings 2nd, Center outfield, Latrell."

"Let's go Latrell! Hit it big!"

As the athletic guy came up to the batters box, Ken approached the field with his bat in his hand and helmet secured. His instincts were tingling, which meant that there were more runs coming.

He turned to the bench, only to see Steve giving him some thumbs up. Despite being out of earshot, he could tell what the guy was thinking.

'Hurry up and end the game.'

Ken shook his head, letting out a small chuckle. They were currently up 4 runs at the top of the 5th inning, which meant they needed at least 4 more in order to invoke the mercy rule.

Of course they would have to prevent the Dodgers from scoring once more, but Ken had all the confidence in the world to do so.

'Let's see what we can do.' Ken thought, his eyes focused on the pitcher.

Since he had the time now, Ken decided to try and make some adjustments to his mental capacity. In his last at-bat, he'd thrown caution to the wind and unleashed his entire focus, resulting in too much information pouring in.

This led to a splitting headache, which felt like his mind was going to explode.

'If I want to be able to use it, I'll have to set some limitations.' He mused inwardly, focusing in on the pitcher.

As he saw the pitcher wind-up, Ken slowly removed his shackles. At first, the information came in small drops, giving him small insights into how fast the ball would be, as well as some hints on the trajectory.

PAH

"Ball."

Ken nodded, turning his attention back to the pitcher. This time, he tried to unleash more of his mental capacity. Things seemed to slow down as his mind processed everything at a much faster pace.

WHOOOSH

WHACK

Hearing the ball being struck, Ken watched it fly into the left outfield. Since he was using his ability, he already knew that it would be a double.

He nodded in satisfaction, trying to remember the feeling he just experienced. Since everything to do with his mental ability had to be done manually and with his own intent, Ken needed to be thorough.

Thanks to the double, Adam crossed home plate wearing a grin. He walked past Ken, and gave him a high five before triumphantly heading back to the bench.

'Let's put an end to this.' Ken thought, making his way over.

"Batting 3rd, Pitcher, Ken."

As Ken stepped into the batters box, he could feel Brady shrink back slightly. But instead of trying to intimidate him further, Ken completely ignored him.

Seeing this, Brady felt a hint of frustration, followed by helplessness. He felt like Ken was looking down on him, but when he thought about it, it made sense. It was clear to him that they were on different levels.

But then, he grit his teeth. 'I don't care if we lose... I just want to strike you out.' He thought, turning his attention back to his pitcher. He made a signal, and placed the glove on the outside.

'I'll have you swinging at nothing but air...'

On the mound, Cade's expression shifted momentarily before nodding his head. Without a word, he began his wind-up and sent his slider out like a whip towards the outside of the strike zone.

Ken's eyes locked onto the ball, his mind being flooded with information. However, in the next moment he noticed something that he hadn't felt in quite a while.

'Is that Crunch Time activating?'

Seeing that the surroundings had come to a crawl, Ken's face wore a wicked grin. He pulled back his mental capacity and planted his front foot with power.

'I guess this is the dagger.'

WHOOOOOSH

THWACKK!

The ball rocketed into the right outfield, quickly disappearing on the horizon. Caleb the right outfielder didn't even move, his legs rooted to the spot.

"YEAHHH!" Steve shot to his feet with a wild cry.



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

## Chapter 653 - 653: Desperation (1)

Ken tossed his bat to the side, feeling the effects of Crunch Time wear off. His hands still felt the sting of smacking the ball, but instead of being painful, it felt invigorating.

In the corner of his vision, the bat he'd thrown to the ground suddenly snapped in two, causing him to freeze in place. Ken cleared his throat before tentatively checking to see if anyone noticed.

Thankfully, everyone seemed to be focused on the ball flying into the distance. Saying a silent prayer for his first wooden bat, Ken began his jog around the bases.

"What a monster..." Tony muttered, shaking his head incredulously. He had come here with no real expectation of finding any prospects, but Ken had shined brilliantly from the moment he laid eyes on him.

The ball seemed to hang in the air for such a long time that Ken was able to almost reach 2nd base before it disappeared over the fence.

Upon rounding the corner, he saw the grinning faces of Nico and Latrell waiting for him, ready to celebrate.

"Damn dude, nice homer."

"I'll be surprised if you don't get MVP of the tournament at this rate." Nico added, dishing out a few high fives.

However he was surprised to see Ken's face dim at his words. "What's wrong? You don't want to be the MVP?"

"Ah, no that's not it..." Ken replied with a sigh.

The mention of the MVP had reminded him that there was no system mission, which meant he was essentially participating in the tournament for free. It might seem like twisted logic, but Ken was used to being rewarded for his performance.

Latrell's face lit up in understanding a moment later, "Ah I know, you're upset that your bat broke." He said, causing Ken to freeze in place.

Without getting a chance to respond, Latrell jogged over and retrieved the bat which had seemingly split right in half. He returned and handed it to Ken, "Here, you might want to keep it as a memento."

Ken didn't know whether to laugh or cry, accepting the gesture from his teammate.

'Damn it... Will the coach make me pay for the bat?' Ken thought, remembering just how expensive these wooden bats were.

Upon returning to the bench, he was congratulated by the team for a stellar home run. Steve especially gave him a warm welcome, excitement painting his features.

It was clear that he wanted the game to end fast, to avoid any embarrassment when dealing with the repercussions of his spicy lunch.

Ken's gaze moved, only to see Coach Wyatt staring at him weirdly. The guy looked down at his fractured bat, his expression stern. Without out a word, he held out his hands, only speaking after a while, "Give it here."

Ken swallowed, passing the two pieces to the coach. He was about to apologize, when Coach Wyatt produced a black sharpie from his back pocket and handed it to Ken.

"What?"

"Sign this for me." The coach said, more of a statement than a request.

"Okay..."

Ken quickly put his signature on the larger part of the bat before handing the marker back to the coach, still not understanding what was happening.

The coach nodded in satisfaction, placing the bat into his bag wordlessly.

"Nice work out there." He said simply before shoing Ken off.

"Eh?" Ken looked around to see if anyone else had seen the interaction, but it seemed they were all focused on Max who had just stepped up to the batters box. Ken was forced to shrug it off and go take a seat.

However, he was a little thankful that the coach hadn't demanded to be compensated for the bat since they were so expensive.

Back on the field, the Dodgers looked similar to zombies. Now down 8 runs at the top of the 5th inning, their hopes at winning the match were all but dashed. In fact, they were now in position to lose via the mercy rule.

With Max the clean-up batter now in the batters box, things seemed even more dire for them.

Even Cade who had seemed unflappable during the first Grand Slam was showing signs of fatigue and emotion. Having worked so hard over the past 4 days, being this far behind in the final match was not something easily overcome.

Coach Roberts also seemed to be at a loss, his nails already losing a good chunk of their length thanks to his nail biting.

"It's over." Lorenzo stated, his expert eye moving over the field. "The Dodgers players look like they don't even want to be there anymore."

"Mmm, I wouldn't be surprised if your prospect sends it over the fence again." Tony replied, his tone showing that he'd lost interest in the game.

As if to back up his words...

THWACKK!

The crowd shouted in awe as the ball sailed into the outfield with force. The sound was like the dropping of a gavel, putting an end to the trial between the Dodgers and Gladiators.

To no ones surprise, the ball flew over the fence, bringing the score to 9-0 in favor of the Gladiators. By now, the victor of the match was evident, it was just a matter of time as to when it would finish.

The Dodgers battery managed to get both Steve and Dion out in their next at-bat's, but the damage had already been done.

"3 outs, changeover."

With the top of the 5th inning now in the books, the Dodgers were now on the fence. If they failed to secure two runs in this inning, the match would end via the mercy rule. Sometimes this was a blessing, but for it to end this way in the final match would leave a bad taste in their mouth.

As the Dodgers team congregated at their bench, Coach Roberts looked at his players. It was clear that morale was at an all time low, and nothing that he said would likely give them the motivation to turn this around.

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

## Chapter 654 - 654: Desperation (2)

Even if they had the guts, would it even be possible? With the reveal of Ken's forkball and Slider, all of their preparation was now a moot point.

"You guys did well..." Coach Roberts said, letting out a small sigh.

His eyes moved to the field where Ken was walking towards the mound confidently. In his heart, he knew that this guy was the main reason why they'd lost so bad. If it had been anyone else, they would have been able to at least get a few runs on the board.

"What are you saying coach? The game isn't over yet..." Cade replied with his head raised high.

Brady turned and looked deeply at his friend. The guy was one of the hardest workers that he knew, and had a never-say-die attitude. Even in this position, it looked like he would refuse to give up.

"Cade..."

Coach Roberts looked to the teen over 20 years younger than himself and let out another sigh. But this time a smile appeared on his face shortly after, "You're right Cade. It seems that you're a much stronger person than me." He admitted.

Feeling much lighter, the coach addressed the players. "Guys, we've come this far in the tournament, we're not about to give up just yet."

"While there's still time left on the clock, we need to push forward. I won't let people say that the Dodgers just rolled over in the final match." His words had strength, something that was absent just a few moments ago.

"Yeah!" Brady shouted, feeling his body heat up in response.

At first the team was a little hesitant, but the hype of those like Brady and Cade slowly began to take over them.

"Let's score some runs!"

Hearing the ruckus from the Dodgers bench, Tony's face changed, a small smile forming on his lips. "Mmm, very good. This is baseball, the game isn't decided until the last ball is pitched."

Soon enough, the Dodgers sent out their next batter.

"Batting 4th, 3rd base, Jackson"

"Let's go Captain! Smash it out of the park!"

"Hit it big!"

The Dodgers bench were loud, shouting out their support from the side of the field.

Ken raised his eyebrow in surprise, "That guy is the Captain?" he muttered, evaluating the large guy in the batters box.

'I thought it was the catcher...'

However, he shook his head in the next moment. Ken only needed to get a few more outs and the game would be over. Despite this pressure, he didn't feel a single bit of stress, his confidence on another level.

After receiving the lead from Steve, Ken nodded and entered his wind-up. Like many times before, his pitching motion was fluid, looking like a piece of art.

The ball flew towards the top of the strike zone, almost like it was rising.

WHOOOOSH

WHACK

"Eh!?"

Ken's eyes widened in surprise as the ball was hit cleanly. It flew into the center outfield, stopping just before Latrell for a base hit.

"YEAH CAPTAIN!"

The Dodgers bench went crazy for the base hit, acting as if they'd just hit the game-winning home run. However, Ken shook his head, quickly moving past it.

If their clean-up hitter was only able to get a single, it wasn't the worst thing in the world, especially since they were still up 9 runs.

"Batting 5th, Catcher, Brady."

As the announcer called for the next batter, Ken felt the familiar feeling of his showdown skill activating. He had used it back in the second inning, wanting to exact some vengeance on the cocky guy.

With his muscles now filled with power, Ken felt his confidence strengthen.

As he turned to Brady in the batters box, a grin formed on his face. 'You won't be getting a hit' He mused.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

The pitch was blindingly fast, something that even professionals would have trouble making contact with. Having every grade increased by two for a short period of time was taxing, but it was also super effective.

Ken's pitching was now at the EX grade after increasing by two grades. This meant that he was technically pitching at the level of a Major League Pitcher, at least temporarily.

Brady grit his teeth, trying to hold back the sense of helplessness gnawing at him. No matter how he thought about it, there was no way he could make contact with these pitches.

Sure enough, the next pitch came shortly after, blowing right by him to the catcher once more.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

"Second!"

Steve was a little slow off the mark, his hand still feeling tingles from the ridiculous power of Ken's pitches. He quickly got to his feet and threw the ball towards second base with all of his might.

"Crap!"

The moment it left his hands, Steve knew that he'd messed up. The ball sailed over the head of Ryan on 2nd base, forcing him to jump high in order to try and reach it.

Jackson slid onto 2nd base easily, but a quick glance was enough to tell him that he could get more. He jumped to his feet and began to sprint towards 3rd base while the Gladiators collected the overthrow.

Latrell pounced on the ball and sent a desperate throw to 3rd base. Thankfully this one was accurate, however it was not in time.

"YEAH JACKSON!"

"Nice running Captain!"

The Dodgers bench was hyped after the miraculous play. After being stifled for 4 full innings, seeing some signs of life was enough to motivate them greatly.

"S—Sorry guys." Steve said, holding up his glove in apology.

Ken frowned a little, but quickly moved past it. He hadn't expected to be in this position, especially while showdown was active.

Steve asked for a fastball down the middle, his expression stern behind his face mask. It seemed that he wasn't impressed with his own mistake earlier and wanted to make up for it.

Ken nodded before sending a blitzing fastball right where he was asked.

But his face changed in the next moment as he saw Brady hold out his bat with two hands, getting into position for a bunt.

'Bunt!?'

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

## **Chapter 655 - 655: End (1)**

'Bunt!?'

Ken was shocked, not expecting the catcher to go for a bunt with 2 strikes. All it would take was a foul for the guy to be out, but it seemed like the guy had already decided to take the risk.

With surprising dexterity, Brady tracked the ball and performed a push bunt towards first base. Ken faltered for a moment before dashing towards the ball, his eyes locked onto the ball's path.

When it hit the ground, it seemed to teeter along the foul line. For a few tense moments, it was unclear if the ball would go foul, or stay fair.

Ken glanced to his right, only to see Jackson flying towards home plate like a freight train. He quickly made up his mind, reaching down, not waiting for the ball to go into the foul zone.

Using his bare hand, he collected the ball, sending a quick throw to first base where the catcher Brady was running to.

"Out."

However, since Ken had thrown it to first base, Jackson was free to step onto home plate, garnering the very first run for the Dodgers.

"YEAH!"

"Nice bunt Brady!"

The Dodgers bench erupted into celebration having finally got a run on the scoreboard. For those who weren't aware of the score, they might think that it was the winning run with the way the opposing team celebrated.

A few cheers came out from the crowd in admiration of the Dodger's tenacity. To be so fired up even while losing was rather admirable, especially for some High School kids.

Tony nodded in appreciation, but for a different reason. "He made the right choice." He muttered, scribbling something down on his notepad.

Lorenzo seemed unconvinced, "Well that depends on who you ask I guess." He replied, shrugging his shoulders.

"From what I understand of Ken, he only cares about winning. Personal stats like not allowing any runs means nothing if he can't win in the end." Tony explained, feeling a sense of pride for some reason.

"Haaah, so he's the ultimate team player is what you're saying?" Lorenzo sighed, feeling like it was a waste.

Tony raised his eyebrow and stared at his cousin, "When did I say that?"

Taken aback a little, the big guy tried to defend himself, "Didn't you imply that by saying he was selfless?"

"No no, I'm saying he's the ultimate competitor. He'll do anything to win, even keeping his pitching arsenal hidden from his own team to do so." Tony stated with a grin.



Back on the field, Ken wiped the sweat from his brow after completing the play. He was unaware of the giant misconception that the Red Socks scout had fabricated about him, but even if he knew, he wouldn't care.

Of course he loved winning and didn't care about personal stats, but he wouldn't go to such lengths as hiding his pitches in order to win a simple tournament like the WWBA.

Ken was the type who would put everything on the line in every game, regardless of what game it was. Even in a friendly, Ken would not hold back. This was his brand of baseball.

As for throwing the ball to first instead of trying to prevent the runner from scoring, Ken evaluated that the former had more chance of success. Adding to the fact they were up by 8 runs, it made no sense to take such a risk.

With the score now 9-1 in favor of the Gladiators, Ken needed to secure two more outs in order to end the game. If the Dodgers wanted any chance of playing till the end, they still needed an additional run on the board.

But it would not be easy.

"Batting 6th, Left outfield, Timothy."

After suddenly getting a run on the board, the Dodgers team were fired up. As the lanky 6th batter appeared in the batters box, his face wore a determined expression.

'They say that a beast backed into a corner will bite... I guess that also applies in baseball.' Ken mused, a small grin pulling at the corner of his lips.

But Ken had no intention of letting them bite back. Not after they'd gotten into such a commanding position.

After seeing the lead from Steve, Ken's grin went wider. It seemed that his friend was also keen to put an end to this match.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

A two-seam ball broke inside, easily passing the wild swing of the 6th batter.

WHOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

"Strikeout!"

3 successive fastballs put an end to Timothy, inching the Dodgers closer to the jaws of defeat. With another out, the Gladiators would clinch the WWBA Tournament and be crowned the winners.

The frenzy of the Dodgers seemed to have hit a wall with the last out, at least until they began to cheer loudly from the bench.

"YOU CAN DO IT LANDON!"

"HIT IT BIG!"

A hint of desperation was evident in their cheers, creating a tense atmosphere.

"Batting 7th, 2nd base, Landon."

'One more out and it's over.' Ken thought in his heart, gripping the ball tightly in his hand. He turned to Steve who had called for another fastball, the fourth in a row.

Ken nodded, getting into position. Though the Dodgers had been aiming for his fastballs, after revealing his two additional pitches, they were basically swinging at anything and everything.

Essentially, they were like fish in a barrel.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

Steve threw the ball back to Ken, feeling his stomach churn slightly.

'Crap... Is it happening already?' He thought, a look of desperation creeping onto his features. 'We need to end this now!'

The next pitch came barreling down the lane, another fastball. It was slightly above the strike zone and would likely be a 50/50 call depending on how Steve was able to frame it.

Landon's eyes narrowed as he put his all into the swing.

WHOOOOSH

WHACK!

The entire field went silent as they watched the ball fly into the outfield with force.

"LET'S GO!"

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

## **- Chapter 656 - 656: End (2)**

### **Chapter 656 - 656: End (2)**

Everybody but Latrell stood rooted on the spot, watching as the ball soared through the air into the center outfield. Ken felt his heart sink, not expecting his pitch to be hit at such a point in time.

All he could do now was hope that it wouldn't go over the fence, otherwise they would be subject to another 4 innings of baseball.

Latrell sprinted towards the back wall, showing off his intense speed. He arrived at the back fence rather quickly and turned towards the ball which was still in the air. For a moment, he stood still, giving the impression that he wouldn't have a chance at catching it.

However, he casually held out his glove in front of his face and easily caught the ball.

Pah~

He quickly showed it to the umpire not far away, who made the call.

"Out! Game set, Gladiators!"

"YEAH!"

The field erupted into cheers while Ken let out a sigh of relief on the mound. The hit had been far too close for comfort, despite him throwing it high, it had carried much further than he would have anticipated.

Caught in his relief, Ken had almost forgotten what usually came after winning.

'Crap, I need to hide.' He thought, his eyes darting around the field. He looked directly to where Steve would have been, but frowned since he couldn't see him.

'Where the hell did Steve go?'

It was only then out of the corner of his eye, he saw the guy sprinting off the field, shedding his gear and holding his backside. It seemed that the prophesied dump had arrived earlier than expected.

"PFFT"

Ken felt his sides begin to cramp as he tried to hold in his laughter. It was only when he was approached by his team for celebrations that he was finally able to calm down.

Now that they had secured victory, Ken felt a sense of accomplishment. While it wasn't at the same level of Koshien, he had actually enjoyed competing with his teammates over the past 4 days.

While nothing would come out of it for now, Ken believed that he'd done enough to attract some more colleges for his consideration in the future.

"Good game man."

Ken span around after hearing the deep voice, only to see the opposing pitcher Cade nearby, holding his hand out for handshake. Ken evaluated him slightly before grasping the hand.

"You too man, you pitched well." He responded respectfully. Ken was one to respect his opponents, unless they pissed him off, like the catcher from earlier.

"Heh, not as good as you apparently." Cade said self-deprecatingly.

Ken shook his head, "Comparison isn't always good. I'm sure you have some good College offers already." He replied.

"Mmm. I'm sure you'll have some as well soon." After saying as much, Cade moved on and began to shake the remainder of his teammates hands.

As if following after their ace, the rest of the Dodgers made their way over and did the same, shaking hands with their adversaries. While it wasn't like Japan where one would bow to each other before and after the game, Ken still liked this kind of thing.

When it came to shaking Brady's hand, the guy looked to be rather devastated. However, he bit his bottom lip and bowed his head, "I'm sorry for trash talking earlier." He said sincerely.

It seemed that he'd learned his lesson in provoking Ken.

"Haha, don't worry about it. I love a good trash talking." Ken responded, gripping his hand a little tighter, "Your squeeze bunt was great by the way."

"T—Thanks." Brady replied, his face lighting up a little.

While this was happening on the field, Coach Wyatt and Coach Roberts shook each others hand.

"Congratulations on the win coach. Withholding the slider and forkball was a real devious strategy, it really threw a spanner in our plans." Coach Roberts said, wearing a wry smile.

"Ah... You see, Ken only told me just before the game that he could pitch those two..." Coach Wyatt responded weirdly.

"Huh?"

Coach Roberts stared at him blankly, his gaze moving to Ken on the field. "You mean to tell me that it was his idea to bring out those pitches for the finals?" He wore a pensive expression, as if he was shocked by the abilities of the Junior pitcher.

Coach Wyatt shrugged, "I don't know all the details, but I don't think Ken is that kind of person. He's only been in the team for a couple of months, there's a chance that our Catcher didn't know he could pitch those two balls."

However, this only made Coach Roberts even more confused. "Right... Well, congratulations all the same coach. Let's hope we can match up next year with a whole different team." He responded.

The thing about 18U tournaments was that every year nearly the whole team would change. With more than half the players moving onto college, it made it quite difficult to keep any sort of consistency.

"Sure thing, maybe we'll see each other back in Texas."

With that, the two separated and rounded up their teams, sending them back to their benches. Despite the game ending, there was still a large amount of people left in the audience, likely for what was to come next.

The charismatic announcer who had graced everyone's ears before the match had begun came onto the field, holding his microphone.

"Wow, what an amazing final game we just witnessed here at East Cobb Fields. Thank you all for attending the WWBA Tournament sponsored by Perfect Game, we appreciate your presence."

"To all teams who attended the tournament, we'd like to thank you for putting on a great show for us. But now it is time for the award ceremony where we hand out the awards for great performances."

In the Gladiators bench, Steve managed to sneak back in, finding a seat beside Ken. His face looked a little pale, likely from the war he'd just experienced in the bathroom.

"You all good man?" Ken asked, unable to wipe the smirk off his face.

"I hate you..."

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

## **Chapter 657 - 657: Celebration (1)**

"Congratulations to your champions... The Adidad Gladiators!"

The crowd erupted into cheers as the Gladiator's came up to the forefront to collect their large trophy. They were all prompted to stand together and those at the front were tasked with holding a sign which read; "WWBA 2019 Tournament Winners."

"Everyone smile!" The photographer said, placing his face close to the camera.

However, he frowned in the next moment, "You there, tall guy. Can you try be a little bit more natural?" He asked, pointing to Ken.

Ken froze, his face turning into a scowl. He had never been good at getting his photo taken and was often picked on by the photographers wherever he went. People might even say that he didn't have the face to be a professional athlete, despite being handsome.

It wasn't a problem if he wasn't posing for a photo, but the moment he tried to smile, there was something unnatural about it.

"Oh don't worry Mr. Photographer, Ken's face is always like that." Steve quipped, leading to an eruption of laughter from his teammates.

Ken turned to the source of the ridicule and sent a dark look towards his friend who promptly tried to hide. After a few more tries, the photographer seemingly gave up, muttering something about his job being difficult.

"Alright everyone, we have a few more awards to give out, so please stand by."

\*\*\*

Around a bit more than an hour later, Ken and the others arrived back at the hotel. By the time everything was over, the sun was already sitting on the horizon, ready to retreat for the day.

Everyone was in a great mood, apart from Steve who seemed to be suffering from stomach cramps on his way back. Yet, this only made Ken amused.

"Alright guys, I know you're all tired. But I want us to at least have a little celebration tonight over dinner. It won't be much, but I think you all deserve it." Coach Wyatt stated as the bus stopped.

He'd been wearing a satisfied grin ever since the end of the game was announced, causing his mustache to be permanently fixed upwards.

"Head up to your rooms and get ready, we'll meet downstairs in an hour for the celebrations." He finished, gesturing for everyone to depart the bus.

Ken got up from his chair and was one of the first to leave the bus. He waited for Steve since the two shared a room together and used the same key.

However, upon seeing his captain Max with a stunned expression on his face, Ken raised his eyebrow in question.

"Max? Everything okay man?" He asked with concern.

"Hmm? Oh... Yeah, it's great." Max replied, as if his mind was off with the fairies.

But he shook his head, a sudden burst of excitement appearing in his eyes. "I spoke to one of the scouts after the game... It's not official yet, but they want to offer me a scholarship."

His voice was whispered, almost like he didn't want to get his hopes up in case it fell through. But it was clear to Ken that the guy was ecstatic with the news, polar opposite to his mood last night.

Ken couldn't help but smile warmly, placing his hand on the guys shoulder. "You deserve it man... What College is it? Are they a D1 College?"

Max nodded, "Georgia Tech..."

Ken's eyes widened, "Wow, I've heard good things."

"Mmm. I think the scout said his name was Lorenzo. Hopefully he wasn't just talking out of his backside." Max replied, however his face froze in the next moment as he reached into his pocket.

"H—Hello. Yes this is Max Blair..."

"Y—Yes, Mr. Lorenzo is nice to hear from you again."

Ken watched the guy walk off with the phone up to his ear, feeling a sense of relief. It seemed that Max's performance during the tournament was enough to showcase what he was capable of.

After nearly everyone had gotten off the bus, Steve was the last to come out. His face was pale and he was holding his stomach, almost as if he'd taken a bullet to the gut.

"Alright soldier, let's head up to the room and get ready for the celebration." Ken said, putting his arm around the guy's shoulder.

"I don't want to go to the toilet again... It hurts." He complained, leaning against Ken.

"I know buddy, but you gotta go potty okay? Otherwise your stomach will continue to cramp up." Ken rationalized with him, sounding like a father talking to their toddler.

At any other time, Steve probably would have quipped back, but he was too busy trying not to fall to the ground to back chat.

Eventually, the two went up to the room where Ken decided to shower first. There was no way that he'd allow Steve to use the toilet before he went for a shower... That was one way to ruin his appetite.

After around 20 minutes, Ken walked out of the bathroom, "It's all yours" he said, addressing Steve who was crumpled to the floor.

Ignoring the guy's complaints, Ken sat on his bed and got out his phone, intending to send some messages out to his family and girlfriend. One thing that he had worked on since coming to America was keeping in contact with everyone regularly.

He didn't want to grow apart from Ai, or Daichi for that matter. These were still two of the most important people to him in this life.

"Hmm?"



Ken was a little surprised to see an email notification that wasn't from the people he was expecting.

"Invitation to the Perfect Game Showcase?" He mumbled, reading through the body of the email.

Ken had heard of the showcase from Nico and Latrell when looking at their Perfect Game profiles on the website. They had said that he probably would receive an invitation after the tournament, but he didn't expect it so soon.

"It's only been over an hour since the tournament finished..." He muttered in confusion.

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

## **Chapter 658 - 658: Celebration (2)**

He looked at the date before frowning. Since it was Summer break, he had wanted to head back to Japan before he started his Senior year. That way he would be able to spend time with both Ai and Daichi, perhaps even his old school friends as well.

'Early July... That should be fine.' Ken thought. Although it might be summer break over here, Japan didn't start their break until mid-July.

He was thoughtful for a little while, only for his eyes to light up a moment later, followed by a small grin.

'The end of Mika's training plan will be in a couple of weeks. I'll be able to take the SSS-Grade Physical Elixir before joining the showcase.'

Ken was practically salivating at the idea of improving his physical grades. It had felt like he'd been stagnant for the longest time, yet now he was not far away from breaking through his limits.

Of course he could have taken the Elixir whenever he wanted, but he felt that this way was better. If the System were to ever shut down or upgrade again, then he would at least have some peace of mind that he wouldn't regress like before.

'Ok it's settled. I'll attend the showcase and head back to Japan afterwards for a month or so. Then maybe I can spend time with Grandpa before my Senior year starts.' Ken thought, making his mind up.

He lowered his head and began to send off some messages to his family and girlfriend to let them know of his results. He would save talking about his trip to Japan after hashing out all the details in person with his mother and father.

Once he was done, Steve had already returned from the bathroom. As he opened the door, a horrid smell wafted into the room, mixed amongst the steam of the shower.

Ken turned up his nose and pointed to his friend, "Close the damn door!" he shouted in horror.

Steve froze, but his face soon bore his trademark mischievous smile. "What was that?"

He began to open and close the door, fanning both the steam and the smell it contained into the small bedroom. What was originally just a small stench, suddenly filled the whole place.

"BASK IN MY STENCH!" He shouted, laughing in a carefree manner. That was, until he saw Ken's dark expression.

"Ha...haha, it was just a joke." Steve said, promptly closing the door. However, the damage had been done already.

Seeing Ken's figure approach, still garbed in a towel, Steve panicked, slowly backing up until he was against the wall.

"P—Please no! I'm sorry..."

Steve pleaded with Ken who looked like he was about to enact some violence upon him. However, his pleas turned into a horror-filled scream when he saw Ken about to remove his towel.

"O—Oi what are you doing man?" He squealed, expecting to see a snake and bush revealed from behind the veil. However, upon seeing that Ken was wearing underwear, he breathed a small sigh of relief.

CRACK

At least that was until the towel was used to whip him on his exposed skin.

"YOWCH!"

CRACK CRACK

Around 25 minutes later, both Ken and Steve appeared in the hotel restaurant, only to see the Coach at a large table. Usually they ate apart in their separate groups, but it seemed the Coach had managed to convince the restaurant to put them all together.

"Ken, Steve, come give us a hand." The coach called out, waving them over.

The two walked over, helping to move some of the tables and chairs so that everyone had a place to sit. Soon enough, more and more of their teammates arrived, adding to the bristling atmosphere.

Around 10 minutes later, everyone had arrived at the table and had already begun to grab drinks.

"Okay guys, listen up." The coach called out, getting everyone's attention.

The chatter instantly died down as they all turned to the coach.

"First of all, I wanted to thank everyone for their hard work for this tournament. You all showed that you have the ability to act like professionals, both on and off the field." His words were sincere, and it seemed like he was holding back some emotion.

"I would have been happy with making it to the single-elimination bracket, but it seems like I might have sold ourselves short." He said, letting out a chuckle.

"Pfft, you think Ken would have let us get knocked out in the single-elimination bracket?" Steve piped up, garnering some laughter from the others.

"Hmm?" Ken looked around, only to see his teammates looking at him fondly.

"Yeah, you're right. I underestimated just how much you guys wanted to win. Well, I wanted to take this time to celebrate what we managed to accomplish as a team. Please raise your glasses and lets make a toast."

Hearing this, everyone grabbed their drinks which was mainly soda or juice and held them up. "To the WWBA Tournament Champions."

"To the Champions!"

Despite the drinks not being alcoholic, everyone emptied the contents of the cups into their mouths and slammed them back onto the table. Following this, everyone began to chatter amongst themselves happily.

"Go help yourself to the buffet, make sure you leave room for dessert though." Coach Wyatt added, flashing a grin.

"Come on Mr. MVP, let's grab some food." Steve said, nudging Ken in the arm.

Ken let out a groan. Just hearing the words MVP made him think about the lack of a system mission for the tournament, making him annoyed.

Steve raised his eyebrow in question, but decided to drop it. "I'm gonna eat a lot tonight~" He stated with a grin.

"The next dump you take better be in the public toilets..." Ken warned, his eye twitching.

"Y—Yes sir..." Steve replied, half in fear.

With that, the Gladiators team celebrated into the night together. Having gone through such an experience together, they were closer than ever as a team.

It wasn't until around 11pm that the coach ordered everyone to go to bed. They had a flight back to Austin the next morning, one that they couldn't miss.

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

## **Chapter 659 - 659: Showcase (1)**

A few weeks later, a red Silverado pulled into the parking lot of a High School. Since there were so many cars already, it was forced to park far away from the entrance.

"Dude, I know that you don't have a car. But did you have to drag me 3 hours away to Dallas?" The familiar whine of Steve broke the silence.

Ken picked his ear, as if uninterested in the complaints. "You might want to check your engine before we leave today, I can hear a high pitched and annoying whine."

Steve blinked a few times before letting out a sigh. "I still don't know why we needed to attend this showcase. There would have been one closer to home in a couple of months."

Ken shrugged, "I've got nothing better to do this weekend. Plus, we just finished our training plan. I want to see how much you and I have improved."

"Mmm, I guess you're right..." Steve replied, his eyes growing distant. Just remembering the torture he'd had to endure for the past 3 months was enough to make him feel weak. But he couldn't deny that it had worked.

"Once I understand our improvements, I can come up with a more difficult training plan for our Senior year." Ken added, a small smile creeping onto his face.

Steve froze, "M—More difficult...?"

"Well the only way to improve is to keep pushing forward." He said, matter-of-factly.

"R—Right... Well we should probably go in." Steve quickly changed the subject, choosing to ignore the future of pain and suffering that was in store for him.

With that, the two alighted from the truck.

"You head in, I just want to send a message." Ken stated, shooing his friend away.

After Steve left, Ken looked around for a moment before opening up his system window.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 5 (64,880/1,000,000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 18

TALENT ASSESSMENT: SSS+

POTENTIAL: EX-

MAJOR POINTS: 64,880

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS

-SYSTEM SHOP

-LOTTERY (Locked)

-IMAGE TRAINING

-IDENTIFY

-TRAINING PLAN

-MENTOR

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: SSS+

>Pitching: SSS+

>Fielding: A+

>Game Intelligence: S+

>Mental: EX-

>Skills: 21

>Traits: 2

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. SSS+)

Balance and Coordination: SSS+

Agility: SSS

Strength: SSS

Stamina: EX-

Seeing the huge increases brought on by the Physical Elixir he'd taken just a few days ago filled Ken with a sense of satisfaction. Although it had been the most painful one he'd consumed by far, it was clear that it was worth it.

'Now that my physical grades are all above SSS, I wonder how I'll do in this showcase?' Ken thought, clenching his hand into a fist.

This was the highest physical peak he'd reached, yet his body was still only 18. Compared to his emaciated figure in his previous life, the difference was like night and day.

"Hmm Ken? Is that you?" A voice called out, grabbing his attention.

Ken moved his head, only to see a large man with his gut hanging out under his shirt. The guy was wearing a cowboy hat, and didn't seem familiar.

"Yes, I am Ken... Can I help you?" Ken asked, trying to sound polite.

"A—Ah, sorry where are my manners." The man said, rubbing his right hand on his jeans which seemed rather dirty.

"The name's Tex, I work with your father at the University of Texas." He said, holding out his hand.

Ken's eyes widened slightly and he lowered his guard a little, "Nice to meet you. Are you in the administration?"

"Hehe goodness no. I'm one of their scouts." Tex stated, looking rather proud.

However, upon hearing this, Ken's face turned grave. "Mr. Tex... Do you know the repercussions for making contact with an amateur athlete before the appointed time?" His tone was frosty, filled with both annoyance and anger.

'Ah crap!'

Tex quickly took back his hand, his face turning into one of panic. "M—My bad."

He knew that if they were caught not only would University of Texas possibly be sanctioned, but Ken would also suffer if word got out.

Tex quickly looked around and turned on his heel, "Please forget this meeting ever happened Ken..." With that he scampered off, looking rather comical with his large belly sticking out.

But Ken was not amused. Perhaps it may have been an innocent mistake, but to Ken it involved his future as a professional player. This was not something that could be taken lightly.

"Thankfully no one was around to see it..." Ken mumbled, his eyes darting around the parking lot. But just as he thought this, he saw a person walking their dog along the path.

'C—Crap... Did they see?' He thought in panic.

However, after seeing the harness of the dog, and the thick black glasses of its owner, Ken let out a sigh of relief. 'It's just a blind person...'

Letting out a sigh of relief, Ken quickly made his way into the school, looking for Steve. Thankfully it didn't take long for him to see the guy, since he was not far from the entrance.

"What took you so long?" Steve quipped. He was fidgeting quite a lot, likely from nervousness.

"Long story." Ken stated, making it clear that he didn't want to talk about it. "What are you lining up for?"

"We need to check in apparently."

"Fair enough."

After around 5 minutes, it was finally their turn as they headed up to the makeshift counter.

"Names."

"Ken Takagi and Stephen Adams." Ken replied politely.

The woman scoured the sheets in front of her before ticking off their names. She then grabbed a red shirt from the ground beside her and handed it to Ken.

"You're in team 1, head over to where they're warming up. Try and be quick, we'll be taking photo's shortly."

At the mention of photo's, Ken's face turned up in a frown. But he couldn't complain, especially since he didn't even have a profile photo on the Perfect Game website.

"Stephen Adams, you're in team 4." She said, handing him a yellow shirt.

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

## **Chapter 660 - 660: Showcase (2)**

"Ah... We're in different teams?" Steve said, seeming a little disappointed. However, the woman behind the counter didn't seem to care at all.

"Ma'am, I'm not sure that you want to split us up. I don't think any other catcher here can catch Ken's pitches." Steve spoke up a little anxiously.

The woman scoffed, "We have some of the best under 18 players in the Southwest here, I highly doubt that it will be an issue."

Steve couldn't reply to the harsh words, so he just let out a sigh and moved to the side, his head lowered. "Well, good luck out there buddy." He said, raising his head towards his friend.

"O—Oi!"

However, Ken had already walked off towards his team, completely disregarding him. This caused Steve to let out another sigh, feeling his anxiety increase.

'It should be okay right?' He thought.



As Ken made his way over to where the team was warming up, the first thing that he noticed was the tense atmosphere. Only a few of the players sent him a brief glance before returning to their stretches.

'Hmm, they look nervous.' Ken thought inwardly.

"You there, why aren't you in uniform?" A deep voice called out from the side.

Ken turned his head, only to see a middle aged man pointing at him. At first, Ken was going to answer rudely, however he quickly realized that this was likely the coach for team 1.

"My apologies coach, I only just received the uniform. I'll get changed right away." He said, dropping his bag on the ground.

Ken took off his shirt on the spot, throwing it to the ground on top of his bag. His toned muscles were on full display, showing just how well-trained and symmetrical his body was.

"Ahem... Be quick, we've got a long day ahead." The middle-aged man said, turning his head from the sight in front of him.

After Ken got changed, he felt a few more pairs of eyes on him. Upon seeing his name on the back of the shirt and the number 1 assigned to him, many even began to whisper amongst themselves.

"Hey, you must be Ken." A figure approached him, holding out his hand.

Ken looked the guy up and down, he seemed to be one of those kids who had attended private school and was from a well off family from the way he held himself. Of course Ken wasn't one to judge from appearances alone, so he replied respectfully.

"That's me, sorry I didn't catch your name." He said, grasping the hand.

"Taylor Jenkins, I'm a catcher for the Upstate Mavericks. I'm looking forward to catching your pitches." The guy said, giving him a warm smile.

"I see. I'm sorry, I don't think we've met before." Ken asked with some confusion. How did this guy know that he was a pitcher?

"Heh, we never met personally, but my team also competed at the WWBA Tournament a few weeks ago." Taylor replied matter-of-factly.

"Ah, I see. Well it's nice to formally meet you then."

"Likewise. Is this your first time at a PG Showcase?"

Ken grinned, "Could you tell?"

"Nah, It was just a guess." Taylor replied a little sarcastically. "How about I run you through what we'll be doing?"

"Mmm." Ken nodded, "That would be a lot of help."

"Alright no problem. We'll be doing some drills today, depending on what position you play. Even though you're a pitcher, you also played in the outfield right?" He asked.

Ken rolled his eyes, "Yeah, I didn't have much choice though."

"Alright, well if you can play outfield, I'd suggest taking part in the outfield drill. We'll also have batting practice a bit later where they test your exit velocity. Apart from the physical drills, we'll also have a game later today."

"Seems easy enough."

"Yeah, it's pretty simple. I've been doing this every year since I was 14, so you came to the right person." Taylor added with a smile. He seemed rather confident and easy to talk to, which made Ken drop his guard a little.

"Mmm. Do you have any tips for me?" Ken asked off-handedly. He didn't expect a proper response, especially since they were all competitors.

"Sure. The main purpose of the showcase is to get the attention of coach's and scouts. Try and be respectful if a coach approaches you or gives you some feedback. Also try and treat the drills as if you are in an actual game."

Taylor paused, looking around slightly before continuing on, "Make sure you focus on technique, particularly your batting and pitching mechanics. Generally the coach's aren't looking for velocity and power, but technique instead."

Ken's eyes widened, not expecting Taylor to reveal so much to someone who he'd just met. For some reason, he felt like he was a really good guy.

"Well thank you for that, I'll definitely take heed of your words." Ken replied bowing slightly.

"Hey no problem, we gotta look out for each other right? Who knows, we might even join the same college in the future." The guy added, sending him a wink.

"Ha ha... Sure thing."

"Alright, everyone head over here to get your mugshot. Once you're done we'll start playing some catch before moving into the physical drills." The coach stated, his deep voice getting everyone's attention.

Ken had to stop himself from rolling his eyes in response. He hated getting his photo taken, professionally or otherwise. Just thinking about this made him remember the team photo posted on the Perfect Game website after the tournament.

Everybody else in the photo seemed to be happy apart from him who looked like he was on trial for murder.

'I just don't understand why I can't smile naturally for photos...!' Ken thought, letting out a sigh.

"After you man." Taylor said, gesturing for Ken to go before him.

"Nope, I'll go last. Otherwise we'll be here for too long." Ken shook his head, moving to the side.

Taylor looked at him with confusion, but eventually dropped it. It wasn't until afterwards that he understood what Ken meant.

"Help me out here man... Can you just smile naturally?" The photographer asked, his face looking impatient.

"This is the best you'll get..." Ken replied with annoyance.

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