

Major League System

Chapter 661 - 661: 60-yard Dash (1)

Thankfully, the photographer gave up after a few more attempts, allowing Ken to roam free shortly after. He then followed the pack of his new teammates out onto the field for a bit of catch.

"You wanna team up?" Taylor asked, lobbing a baseball to him.

"Sure, let me grab my glove." Ken had no reason to refuse. Taylor was the only one who had introduced himself out of the team, so it made the choice rather convenient.

After grabbing his glove, he took a spot in the lineup and began to play some catch. Since it was a pretty standard warm up drill for most teams, everyone knew what they were doing.

Ken found out pretty quickly that Taylor had a good arm. He wasn't too surprised, especially since the guy was a catcher, they needed to have a good arm in order to throw the ball to the bases.

"Start throwing seriously." Taylor called out after sending a strong throw back to Ken.

Ken let out a chuckle. He remembered Taylor's earlier advice about taking even the warm ups seriously, so he didn't complain. With a quick step forward, he sent a throw with around 80% power right back at the guy.

PAH

"Nice~"

The drill continued for around 5 minutes before the coach stepped in.

"Alright listen up, we'll be starting with the 60-yard dash. I need everyone to follow me, we've got a tight schedule so no dilly-dallying." The middle-aged coach spoke up, adjusting his visor.

The team did as they were told silently. Out of the 12 teens, only Ken and Taylor seemed to be carefree enough to chat amongst themselves.

"Have you done these tests before?" Taylor asked Ken casually.

"I did a few when I tried out for the U18 Japanese National Team." Ken admitted, remembering his mediocre results back then.

"Oh, that's cool. Did you end up making it?" He asked curiously.

"Mmm, but that was almost 2 years ago now." Thinking about the Japanese National Team brought back fond memories, but it was also a source of disappointment since he missed out on the Asia Championships last year.

He could technically be selected this year in August for the U18 World Cup again, but since he was living in America, he wasn't sure if Coach Takashi would select him.

Taylor was thoughtful for a while, but his eyes soon lit up, "Wait, did you play for the Japanese team at the U18 World Cup?" He asked excitedly.

"Yeah, why?"

But before Taylor could respond, they had already arrived at the drill with the other teams nearby. With 4 teams total, each with 12 players, there was almost 50 teens all gathered.

"Okay, everybody please pay attention, I'll only be saying this once. When I call up your name, approach the start line and get into position. Since we have a lot of people, you'll only get 2 attempts." One of the staff member's wearing a black polo shirt spoke up, addressing everyone.

Thankfully, many of the attendees were serious about the showcase, so there were no disruptions.

Ken looked around, trying to find Steve amongst the players with the yellow shirts on, but even with his height he couldn't see the guy.

"First up, Stephen Adams." The guy from earlier spoke up, calling the first name on his list.

It was then that Steve appeared from the crowd, his body obviously filled with nerves. Ken couldn't help but feel sorry for the guy whose name would probably always get called out first in alphabetical order.

The surroundings were silent, so much so that Ken could feel the tension in the air.

"Let's go Steve, run like the wind." Ken called out, showing support for his friend.

At the sound of Ken's voice, Steve turned around, his nervous expression easing a little. He flashed him a grin and a thumbs up before turning his attention back to the starting line.

A lot of eyes turned to Ken, as if these people didn't appreciate Ken speaking up all of a sudden. However, he didn't care. He wanted to show support to Steve who obviously seemed nervous.

"On your marks."

"Get set..."

FWHEEE

The moment the whistle sounded, Steve broke into a sprint, his legs and arms pumping wildly as he accelerated as fast as he could.

Everybody watched on in silence, waiting for the guy to finish his run.

There eyes moved to a display which showed the time.

'6.52 seconds... Is that good?' Ken thought, not really knowing what he should be aiming for.

"Mmm, not bad. Is he your friend?" Taylor asked.

Hearing the satisfaction in Taylor's tone, Ken felt a little better. "Yeah, he also plays for the Gladiators as a catcher."

"I see. Well, he's not bad for a catcher."

Ken raised his eyebrow, not knowing what Taylor was insinuating. "What's the record for the 60-yard dash?"

"Just under 6 seconds I believe."

Ken nodded. Judging by this, Steve's score wasn't too bad overall. However, if this was before they'd completed the 3 month training plan from Mika, he probably would have been a lot worse.

After Steve finished, the staff began to call out another name without delay. With the almost 50 players here, they needed to be quick or risk putting everything behind schedule.

"Heh, how was that?" Steve tracked down Ken after returning to the mass of awaiting teens, wearing a smug grin.

"Mmm, pretty good man. I think you can do better though." Ken stated simply.

Instead of being offended, Steve nodded. He had been a little nervous to begin with, but he believed now that he'd already experienced it, he'd be able to improve the time even if only a little.

"What do you think you'll get?"

"I'd be happy around the 6 second mark." Ken stated, beginning to stretch his legs a little in anticipation.

"True, you were always faster than me, especially over long distances. I guess that's the perks of being a damn Antelope..." The last sentence was said under Steve's breath, but Ken still picked up the words.

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

Chapter 662 - 662: 60-yard Dash (2)

"Taylor Jenkins."

But before he could respond, he heard the name of his new catcher.

"Good luck out there." Ken said, watching the guy's figure walk up to the starting line.

"Cheers."

"Who is that guy?" Steve asked, his eyes silently judging the figure.

"That's my new catcher." Ken replied nonchalantly.

"Eh? You've replaced me already?" Clutching his heart dramatically, Steve acted as if he was hurt deeply.

Ken scoffed, quickly ignoring the guy. He was really curious as to what kind of time someone like Taylor would have, especially since he seemed so confident.

'Since he didn't seem too impressed with Steve's time, that must mean he should be faster. If the record is under 6 seconds, then this guy should at least be a 6.3 or 6.4' Ken thought, scratching his chin.

"On your marks"

"Get set."

FWHEE

Taylor was quick off the mark, his form looking rather dazzling. It was obvious that he'd had some practice doing the 60-yard dash before, which seemed in line with what he'd told Ken earlier.

Ken turned his attention to the board, waiting for the time to appear.

"Whoa, 6.18."

The once silent group of teens whispered amongst themselves after seeing the strong result of Taylor's dash. What was even more surprising was that the guy had such athleticism despite being a catcher.

"I wonder if he's a lead-off batter." Ken muttered. Generally the athletic guys would bat first, as long as they were good enough at making contact with the ball.

Taylor returned, still looking rather fresh despite running hard just a few moments ago.

"Nice run man, 6.18 is pretty fast." Ken stated.

Taylor shrugged in response, "I can still go faster, but at least I beat my time from last year." He replied nonchalantly.

The trio waited for a few minutes as more and more people were called up to do their first run. Around 5 minutes later, Ken finally heard his name.

"Ken Takagi."

"Good luck man." Both Taylor and Steve said these words at the same time, causing them to glance at each other weirdly.

Steve flashed the former a scowl before creating some distance between the two. Inwardly he was annoyed that this guy was trying to cosy up to his friend.

Taylor on the other hand rolled his eyes, promptly ignoring Steve and turning his attention to the dash.

Ken felt his mind clear up as he approached the starting line. Instead of nervousness, he was experiencing a sense of excitement. He hadn't truly tested out the limits of his new and improved physical grades, so he was looking forward to it.

"On your marks."

"Get set."

FWHEE

The moment the whistle sounded, Ken kicked off the ground with force. His cleats dug into the grass, propelling him forward in an instant. Starting off low, he pumped his powerful arms and legs, quickly accelerating in speed.

Like a machine, he powered forward, each movement swift and filled with strength as he approached the finish line.

"Damn that was fast..." Taylor mumbled in surprise. Despite not seeing the time yet, Ken's reaction speed and acceleration was enough for him to know that the time would be quick.

It wasn't just him, nearly all of the players silently watched the board, waiting for the time to appear.

"W—Whoa, no way..."

If the crowd was impressed after seeing Taylor's run, they were mostly silent now, filled with awe after seeing the time.

"6.03 seconds... That dude is a monster." Taylor said, his eyes moving to Ken who was heading back their way.

"Hehe, speed isn't even his best attribute. The dude has enough stamina to run for a whole day and night." Steve said, feeling a sense of superiority after showing off his friend.

Ken looked at the board on his way past and nodded in satisfaction. 'I can probably still go faster.' He thought, going through the run in his mind.

The good thing about his Academic Trait was that he was able to remember many more details than the average person. Even now, he could think of a few ways to improve his time.

"Nice work partner." Steve grinned, holding out his fist for a fist bump. His choice of words were to let others within earshot know that they were a duo and to back off.

However, Taylor didn't even pay attention to the guy. "Who would have thought that you're also a speedster..."

Ken fist bumped Steve, using a little more force than he would usually since he knew what the guy was doing. "I'm what you'd call a jack of all trades I guess." He replied to Taylor.

"Ow~" Steve exclaimed, massaging his knuckles. He felt a little left out between the duo of Ken and Taylor, but soon enough his name was called again for his second attempt.

"Stephen Adams."

Ken didn't leave him hanging, saying a few more words of encouragement. "If you can't beat 6.3 seconds, I'll tell Mom to stop making you food."

Steve froze on the spot, turning to Ken with shock. "You're bluffing... Yuki would never let me go hungry."

Ken shrugged, "I'll just tell her you said that her food is trash. Good luck getting any food then."

Steve gasped audibly, clutching his chest once more as if he was appalled by the notion of missing out on Yuki's food.

"Stephen Adams... Please hurry up."

Unfortunately for Steve, he was quickly ushered over to the dash before he could respond. However, his whole demeanor seemed to change. It was as if this drill was something that involved life or death.

Even the staff members felt the suffocating atmosphere.

"On your marks."

"Get set."

FWHEE

"YUKIIII~"

Ken pinched the bridge of his nose after hearing Steve yell out his mother's name as he took off for the 60-yard dash. He couldn't help but shake his head, feeling a headache coming along.

But a few moments later, he looked up at the board only to let out a small chuckle.

"6.27 seconds. Looks like my threat worked." He said smilingly.

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

Chapter 663 - 663: More and more drills (1)

Everybody present at the drill was silent as the whistle blew, their eyes locked onto the tall figure who was sprinting towards the finish line like a freight train.

Ken exploded forward, his legs and arms pumping in sync. With each step, his cleats ripped into the turf beneath him, showing just how much power his muscles were generating.

By the time he reached halfway, his head had raised and he entered his full stride. As soon as this happened, his speed increased even further thanks to his long limbs propelling him forwards.

After he crossed the finish line, everybody turned to the sign which would display his time, their breaths held. It took a few moments, but 3 numbers were shown, causing a few gasps of shock and disbelief to ring out.

"5.95 seconds?"

"Isn't that a new record?"

Taylor blinked a few times, almost not believing his own eyes. He glanced at the coach's only to see a similar look of shock on their own faces. The previous record was 5.96 seconds and had been the same since he first started attending the showcases over 4 years ago.

Upon seeing the time, Ken nodded in satisfaction. He often incorporated sprinting into his workouts, but that was generally to finish off his runs. 'I should probably work on my acceleration, I might be able to shave off a few tenths of seconds.' He thought.

There was quite a difference sprinting from a stationary position as opposed to while mid-run. With the former, it put a large strain on the body and required explosive power, something that he needed to work on.

While he was evaluating himself, Ken returned to the pack, only to feel many sets of eyes on him. But Ken was used to this. Ever since acquiring the double-edged Charismatic Air skill, this scene was a daily occurrence for him.

"Congrats on getting the record." Taylor said, his face still looking a little flummoxed.

"Oh nice. When you said it was below 6 seconds, I wasn't sure how far." Ken replied. But it was clear that he didn't care too much about the record, as if it was merely a side quest.

After Ken's run, no one came close to his time, which wasn't too surprising. Once they had all finished, the middle-aged coach who had spoken to Ken earlier stepped up and addressed the players.

"Alright, Outfielders follow me. Infielders go with Coach Ray." He said, not wasting any time.

Taylor nudged Ken, "You should go with Coach Bishop, it's better than just waiting around for the batting drills."

Ken thought for a few moments before nodding his head. He had the capability to play outfield, so it made sense to participate in the drills even if he disliked the position as a whole.

"Alright, thanks."

With that, he nodded to both Taylor and Steve before jogging after Coach Bishop with around a third of the other players. Ken didn't know any other guys in this group, so he just decided to keep to himself.

For some reason, no one approached him like Taylor earlier, each already sticking to their own groups. However, that suited Ken, he didn't exactly come here to make friends.

"Listen up, we'll be testing your velocity throwing to the infield. I'll send you a grounder, all you need to do is throw it hard and fast to Randy over there." Coach Bishop said, pointing to a man standing some distance away.

The guy was decked out in protective gear, as if he was afraid of being hit. To top it off, when the coach pointed to him, he waved, wearing a brilliant smile.

A few chuckles rang out within the group of players, but they soon had no time to be so carefree.

"Alright, warm up your arms. The last thing we need is for one of you guys to get injured." The coach said in a no-nonsense tone.

After the warm ups, the coach proceeded to call the players up much like before.

"We want not only fast throws, but also accurate. As you can guess by Randy's gear, some people don't always take our advice. You'll get no more than two throws, so make it count." He said, wielding his bat.

WHACK

Coach Bishop expertly smacked the ball along the ground towards the outfielder, causing Ken to raise his eyebrow in surprise. Just from the casual action of the hit, it was clear that the coach had a lot of experience batting.

Ken debated using Identify on him, however there was no real point in doing so.

After the player collected the ball, he took a few steps forward and fired a throw to Randy. The throw was pretty accurate and had some heat, eliciting a nod of approval from Ken.

'I guess outfielders specialize in this kind of thing.' He thought inwardly.

Ken had expected to see a sign or something that would show the velocity of the throw, but there was nothing. Although it made things a little annoying, he didn't complain since he wasn't really an outfielder.

'Guess I'll just get this over and done with.'

Soon enough it was Ken's turn. He casually jogged over, rolling his shoulder to ensure it was ready. He turned to the coach and awaited the ground ball and wasn't disappointed.

WHACK

The ball came towards him, perfectly weighted. With relative ease, Ken bent down and casually collected the ball, taking a few steps towards the direction he would be throwing.

He threw the ball hard and fast, aiming for the outstretched glove of Randy. The ball sailed through the air, accurately arriving at its destination.

"Hmm, as expected of this kid..." Coach Bishop muttered, however his facial expression remained the same. While they were participating in the drills, he liked to remain neutral so everyone was on the same playing field.

Unless someone was completely out of line, he would not speak up.

He waited until Ken was ready and proceeded to send another grounder his way. Once again, Ken sent another accurate throw to Randy, completing his drill.

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

Chapter 664 - 664: More and more drills (2)

Once he was done, Ken walked back over to where the others were waiting. He turned his attention back to the drill, but it didn't take him long to get bored.

Thankfully, there wasn't too many people to get through after him, so around 15 minutes they were finished. Just when he thought that he'd get to rejoin the other players, the coach spoke up.

"Alright, now we'll test your arm strength." He turned to Randy and shoed him away, to which the guy picked up his makeshift base and jogged back to the next marker.

Ken was a little perplexed, but it was swiftly explained in the next moment. "Where Randy is approximately how far home plate is away from the outfield. I'm sure you don't need any more explanation."

Ken resisted the urge to roll his eyes since he thought that the outfield drills were already over. He hadn't really needed to throw back to home plate from the outfield before, so at least it would be something new for him.

'But now I gotta sit through everyone else's attempts...' He thought bitterly.

After 10 minutes, Ken's name was finally called up. He had managed to keep his shoulder warm for the duration, so he was already raring to go.

'Let's get this over with.'

Quite a few of the other players were able to get rather close to Randy with their throws, which led Ken to believe he had a shot. As for how accurate it would be, he wasn't exactly sure.

'I can probably do a one-hopper if I want to get it there accurately... Let's try that first.'

WHACK

The ball came towards him along the ground, slowing before it reached him. Ken casually collected the ball and took a few strides forward, his arm flying out like a whip as he threw.

Everyone's neck turned as they watched the ball sail through the air. Despite the obvious power of the throw, its flight path was rather low and compact. It bounced 20 feet in front of Randy before bouncing up and into his waiting glove.

No one spoke up or commented, merely watching on. Even Coach Bishop was wearing an unreadable expression as he watched the proceedings.

"Again." He said, getting Ken's attention.

'Alright, I'll try reach him on the full this time.' Ken thought, awaiting the next grounder.

WHACK

Once again, Ken collected the ball and took a few large strides towards Randy's direction. This time he aimed a little higher, putting around 90% of his power into the throw.

Since it was his first time doing something like this, he wasn't sure of what angle, nor how much strength to put into the throw. Having pitched for majority of his life, this was all new to him.

The ball was like a rocket as it flew towards Randy at his new post. Coach Bishop's eyes widened as he saw the course, not even daring to blink.

Randy who was still decked out in his protective gear, followed the ball with his eyes, watching it get closer and closer. He bent his knees, jumping into the air in order to try and catch the ball, but it flew right past his extended glove.

"Ah crap..." Ken muttered in annoyance.

But now that he had something to compare to, Ken believed that he'd be able to make the adjustments and throw accurately this time. This was the problem with doing things for the first time, it never usually went to plan.

He turned to Coach Bishop, waiting for the next ball, however the guy was just staring at him blankly for some reason.

"Coach? I still get 1 more attempt right?" He asked.

"Y—Yeah..." The coach replied, snapping out of his reverie.

He took a little time to come back to his senses, but the middle-aged man collected another ball and sent it along the ground to Ken.

WHACK

This time, Ken scooped up the ball and once again took a few strides towards the direction he would be throwing.

'If I just reduce the angle a bit, I should be able to keep around the same amount of power, if not more. Better keep it at 90% to reduce the variables.' He thought inwardly.

Just like that, he completed his throw, making the small adjustments. Thankfully, they seemed to work out, although it was still a little higher than what he would have liked.

'If there was a runner coming, the height of the ball could be the difference between safe and out.' Of course it wasn't often when one would be in this scenario, but it was good to treat they were in a game.

Now that he completed his third throw, Ken returned to the group of players. He received quite a few more looks this time, but he just ignored them.

'When can I pitch?' Ken complained inwardly.

Unfortunately for him, there was still a few things left on the agenda before the game this afternoon.

Once they finished with the outfield drills it was just after 10am. The infield drills seemed to have also been completed, which just left the catcher's drill, which apparently measured pop times.

"Pop times?" Ken asked Taylor who he had met back up with.

"It's interesting that you don't know the term since you're a top prospect..." Taylor replied, but he still explained it in the end.

"Pop time is the time it takes a catcher to throw the ball from home plate to second base to stop a stolen base attempt. Coach's and scouts look at this number to get a gauge of the catcher's efficiency." He stated.

"You need to have good footwork, a quick exchange from the glove to your throwing hand and a strong arm in order to get a good pop time. If you're lacking in any one of them, it really shows."

Ken was thoughtful for a moment before nodding. Now that he thought about it, Coach Takashi had done a similar drill when testing out the catchers for the U18 team.

'I wonder what Daichi's pop time is?' Ken mused inwardly.

"Alright, catchers, head over this way."

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

Chapter 665 - 665: Batting Practice (1)

Ken was bored out of his mind for the next 30 minutes or so. To see the exact same drill over and over just with different people felt like watching paint dry, definitely not something that he'd like to be doing.

He only marginally paid attention to Steve and Taylor's sessions, but even then they weren't announcing the times on the spot. In fact, no one was speaking regardless on how the players performed.

Ken noticed that there was a table not far away underneath a gazebo with 3 random people sitting at it. Judging by the fact they all had laptops in front of them, it was likely that they were the one's recording all of the scores and results of the drills.

"How do you think I went?" Steve asked, massaging his shoulder.

"How the hell should I know?" Ken replied simply, even if he had been watching intently, he didn't know what the standard for catchers were.

"You were supposed to say good..."

"Oh. Then you did good."

Steve sighed, "I've been a bit nervous since so many people are watching, hopefully my performance was okay." The guy was rarely sincere like this, which took Ken off guard.

It was then that he realized, while he didn't much care for this sort of thing, others took it quite seriously. Just a quick glance around at the expressions of the players around him were enough to understand as much.

Ken felt he might have been a bit conceited earlier, especially since he was complaining to himself the whole time.

"Don't worry man, I think you're doing well... Probably." He replied, patting his friend on the shoulder.

"Gee thanks." Steve quipped, but inwardly he felt a lot better.

After the catcher's drill, it was finally time for the batting practice. The staff moved efficiently, placing the L shaped screen just in front of the mound as well as a couple of expensive looking cameras near home plate.

"Finally... We get to hit some balls." Steve muttered, rubbing his hands together.

"I'm not sure I like your choice of words there."

"Don't sweat the small stuff."

While this was going on, Coach Bishop who seemed to be the one in charge addressed the players once again. Despite being obviously middle-aged, he seemed to have a lot of stamina.

"Listen up, you'll each get 10 hits to show what you can do. If you're a switch-hitter, we'll give you 6 on each side of the box. What we're looking for is exit velocity and hitting mechanics." He said, his eyes scanning over the players.

"But all of this is useless if you don't hit the damn ball, so please make sure you're accurate." He implored, shaking his head slightly.

Judging by his attitude, there were probably people who would just try to smash the living crap out of the balls without swinging accurately.

"Alright, team 1 will be hitting first. Team 2, head out to the outfield to collect any balls that are sent out there." Coach Bishop said, clapping his hands.

'Nice, I get to go first.' Ken thought, clenching his fist.

"Let's go warm up." Taylor said, pointing to a free spot on the field.

"Sounds good to me." Ken replied, picking up one of the nearby bats and weighing it in his hand before following. Steve was left by himself, looking a little awkward after.

When they were far enough apart from everyone, Ken began his warm up swings with the wooden bat. He'd made a concerted effort ever since the WWBA tournament to practice with the wooden bat, even purchasing one for his own personal use.

Thankfully his father had sported the bill, since they were so damn expensive. While Ken had a fair bit of money from his Grandfather, he was a rather frugal individual when it came to such things.

"I heard a rumor that you never used a wooden bat before the WWBA Tournament." Taylor said casually, his eyes locking onto Ken.

"Oh? Who told you that?" Ken asked, a little surprised. While it wasn't exactly personal information, he wondered where Taylor would even hear of such a thing.

"Heh... Your coach was interviewed and spilled the beans. He even said that you had forgotten to tell your catcher that you could throw a fork and slider." Taylor replied with a grin.

"Eh?" Ken was bewildered. A vision of the mustachioed coach flapping his gums and revealing all of his secrets appeared in his mind, causing him to shake his head in exasperation.

"Well, he wasn't lying. But I've been practicing a lot lately, so it shouldn't be an issue." He said, sending another swing out.

"Mmm. As long as your mechanics are good, the coach's won't be worried about your exit velo as much." Taylor replied.

"Alright, everything's set up. Jason Carrol, you're up first." Coach Bishop called out, getting everyone's attention.

One of the players nearby raised his hand before jogging over to the batters box. Judging by his body language, it was rather clear that he was nervous.

The guy got quite a few good hits from his 10 attempts, but that was to be expected. With the pitcher essentially throwing slow balls to him, Ken would have been more surprised if he didn't hit anything good.

Thankfully, things were rather quick in his group. Soon enough Taylor was up to bat, so Ken decided to watch carefully. While he didn't know anything about catching, he was quite familiar with batting.

'I wonder if this guy is any good with the bat?' Ken thought.

It wasn't often that a catcher was great at hitting. Of course Ken knew of two players who were the big fat exception to the rule, but they couldn't be looked at conventionally.

Both his brother Daichi and Leo Cameron were freaks. Not only were they the top of their class in catching, but they also both batted clean-up.

However, if anyone were to hear Ken complaining about this, they might look at him weirdly.

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

Chapter 666 - 666: Batting Practice (2)

The freak two-way player Ken who could both pitch and bat at an extremely high level was complaining about a catcher duo who could do both? The guy needed to look at a mirror before he opens his mouth.

Unaware of his hypocritical thinking, Ken watched Taylor go through the batting practice.

WHACK

WHACK

CLICK

WHACK

Ken nodded, hearing the feedback from the bat hitting the ball. They were good sounds and the guy was rather fluid with his batting motion. He could tell that the guy had quite a bit of experience hitting.

THWACK

In his 5th hit, he sent the ball flying over the fence. It was a great sound, the one you would hear when hitting the sweet spot of the bat.

'Not bad.' Ken thought, bringing his hand up to his chin in thought.

The rest of the balls were also struck well, leading Taylor to wear a satisfied expression as he walked back over.

"Nice work, you got some good hits in."

"Thanks, I've been working on my batting for a while. It used to be the worst part of my game." He admitted with a smile.

"Mmm. Me too."

Taylor looked at Ken a little weirdly, but decided not to comment on it.

"Ken Takagi, you're up next." Coach Bishop called, getting his attention.

"Alright, I'll be back." Ken said, approaching the plate.

Unknown to Ken, many in the crowd paid close attention to his figure as he went up to bat. It wasn't just the crowd, the three figures on the makeshift scoring table also perked up, as if they'd been waiting for this moment.

"This is the guy we got told to keep an eye on." One of them said in a hushed tone.

"Mmm, I've got many messages already asking for updates on his results..."

The third one sighed, "I haven't seen them this impatient in a long time."

Ken stepped up and tapped the bat on home plate followed by the toes of his cleats before squaring up. He gripped the bat tightly and waved the bat over his shoulder as he prepared for the first ball.

The first ball came, a little bit slower than he expected, catching him off guard.

WHACK

As he swung, the ball flew right to where the short stop would have been if this were a game.

"Tch." Ken clicked his tongue in annoyance after messing up his first hit. Of course this wasn't a competition to see who could hit the most home runs, but he was still annoyed by the mistake.

But he quickly moved passed it, awaiting the next pitch.

THWACKK!

'Bingo.'

The very next ball was struck in the dead center of his bat, giving off an almighty sound. It honestly felt amazing, something he wished would happen every time he came up to bat.

WHACK

THWACK

WHACK

Ken went through his 10 balls, managing to hit the center every second try almost. If this was before he had trained so thoroughly with a wooden bat, the results might have been quite different.

Thankfully, he finished up feeling quite satisfied.

"Ridiculous... How can he have so much power?" One of the people at the scorers table mumbled, almost not believing his eyes.

"Y—Yeah, it doesn't feel right."

"I can see why those guys are so interested..."

After returning to where Taylor was, Ken rolled his shoulders feeling as if he was able to let off some steam. "I feel more relaxed now." He stated.

Taylor was silent for a while before letting out a small sigh. He knew that it was foolish to try and compare to someone of Ken's caliber, especially when they played at different positions.

But it was hard on his ego to know that such a great pitcher was also better than him with a bat in his hands.

"Man, you really are special." Taylor said, shaking his head.

Ken turned his gaze to Taylor, and raised his eyebrow, "What are you saying? All I did was hit some lousy pitches..."

"Yeah yeah..." Taylor felt all of his energy drain after hearing the nonchalant reply from the genius. Some things in life weren't fair, and this happened to be one of those things.

"My brother is way better at batting than I am anyway." Ken said dismissively. Inwardly he knew that he had a lot to do if he wanted to catch up with Daichi in that regard.

"Eh? Really? How old is he?" Taylor was surprised that Ken had a brother, since he'd never heard this before. Chances are, Ken's brother would already be well known if he was anything like Ken.

"My age."

"Huh? Is he your twin or something?"

Ken shook his head. "We're not biological brothers, but we're still family."

Taylor felt his interest pique, "What's his name?"

Ken raised his eyebrow, 'Why is this guy so interested?' He had said this in passing, yet Taylor seemed eager to find out his brother's identity.

"Daichi. He's back home in Japan completing High School since his English isn't great. But he might be coming here to join a College after next year." Although Ken said this, he wasn't sure what his brother wanted to do.

He would be putting forth the question on his trip back to Japan. Since Daichi would graduate in March next year, he would have almost 6 months to get noticed by scouts and secure a scholarship.

"I see..." Taylor said, seeming a little disappointed. He had never heard the name before, so he lost a bit of interest. "What position does he play?"

"Heh... Catcher."

Taylor's eyes widened slightly. For Ken's brother to be a catcher and also better at batting than him, it made Taylor feel a little threatened. Since they were essentially the same age and the guy would be coming to America eventually, they could be possible rivals.

'Daichi huh? I guess I'll need to do some research on him.' Taylor thought, bringing his hand up to his chin.

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

Chapter 667 - 667: Small World (1)

"Hey Coach T... I kind of messed up."

Tex was walking around in circles with his cell phone clutched to his ear, his voice sounding rather stressed. He had been agonizing over making this call for quite a while, but eventually decided to bite the bullet.

"I saw your son in Dallas and spoke to him without thinking. D—Don't worry though! As soon as I realized, I quickly ran away." Tex admitted, his face somber.

"Anyway... Call me back when you get this message."

With that, Tex hung up, letting out a deep sigh. "Hopefully he takes it okay..." He muttered, placing the phone back in his pocket.

He turned towards the school and walked back. He wouldn't hear the end of it if he failed to do his job properly on top of all this mess. Thankfully, no one was around to see the exchange between the two, so as long as he was careful, nothing would happen.

By the time he arrived at the baseball field, the first game of the day was already underway. It was Team 1 vs Team 2 with the latter taking the field.

"Tex, long time no see." A deep voice called out, surprising him.

Tex turned to see a well-groomed and fit figure with slicked back salt and pepper hair. "Mr. Fisher!? What a surprise to see you here." He said, holding out his hand for a handshake.

The firm grip of the man showed just what kind of strength he hid.

"Mmm, I asked to attend today to see a certain prospect." He replied, wearing a knowing grin. It was clear whom he was speaking about without mentioning names.

Tex nodded, "I bet Perfect Game have been inundated with requests for Ken's results already."

Rob let out a small chuckle, "Alice has been complaining about it non-stop. She said that if he didn't attend this showcase, she would have handed in her resignation."

"Oh? Your wife works for Perfect Game?" Tex asked in surprise.

Rob nodded, "I told her she doesn't need to work, but you know how women can be... Ahem. Now that the kids are grown, she can't stand staying idle at the house."

"I see. This is why I chose the single life after all." Tex said, puffing his chest out slightly.

Rob tried to keep a straight face, but struggled immensely. "You sure that you chose it?" He asked.

"Hahaha! You're right." Tex guffawed, slapping the guy on his back a few times.

It was clear that the two held some rapport, which seemed rather unlikely given their different positions. While Tex was a mid-level scout for the University of Texas, Rob was the chairman of the WWBA.

"Whatever happened to Colleen? You guys were really close in College." Rob asked after the laughter died down.

However Tex shrugged, "She moved on, had 3 kids with another guy. You should see her now though... Really let herself go."

Rob raised an eyebrow, his eyes looking his friend up and down. "Yeah, I heard that happens when you get older."

This time, Tex scoffed. "Says you, I think you're probably more fit now than you were back on the team."

THWACKK!

The two were interrupted by a mighty sound which echoed around the field. Without missing a beat, both Tex and Rob turned their heads, locating the ball flying into right field.

Their eyes moved to the player who had hit the ball, only for a wry smile to appear on their faces. The red shirt had the number 1 on it, displaying the last name Takagi.

"I should have known..." Tex stated in exasperation.

Rob sighed, "Don't get me started. They had to take him off the mound in the 4th inning, otherwise no one on team 2 would have had a chance to hit."

"Really? How did he take it?"

"Hah. How do you think? The guy has been sulking in the outfield ever since." Rob replied half-jokingly.

Tex nodded, "Well, what do you expect? The guy is a true Ace. Taking him off the mound is like taking away his pride." He said matter-of-factly.

"Did they at least get enough information in those 4 innings?"

"I'd say so, otherwise my wife has got some tough times ahead of her." Rob sighed, hoping it was enough.

As they watched Ken jog around the bases, the two shared a few moments of silence.

"Wait, didn't you mention you worked with Ken's father?" Rob asked, as if suddenly remembering some important information.

"Y—Yeah..." Hearing Ken's dad being brought up in conversation made him remember the voice mail that he'd just left earlier.

"So I guess that means he'll probably choose University of Texas in the end." Rob stated, his expression unreadable.

"Hah, yeah right. Coach T already said that he won't get involved with Ken's decision. He said that whatever decision his son makes is entirely his own, and that he'd resign if anyone tried to force him to intervene." Tex said, a hint of exasperation in his voice.

"Really? Wow, Coach T has a lot of integrity." Rob replied, his tone showing respect.

"Mmm, I think it's a Japanese thing."

The two chatted for a while longer while watching the game. Since it was a practice match, the game went the full 9 innings, despite the run variance.

It ended with a score of 12 - 2 in favor of Team 1, showing the difference in the players abilities. Generally, the organizers would try and make the teams somewhat even, but sometimes that was impossible.

Once finishing the game, Ken grabbed his things and met up with Steve who was in the audience. The guy seemed to be a little nervous, despite it just being a practice game.

"Why are you stressing? This match is nothing compared to the WWBA finals we had just a couple of weeks ago." Ken said, dropping his gear down.

"Y—Yeah you're right... But I haven't got you on my team either." Steve replied, raising his gaze.

"Stop complaining. Just lead like you usually do and there shouldn't be an issue."

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

Chapter 668 - 668: Small World (2)

"Team 3 and 4 please take the field." Coach Bishop called out, prompting many in the audience to stand.

Steve too stood up, his legs a little shaky. "Alright, wish me luck."

"Ganbatte."

"Eh? Did you just cast a buff on me?" Steve asked.

"It means do your best... Now hurry up, you're in my way." Ken said, smacking him on the back on his way past.

With that, Ken took a seat and got comfy. In reality, he was ready to go home ever since he was taken off the mound in the 4th inning. However, he didn't really have much choice in the matter since he was 3 hours away from home without a car.

Just when he was about to pull out his phone, a figure appeared next to him suddenly. Ken looked up, only to see a fit looking man with his salt and pepper colored hair slicked back.

"You must be Ken, I'm Rob Fisher, the chairman of WWBA, nice to meet you." He said in a deep yet friendly voice.

Ken's eyes widened slowly after hearing the position of the man in front of him. He quickly stood to his feet respectfully and grasped the outstretched hand of the man firmly.

"Yes, I am Ken. It's nice to meet you Mr. Fisher." He said, not putting on any airs. Even though he'd been in America for a few months now, it was always drilled into him to be respectful to his elders.

Since the guy wasn't a scout or anything, he had no qualms in speaking to a man like this.

Seeing the firm handshake and obvious respect, Rob nodded his head in satisfaction. Many times, top prospects could be rude or have inflated ego's, especially when it came to professional sports. To see Ken did not have such a thing was a pleasant surprise.

"You played well out there, I'm sure you'll have a lot of work ahead of you in September." Rob said, his face pulling up into a smile.

"September?" Ken raised his eyebrow.

"You know, when coach's and scouts can finally reach out to you."

"Ah... Yeah, I'm already dreading it." Ken admitted, his face faltering slightly.

Rob let out a chuckle, "Allow me to give some unsolicited advice. If you can afford it, I'd recommend hiring an agent. Not only will they handle all the correspondence, they can also give you plenty of advice."

"I see..." Ken was a little skeptical, but he didn't want to refuse outright. "I'll chat to my Grandfather first and see what he thinks."

"Your Grandfather? Is he in the baseball industry also?" Rob asked curiously. He had already heard from Tex earlier that Ken's father was a coach for the University of Texas, so to hear that Ken would ask his Grandfather instead of his father was interesting.

"Mmm, he used to coach the U18 US squad." Ken replied, a hint of pride in his tone.

"Oh? What's his name? I know a couple of the coaching staff."

"Mark Williams."

"Huh!? Your Grandfather is Mark!?" Rob's jaw dropped after hearing this revelation. Not only was his father a coach, but the guy's Grandfather was also a well-renowned figure in the baseball community.

Suddenly, Ken's abilities didn't seem so far fetched anymore. With a family pedigree like this, it made sense why the guy was a freak two-way player.

"You know my Grandfather?" Ken asked in surprise.

"Yes... We've worked closely for the last few years to get some rough prospects a chance in the U18 scene." Rob replied, though he still seemed to be shocked.

"A—Anyway, take this card. I was a bit skeptical about giving you it since the guy is a little... picky. But since you're related to Mark, he should have no issues representing you." Rob produced a card from his pocket, handing it to Ken.

Ken retrieved the business card respectfully with two hands, looking at the name.

'Barry Hart...'

The business card was plain as can be with only a name and a phone number. There was no other information, not even the name of the business on it. Ken looked up, his expression slightly confused.

Rob shrugged, "Talk to your Grandfather and ask him about Barry before you make a decision. Anyway, it was nice to finally meet you in person. I'll leave you to it."

Before Ken could respond, the fit middle-aged man was already leaving. It had been an unexpected chat, but it seemed that he had gotten some good advice in the end.

'I'll have to give Grandpa a call at some point.' Ken thought inwardly. He had a feeling that Mr. Fisher was right and that he should hire an agent, otherwise his life would devolve into an administrator's worst nightmare.

Even before he participated in the WWBA or PG Showcase, Coach Wyatt had given him a list of 15 email addresses of coach's who wanted him to contact them. Forget training, Ken wouldn't even have time to wipe his own backside once September came.

BUZZ BUZZ

Ken was caught off guard by his phone ringing. He quickly pulled it out and put it up to his ear.

"Hello?"

"Hey Ken, how is the showcase going?"

Ken's face lit up, "Hey Dad, it's alright. I just finished the practice game, I'll head home once Steve finishes up."

"Mmm good. Hey I just got a voice mail from Tex... Tell me what happened in the parking lot earlier." His father's tone was somber, indicating he wasn't too impressed.

"Yeah, that guy sure is an idiot..." Ken said, detailing everything that had happened. He made sure not to leave anything out, even telling him about the blind person that he had seen at the end.

After a couple of minutes, Chris let out a sigh, his exasperation evident. "That guy... I'll have a talk to him, just try and avoid him if you see him again."

"No problem, he's hard to miss." Ken replied cheekily.

"Haha. Alright, I'll see you at home later tonight."

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

Chapter 669 - 669: Surprise (1)

A few days later, Ken came to a stop at the top of a hill, his face covered in a sheen of sweat. The summer breeze was hot against his skin, making it even more uncomfortable than usual.

As he began to control his breathing, Ken turned to see a figure halfway down, making his way towards him. A slight hint of amusement crept onto his features as he watched Steve struggle.

"Ganbatte!" He yelled out.

"Shutup!" Steve cursed between ragged breaths.

After a couple of minutes, the guy finally arrived on top of the hill, immediately rolling onto the ground in exhaustion. Despite the constant training for over 3 months, he was still behind Ken in both speed and stamina.

However, Ken couldn't blame the guy. After all, he had the Elixirs to buff his own physical grades, whereas Steve was all natural. When he looked at it this way, it almost seemed like he was using performance enhancing drugs.

Ken shook his head, trying to rid himself of the moral dilemma before it took hold. He had already talked to Mika about the next training plan in order to reach his current level without the buffs.

Unlike last time which had only taken 3 months, it appeared that the gap was much larger than he expected. 12 months was the length of the training plan this time, and it was far more intense.

'I guess things get harder the better I get.' Ken thought, already beginning his stretches.

"Get up before you melt into the ground."

Steve who looked like he had crawled back from the precipice of death, slowly got to his feet. His shirt was drenched, picking up the dirt and rocks from the road.

"Are we going to survive this training plan of yours?" Steve asked, his face showing fear.

Ken shrugged in response, "I will, but I'm not so sure about you." He said with a grin.

Steve let out a hollow chuckle, knowing his friend was kidding. The two went through their stretches in silence, making sure to cool down their burning muscles which would help prevent soreness the next day.

Of course the two both had the Fatigue Management skill, which made things even more convenient.

"When are you heading to Japan?"

"In 2 days time. I've already booked a place to stay in Osaka with my girlfriend to go and watch Koshien." Ken replied, his face full of nostalgia.

"Koshien? Is that the big baseball tournament you were talking about? Aren't there more romantic things to do with your girl than that?" Steve turned up his face in disgust.

"Do I need to take romance tips from you?" Ken retorted, sending him a scowl. "Plus, my brother will be playing as a senior. There's no way I'll miss it."

Steve ignored the slight, "Oh? Is this the genius catcher you were talking about?" he asked with interest.

Ken nodded, "He doesn't know I'm coming yet, I wanted it to be a surprise. In fact, my girlfriend doesn't even know I'm coming yet."

"Aww, how sweet. I bet you'll cry when you finally see her again."

Ken turned to the guy with a deadpan expression, "Do I hit you now or later?"

"H—Hey man, I was just kidding." Steve took a few steps back, raising his hands in submission. "I'm just saying, I'm sure she'll be happy to see you again."

"Mmm, even though it's only been 4 months, I miss both of them." Ken stated, his eyes drifting off into the horizon dramatically.

"...What are you doing?"

"I'm looking towards Japan." Ken replied simply.

Steve looked left and right briefly, "You're looking towards Canada. Japan should be that way." He said, pointing behind Ken.

Ken felt his face redden in embarrassment, "Shutup! I know where Japan is..." Without another word, he started jogging back down the hill, leaving his friend behind.

"H—Hey, wait for me!"

As Ken walked through the airport, the sight of his native language brought a smile to his face. While the signage might be mundane, to him who had not been to Japan for over 4 months, it was much more than that.

'I'm finally back home.' Ken thought, forgetting his stiff body for a few moments. The 16 hour flight had been torturous for his tall frame, especially since he was a miser and didn't upgrade his seats.

His eyes drifted to the large clock on display.

'4 O'clock... If I catch the train I should arrive at her house in the next 30 minutes.' Ken did the math in his head.

At the thought of surprising Ai, Ken felt a little giddy. It had been torture keeping such a secret from her, but he had thought it would be worth it in the end.

Just as he was about to leave the airport, he suddenly froze. 'Crap, I should get some flowers or something...'

Ken quickly changed his direction, heading towards the shopping area close by. Despite being tired and jet lagged from the long flight, he still wanted their reunion to be special.

Almost an hour later, he alighted from the train.

'Japan public transport is still the best...' He thought.

Around 10 minutes later, Ken arrived at a familiar apartment building with 5 stories. His heart was beating loudly in his chest the closer he got, but he somehow managed to keep his calm.

Taking the elevator to the 4th floor, he stepped out slowly. In his left hand were a gorgeous bouquet of flowers, and in his right was his suitcase.

Ken swallowed, feeling his throat dry up almost instantly. .

'Damn it, why am I so nervous...'

After shoving down his jitters, Ken finally stood in front of Ai's door. Standing up his suitcase, he rang the door bell, holding up the flowers in front of the peep hole.

As the clinking of the door lock sounded, Ken flinched. He lowered the flowers, and saw the door swing open, however his face faltered in the next moment. "Who are you?"

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

Chapter 670 - 670: Surprise (2)

A young man in a High School uniform was standing at the door, just as perplexed as Ken. The guy looked Ken up and down and asked, "Can I help you?"

Ken blinked a few times, his earlier nervousness turning into a mix of confusion, hurt and anger. "Is Ai here?" he asked, his tone frosty.

"Ai?" The young man tilted his head in confusion. "Ah! You mean the girl who used to live in this apartment. I think she moved to the end of this level." He stated.

Ken felt his whole body relax in that moment, causing him to let out a sigh of relief. "Sorry for the interruption." He said, bowing deeply.

With that, he stood back and left. Only on the way past did he notice that the name written below the mailbox was not Koyama, but Fuji instead.

'Damn it, my nervousness has made me stupid.' Ken cursed inwardly.

Only after arriving at the end apartment did he finally see his girlfriend's family name written below the mailbox.

Since his heart had already been toyed with enough, Ken pressed the door bell without waiting. He just wanted this thing to be over with now with no other surprises.

"Coming~"

A female voice called out, allowing Ken to heave a sigh of relief.

Upon the door opening, Ken smiled brilliantly. "Surprise." He said, holding out the bouquet of flowers.

However, as his eyes moved to the face of the woman in front of him, he saw a green mask plastered onto her face like a second skin. Her hair was tied back and she was currently wearing comfy looking pajamas.

He blinked a few times, having trouble recognizing if it was Ai or not. But even through the mask, he could see the look of horror plastered onto the woman's face.

SLAM

Before he could say another word, the door was slammed on him, causing the bouquet of flowers to rustle from the wind generated. He stood awkwardly for a few moments, not knowing what had just happened.

"Umm... What do I do now?" Ken muttered. He wasn't even sure if it was Ai who had answered the door, and if it was, why did she slam the door in his face?

BUZZ BUZZ

"You idiot! Why didn't you tell me you were coming to Japan?"

Ken read the message, his heart sinking. Out of all the scenario's he'd imagined of surprising his girlfriend, this was not in any of the simulations.

Before he could reply to the message, another one came.

"Just stay there... Pretend you never saw anything."

Ken could only listen to her instructions, feeling a little awkward. This was magnified when the occupants of the apartment next door suddenly came outside and saw him.

The two High School girls looked at him up and down and gave him a weird look. "What a weirdo... Why is he just standing there?"

Feeling himself being judged, Ken smiled wryly. 'Next time I think I'll just tell her in advance...' He thought, feeling a sense of fatigue wash over him.

After around 5 minutes, the door opened once more. This time, Ai was in a sun dress, no longer wearing the ogre mask from earlier. Before he could even say anything, she dove into his arms.

As she wrapped her own arms around his neck, a smile finally appeared on his lips.

"I'm back." He said, hugging her tightly.

"Welcome home..."

The two stood like this for some time, basking in each others presence. It might not have been the reunion that Ken had expected, but it was still special.

"Hey, can we go inside? I'm a bit tired from the long flight." Ken said after a while.

"Mmm."

"Ah, these are for you." He said, handing her the flowers.

"They're beautiful, thank you."

"Not as beautiful as you." Ken quipped, but he felt a little lame after saying so.

However, after hearing the cute giggle of his girlfriend, his spirits soared like an eagle. He was led into the apartment which seemed to be bigger than the last place.

The two moved to the lounge area and took a seat on the couch together. Ken let out a deep sigh, feeling his jet lag hit him like a truck.

"What made you decide to come back to Japan." Ai asked, nestling into his chest.

"It's summer break in the states, of course I'd want to come back to see you." He said matter-of-factly. "But I never expected to have the door slammed in my face."

Ai raised her head, only to see Ken grinning widely.

"Never speak of that again..." She said in mock anger, not accepting anything but an affirmative nod in response.

"Okay okay, it never happened." Ken said, pacifying her.

Upon receiving the response she wanted, Ai returned to her spot with a smile.

"I knocked on your old apartment door first. You should have seen my shock when a guy opened the door." Ken said, letting out a chuckle.

"Haha, I bet poor Yamato was shocked to see a man with flowers at his door." Ai replied with amusement.

"Mmm, maybe he thought I was asking him out."

"PFFT."

"Hahahaha."

Ken smiled hearing the giggles of the woman he'd missed for so long. Even though it had only been 4 months, it was still tough.

The two talked for a while on the couch, but soon Ken began to grow weary. As he started to nod off, he heard the doorbell ring.

"Ah crap!" Ai cursed, quickly jumping to her feet.

Ken raised an eyebrow, not knowing what was going on.

Ai ran to the door and opened it while Ken moved his head to try and take a look.

"I've got chocolates, Ice cream and some romance movies." The feminine voice rang out, causing Ken's ears to perk up.

'Don't tell me...'

"Rie, something came up... You can't come over tonight." Ai said, trying to block her at the door.

"What do you mean? Don't we do this every month." She retorted. However, her nose twitched in the next moment and she began sniffing the air.

"I smell a man... Where are you hiding him!?"

Without waiting for an invitation, Rie moved past Ai, her ample bosoms acting like a forcefield and almost throwing the latter against the wall. She walked into the lounge only to see Ken on the couch.

"Hey... You must be Rie." Ken said, getting to his feet. His tall frame towered above her own, causing her to shrink back slightly. Her eyes darted between Ai and Ken, as if not knowing what to do.

"Are you Ken?" She asked meekly.

Ken nodded, though it was clear he was a little tired. "Nice to meet you." He said before walking over to Ai.

"Why don't you and Rie have some girl time? I'm still wrecked from the flight."

"A—Ah, okay. How long are you staying for?" She asked, gripping his shirt as if not wanting to let him go.

"Around 3 weeks, there'll be plenty of time for us to see each other, don't worry." Ken said, wearing a soft smile. He leaned down and kissed her on the forehead lightly.

Her eyes lit up, obviously happy he would be staying so long.

"Rie, wait there while I put Ken to bed." She ordered, pointing to her friend as if to tell her to behave.

With that, she led Ken into the room so he could get some rest.

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

Chapter 671 - 671: Falling Behind (1)

"What the hell is your boyfriend doing here? Wasn't he meant to be in America?" Rie asked, her surprise evident.

Ai who had just returned from the room, let out a small smile. "He decided to surprise me and even brought me flowers." She said, collecting them from the table and giving them a gentle sniff.

Rie shook her head, "And here I thought we would just be having a girls night... I even brought chocolates and ice cream because you said you had bad cramps." She complained.

"H—Hey... Don't be so loud." Ai replied gesturing for Rie to keep her voice down.

"Oh come on, don't tell me Ken is oblivious to that kind of stuff." Rie's face morphed into a knowing look, "I bet you guys have already done the deed."

Ai's face turned beet red, but she didn't deny the fact.

"W—Wait really!?" Rie stood up, her expression filled with shock. She had originally just been trying to make her friend feel embarrassed, but judging by her reaction, she had been spot on.

"Well... We're both adults and have been together for over 2 years now. Wouldn't it be weird if we didn't?" Ai asked, her face still red in embarrassment.

Rie couldn't really refute her words, but she was still so shocked that she fell onto the couch, her bosoms bouncing from the impact.

"I can't believe it... My innocent bestie has already been sullied by a man." She said dramatically, staring into the distance.

"Hey, I don't want to hear that stuff from you." Ai intoned, sitting onto the couch next to her friend. "With the amount of boyfriend's you've had, I would be surprised if you were still innocent."

Rie gasped, placing her hand on her ample chest. "I'll have you know... I am in a serious relationship right now and have been saving myself for my love."

Ai raised an eyebrow, wearing a suspicious expression. "Serious relationship? How many weeks will this one last." She said dismissively.

However unexpectedly, Rie's face turned serious. "I'm not lying... I think this guy might be the one."

"Eh? Really?" Ai was taken aback, but she quickly shifted gears, peppering her friend with rapid-fire questions. "Who is it? Do I know him? What does he do?"

"Hehe~ wouldn't you like to know." Rie teased.

The two went back and forth as Ai tried to pry the information from her mouth. It wasn't until a full 10 minutes that Rie finally relented.

"You know him... In fact, Ken also knows him." She said, sending Ai a wink.

"EH!? No way... Hiroki?" Ai asked in shock.

However, Rie shook her head. "His name is Shiro..."

"EHHHHH!?" In her shock, Ai had forgotten that Ken was sleeping in the next room.

Rie stared at her friend for a few moments before letting out a peel of laughter. "Hahahaha, you should have seen your face." She said, pointing and holding her sides as her assets jiggled from the shaking of her body.

Ai was confused for a few moments before wearing a stern expression, "Damn it, you almost gave me a heart attack." She complained, sitting back on the couch.

"Hehe~ it was too funny not to."

After calming down, Ai probed once more, "So it's Hiroki then?"

Rie nodded, she had had enough fun teasing her friend for now and admitted it. "After we met at Comiket again, we started talking. I thought he hated cosplaying, but it turns out he really enjoyed it after the first time."

She continued, "But since he's a professional baseball player now, he doesn't want to reveal his identity in case it ruins his image. So he'll only where costumes with masks now."

Ai blinked a few times, processing the information. From what Ken had told her, Hiroki never wanted to see Rie again, so this was very surprising news.

"But doesn't he live in Chiba right now?" She asked.

But Rie gave her a look, "Doesn't your boyfriend live in America?"

"Ah... very true."

"Anyway, he wants to keep our relationship a secret until I finish High School. Even though we're only a year apart, it might look bad for his image if the media blows it up." She replied, though her expression seemed to show her disappointment.

Ai nodded, "Yeah, Ken was plagued by the media after the World Cup too..."

The two sat in silence for a while before Ai suddenly shot to her feet. "Let me go change and we can watch some movies."

"Okay~"

The next day, Ken woke up from his long sleep to find Ai snuggled beside him on the bed. His body felt stiff, as if he'd been squeezed into a sardine can for a full day and night, which wasn't far from the truth.

After glancing at his girl, a smile crept onto his features.

A quick glance around the room showed that it was still dark. He reached over and grabbed his phone from the bedside table, checking the time.

'4am huh? Guess I should go for a run.'

Just because he was on holiday in Japan, didn't mean he would slack on his training. Since he didn't want to wake up Ai, he slowly got himself out of bed, feeling his muscles ache slightly.

After getting changed, he walked into the lounge room only to see a figure on the floor snoring away haphazardly. The covers were kicked off and her breasts were almost bursting from her top.

Ken quickly looked away, feeling a hint of embarrassment.

'Damn it, this woman has no class...' He muttered inwardly.

Doing his best to remain silent, Ken walked towards her and grabbed the blanket, covering her assets and ensuring that she at least kept her dignity.

With that, he grabbed his shoes and left the apartment. It was still very dark outside, with the street lights bearing down on the apartment complex.

After taking the elevator down, Ken began to loosen up his muscles with some dynamic stretches. He could feel just how taut his body was from these few movements.

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

Chapter 672 - 672: Falling Behind (2)

He started with a jog, slowly warming up his muscles. While it started out a little painful, after around 10 minutes they started to ease into a rhythm.

Soon enough, Ken increased the pace as per Mika's instructions. Before he knew it, he was already running with 80% of his max speed through the residential streets of Tokyo.

Since he had already stayed at Ai's apartment a few times, he had no real worry of getting lost so he could focus on ensuring his heart rate reached the required speed.

Over an hour later, he slowed to a walk and began to get his breathing under control. He went to a nearby park and began to stretch out his muscles, his usual routine.

His mind wandered as he went through the motions. This was the first time that he'd trained alone in quite a long time. Usually Steve would be close by, speaking nonsense while he tried to focus.

Part of him missed the companionship, but another part of him enjoyed the serenity.

As his mind wandered, he heard the footsteps of someone nearby. Out of habit, he briefly glanced at the figure before promptly ignoring them.

"Ken? Is that you?"

"Hmm?" Ken lifted his head after hearing his name, turning towards the voice.

"Holy crap, it is you~" The figure jogged over and brought him into a hug. Since they were both drenched in sweat, it was a rather unpleasant affair.

"Riku? What are you doing here?" Ken was dumbfounded. What was the odds of meeting someone from the U18 National Team at this time of the morning.

Riku took a step back and looked him up and down, "Didn't you hear? I play for the Tokyo Sparrows now." He said with a hint of pride.

"Oh wow, I had no idea. Congratulations man!" Ken said, his words sincere. After playing alongside Riku in the World Cup, Ken had lost touch with him, especially since he'd gone through quite a slump afterwards.

"Thanks man. Daichi told me that you moved to America, what are you doing here?"

Ken's eyes lit up in surprise. He didn't expect that Daichi would still keep in touch with Riku, but it made sense since the guy was more outgoing than Ken.

"It's Summer break so I came home to see my girlfriend and go watch Koshien while I'm at it."

Riku's face faltered for a moment at the mention of Ken's girlfriend. "Ah yes, it must be nice to have a girlfriend..." He said, looking a little gloomy.

"Yeah... Anyway, are you going to be watching Koshien?" Ken asked, moving from the subject.

Riku shook his head, "We're playing in Hokkaido for the first 2 days of Koshien so I'll just be watching it on TV."

"Ah bummer."

"Hey, give me your contact details, it would be nice to catch up properly while you're still in Japan. Masayuki is also close by, he plays for the Giants." Riku said, grabbing his phone from his pocket.

"Ah sure thing."

With that, the two spoke for a little longer before going their separate ways. Ken was in a pretty decent mood after seeing an old friend, yet he couldn't help but feel a hint of jealousy.

With Hiroki, Riku and Masayuki already in the NPB, Ken felt like he was falling behind. Not only was he still in High School, he would likely still have to join a College before heading to the Majors.

'That could take up to 4 years...' Ken thought, clenching his fist tightly.

While he was busy studying, those 3 would be playing against the top Japanese professionals. Sure he had the system, but self-training would only get him so far.

What Ken really needed was competition that was going to push him to take his game to the next level. But the problem was, unless he could compete at every National tournament, he wouldn't find such competition in High School.

With mixed emotions, he returned to Ai's apartment. The sun had begun to rise, painting the sky mix of orange and yellow which streaked through the clouds beautifully.

Ken unlocked the door and walked inside, taking his shoes off. He took off his shirt, wanting to rid himself of the sweat-soaked burden as soon as possible.

Yet as he looked up, he saw Rie staring at him unblinkingly with a bowl of cereal in front of her. Ken froze, feeling a small shiver run up his back from the stare.

"I—Is Ai awake?" Ken asked, covering his chest with the sweaty shirt as if he was some fair maiden who had been spotted bathing alone by a creep. .

"Mmm... She's just getting ready now." Rie stated, her eyes locked onto him as if she was evaluating his body.

Feeling awkward, Ken walked past her hurriedly.

"Hey, maybe you can join us the next Comiket in 2 weeks."

"Not interested." He said plainly, escaping into Ai's room.

"Tch." Rie clicked her tongue in disappointment.

Ken breathed a sigh of relief as he closed the door behind him. Yet his eyes grew wide as he saw Ai dressed in her underwear, about to put on some clothes. He took a moment to appreciate the sight in front of him before Ai quickly hid under the covers.

"W—Why didn't you knock." She said, her face reddening.

"Sorry, I was escaping from Rie..." Ken admitted, feeling a little disappointed he didn't get to look for longer.

"Anyway... Go and shower, I can smell you from here." Ai said, shooing him away.

Ken felt his body flinch from the words. This was one of Ken's complexes ever since beginning his training. Even at the airport he was queried why he had so many cans of deodorant packed with him.

"R—Right, I'll be back soon." He said, opening the door to leave.

"Oh, I almost forgot." He said, turning back around. "I've booked us a place in Osaka so we can go watch Daichi play at Koshien, so you'll need to pack enough clothes for 5 nights."

"Eh?"

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

Chapter 673 - 673: Koshien (1)

"Wow, this place is so fancy..." Ai stated, her eyes lighting up as they walked into the hotel. It was modern, yet also classy, something that was different for a traditional town like Osaka.

"Mmm, it's a little further away from the stadium, but I wanted us to stay at a nice place." Ken said, wrapping his arm around her.

"How did you afford this?"

Ai was a little suspicious, but there was also some concern in her expression. She didn't want Ken to be wasting all of his money, especially since he'd already spent big to fly to Japan.

"Heh, I've got some money don't worry." He replied. While he could be considered a miser with most things, Ken was willing to splash out for those close to him. What guy didn't want to treat their girlfriend if they could?

Ai still seemed a little tentative, but she accepted his words. "We should probably check in and head to the stadium soon. When is Daichi playing?"

"I think he's playing at around 3pm. But we need to stop by somewhere on the way first." Ken's face turned up into a wicked grin.

"Err, okay."

With that, the two checked in and placed their bags up in the room. The room was rather spacious with a small lounge room, a kitchenette and queen size bed that looked quite comfortable.

They didn't stay for long since Ken seemed almost giddy to leave for their next destination. As they got onto the street, they walked casually for a few blocks before coming to a printing shop.

"Eh? Is this where you wanted to stop?" Ai asked curiously.

"Mmm. You'll see."

Ken walked in wearing a grin and addressed the lady at the counter. "Excuse me, I'm here to pick up my order."

"Name please?"

"Takagi."

The woman's smiling face faltered for a moment before looking Ken up and down as if something was wrong with him. Ai caught this, her curiosity growing even further.

'Just what has he ordered?'

The lady quickly left the counter and returned a few moments later holding a large item in her hands. It was wrapped in some white material, but Ai could see some color beneath it.

"Here you go... Thanks for your business."

Ken gleefully grabbed the large item and left the store with Ai in tow. They only got a few steps out before Ai couldn't hold her tongue anymore.

"Just what is that thing?"

"Hehehe." Ken chuckled darkly before removing the material covering the item.

Ai's eyes widened in shock, before her hand shot up to her mouth. "PFFT"

"Hahahahaha"

Soon, uncontrollable giggles came out of her mouth as she stared at what Ken had just shown her. At no point did she imagine that he would purchase such a thing, but that's what made it even funnier.

It took quite a while for Ai to recover enough so she could walk properly. "Does Daichi know about this?" She asked in amusement.

Ken shook his head, "He doesn't even know I'm in Japan." .

"Oh my goodness... You really are devious."

Ken shrugged, "I try my best."

With that, the two called a taxi and decided to head to the stadium. Ken struggled a little getting the large item into the car, but eventually he made it work.

It was surprisingly easy to get the sign into the stadium and Ken paid extra to be sitting on the first base side. He was hoping that he would be in view of Daichi when the guy finally took the field.

Since it was around 12pm, the second game of the day was just beginning. Surprisingly, it was his old team Yokohama vs Kanto Daiichi for the first round.

"Oh crap, I didn't even know Yokohama made it to Koshien this year." Ken mumbled after seeing some familiar faces walk onto the field.

He had been so focused on seeing Ai and Daichi that he hadn't even talked to his old school friends, or even Coach Hanada. A wave of guilt washed over him as he remembered the disappointed expression on his teammates faces when he announced he'd be moving to America.

'I should probably try and catch up with them while I'm in Osaka as well.' Ken thought.

"Ah, there's Shiro and Yusuke." Ai said, pointing to the field.

"OI SHIRO! YUSUKE!" Ken called out at the top of his lungs, causing the people around him to flinch in shock. They sent him weird and annoyed looks, but he didn't care.

After hearing his name, Shiro looked around, trying to find the source of the sound. Eventually he saw a long pair of arms waving in the crowd near first base.

"Is that one of my fans?" He muttered, his face lighting up.

Without seeing who it was, Shiro waved back enthusiastically, "I love you too~" he yelled, blowing kisses towards the direction of the person.

Ken instantly felt annoyed, wanting nothing more than to jump the barricades and go deal out some physical punishment.

"Is that Ken and Ai?" Yusuke said in shock, narrowing his eyes as he looked towards the crowd.

At the mention of Ken, Shiro flinched. His face darkened as he remembered blowing kisses towards the guy and could already imagine the punishment he would receive as a result.

"It is! What's he doing back in Japan?" Yusuke said waving back with excitement.

"The game is about to start, don't lose focus." Shiro said, clearing his throat. He quickly turned and walked back to home plate, trying to forget that he ever did something so embarrassing.

'I need to avoid him after the game...!' Shiro thought, feeling a cold sweat on his back.

Back in the crowd, Ken smiled. He hadn't expected to see his old friends playing at Koshien this year, not that he didn't think they were good enough.

With his Training Demon skill and Coach Hanada's training regimen, he wasn't surprised that the team would qualify for Koshien. Especially with their new pitcher.

Ken looked down as a figure made his way to the mound.

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

Chapter 674 - 674: Koshien (2)

'Mamoru Sugimoto... It looks like he's truly taken over the ace position.' Ken thought fondly. While they had had their run-ins in the past, the two had left on good terms.

In fact, Ken felt that Mamoru's pitching was similar to his own, though he lacked the same raw power.

"Play ball!"

The stadium erupted into cheers as the umpire called for the start of the game. In an instant, the atmosphere turned crazy with cheering squads going all out and chanting their team's name.

Ken was overcome with a wave of nostalgia, bringing a bittersweet feeling with it. He knew that he missed Japan, but it wasn't until this moment he realized just how homesick he was.

If he were to compare the WWBA Tournament atmosphere to this right now, there would be absolutely no question of which was more electric. He subconsciously clenched his fists, an overwhelming urge gripping him tightly.

'I want to play...'

He felt a soft hand on top of his fist, causing him to turn his head slightly. Ai smiled warmly at him, her kind blue eyes carrying a knowing look.

"I know you miss it here, but you're chasing your dreams." She said softly, barely audible above the cheering crowds. But Ken heard it deep in soul.

The tenderness she displayed was far more than he could have expected. What girlfriend would willingly allow their partner to move overseas, even if it was to chase his dreams?

'This woman... She's really too good to me.' Ken thought.

Just thinking about the sacrifices she was willing to make because of him was enough to make his heart sore. While he was off training and goofing off with Steve, this woman waited patiently for him.

For the first time in a long time, Ken was speechless.

He leaned his head forward and placed his lips upon hers, kissing her deeply.

"I love you." He stated unabashedly.

Ai's face reddened but she didn't protest. It was only after the kiss that she realized there were many people around them looking at her and Ken with both fascination and awkwardness.

She shrunk back a little before saying in a soft voice, "I love you too dummy..."

Ken couldn't help but grin widely before turning his attention back to the game.

The two barely spoke during the game, but Ai didn't have a problem with it. She knew that once Ken was engrossed in baseball, there was nothing that could pry his attention away, even her.

'Well... Maybe there was one thing.' She thought, giggling softly.

"I'm going to get some food, did you want anything?" She asked wearing a knowing smile. Search* The website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Ken's ears perked up, "Oh great, I'm starving."

"Fufufu~"

Ai giggled once more, causing Ken to tilt his head in confusion.

Soon enough, the game progressed until the 6th inning with Yokohama ahead by 7 runs. Both Yusuke and another runner were on 1st and 2nd base respectively, with a familiar figure coming up to bat.

While Ken didn't know any of the current first years, he recognized Ryo, the second year. Apart from being Mamoru's good friend, the guy was an absolute gun with the bat in his hand.

'It's the bottom of the 6th. If Ryo hits a home run, the game will end here.' Ken thought, subconsciously moving to the edge of his seat.

He could hear the drums and cheers from the Yokohama fans beating in the background.

"YOKO ~ HAMA!"

"YOKO ~ HAMA!"

As Ryo readied himself in the batters box, things quietened down. The atmosphere felt tense, yet there was a hint of excitement buried beneath, almost like they were expecting something.

The pitcher lifted his leg before striding forward, his arm snaking out like a whip as the ball careened down the lane. Ryo's unassuming figure seemed to bulk up as he planted his lead leg and twisted his body.

DOOOOOONG!

The sound reverberated around the arena, bringing with it a cacophony of cheers.

Ken let out a whistle of appreciation as the ball sailed into the outfield. From his vantage point near first base, it was rather obvious that it was going into the stands.

"YOKOHAMA!"

As Ryo jogged around the bases, Ken felt an overwhelming urge to yell something.

"ORYAHHHHH!"

"Oi! Who said that?"

Ken turned his head left and right after being called out, only to see a muscular figure not far away from him.

"Makoto!?" Ken was stupefied. His old captain Makoto Watanabe was in the crowd a few rows back. The guy looked quite similar to what he'd remembered, but now his head was completely free of hair, like a monk.

"Ken? Is that you?"

The two stood up, staring at each other from a distance while the crowd cheered for Yokohama.

"Game, set. Yokohama victory!"

Just like that, the first round match had finished thanks to the mercy rule. Yokohama's team may have been different, but they still held some core players and some up and coming talents thanks to their win 2 years ago.

"How you been man?" Ken asked, evaluating his old captain. Makoto had squeezed into a currently empty seat next to him after its occupant left.

"Heh, I'm good. I'm playing for a corporate league at the moment for the company I work for." He replied, rubbing the back of his bald head with a little embarrassment.

Ken was rather surprised, "I thought you'd try to go pro? Or at least join the University team."

However, Makoto looked rather forlorn in the next moment. "I didn't have the grades for University, and I was knocked back from the professional scene. But I haven't given up yet." He said with gusto.

"That's enough about me though, Shouldn't you be down there playing for our team?"

"Well... You see, I moved to America around 4 months ago. I only came back to see Ai and my brother." Ken said, wearing a wry smile.

"EH!?" It was only now that he saw Ai behind Ken's tall frame, but the words were still shocking to him.

BUZZ BUZZ

Suddenly, Ken's phone started blowing up with messages, undoubtedly from his former teammates.

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

Chapter 675 - 675: Visitor (1)

"Alright, good session guys. Go get cleaned up and get some rest." A deep voice called out.

"Thanks Coach T."

With that, the players moved off the field in groups towards the locker rooms, leaving a tall Japanese man holding a clipboard. He turned his attention to the board, making a few little notations before heading back towards the office building.

The moment he walked into the building, the cool air of the air conditioning washed over him, causing him to let out a sigh of contentment.

"Coach T, there is a gentleman waiting for you in reception." A woman stated upon seeing the figure.

"Hmm? Alright, send them to my office in a couple of minutes please Carol."

With that, Chris grabbed himself a bottle of water out of the fridge and made his way through the now familiar office building. Popping the lid off his water, he drank a few mouthfuls before taking a seat in his comfortable office chair.

He flipped open his laptop and checked his emails briefly before there was a knock on the door.

"Come in." Chris stated.

The door opened, revealing a man who looked to be in his early 50's with salt and pepper hair. Since it was slicked back, he looked like a typical Italian mafioso.

Chris stood to his feet and asked, "How can I help you?"

"Sorry to intrude suddenly. I'm Rob Fisher, the chairman of the WWBA, it's nice to meet you Chris." The man said, smiling gently while holding out his hand.

Chris was a little taken aback, what was the chairman of the WWBA doing here looking for him? Yet he was a polite person, so he held out the given hand, "Likewise. Please, take a seat." He gestured.

Rob thanked him and took the offered seat graciously. "I'm sure you must be wondering why I'm visiting you out of the blue." He said, wearing an exasperated smile.

Chris didn't really know how to reply, so he just nodded. Since the WWBA dealt with players 18 and under, the man should have no business with him, unless...

"Well, it's about your son, Ken." Rob admitted.

At the mention of his son, Chris's expression turned a little frosty. He was quite frankly sick of being approached by people at the University of Texas inquiring about his son's plans for college. This made him rather sensitive on the matter.

Rob seemed to understand Chris's plight, as he quickly placed his hands up in order to placate him. "We're not doing any funny business, so please don't get upset. The thing is, your son has been named the number 1 recruit for the class of 2020 by Perfect Game."

Chris looked at Rob a little skeptically, but he nodded, "And? Why did you need to see me about this?"

This time, Rob's expression turned exasperated. "You see, we've been trying to reach out to him in order to set up some interviews for the website. Unfortunately we can't get through to him on the number he provided."

At the mention of interviews, Chris grinned slightly, knowing just how much Ken hated them. He too used to hate such things, but through many years in the professional scene, he had long grown used to it.

"You won't be able to contact him for another 3 weeks since he's in Japan. I wouldn't bother emailing him either, since he'll probably decline your interviews." Chris stated wryly.

This only made the other man disappointed, but he still accepted this. "Ah man, my wife is gonna kill me." He muttered in defeat.

Chris found the whole thing funny, but his face turned serious in the next moment. "Would you say that Ken would have a better chance of exposure if he filmed this interview?"

"Mmm. Many coach's want to know more about a player aside from their numbers. After all, if a great player is uncoachable, then it could turn out to be more detrimental for the team in the long run." Rob admitted.

"Alright," Chris said after thinking for a while, "I'll force him to do the interview. Just make sure it's in 4 weeks time before the new School year starts."

"Really!?" Rob almost shot to his feet in happiness from the news. "Thank you so much!"

The guy practically skipped out of the office once he'd been given the green light. He promised to send the details directly to Chris, so that Ken wouldn't be able to shirk his responsibilities when it came time.

Chris couldn't help but chuckle as the man left. All he wanted was the best for Ken, which was why he hadn't put any pressure on him to choose a college.

But before he turned his attention back to his laptop, Rob appeared once more at the door.

"Sorry, I got a little carried away and forgot what else I was going to say." He said, walking back into the office.

"Hmm?"

"Has your son decided what path to take to the Majors?" Rob asked seriously.

At the sudden question, Chris was taken aback. In all honesty, the Majors felt so far away that he hadn't even thought this far about it. The obvious and most usual path would be to play college ball for 3 to 4 years before entering the draft.

"I don't believe so." Chris admitted, "Why are you asking?"

This time, Rob took a seat on his own accord, his face serious.

"Look, your son is probably the best High School player I've seen for a very long time. I'm sure that at least physically, he's at or above the College level on both sides of the field."

Before Chris could respond, Rob continued, "I'm not sure that playing in College for 3 years would be what's best for your son's improvement on the baseball field."

Chris frowned, thinking deeply. "So what are you suggesting? He enters the draft right out of High School? It's too risky..." he said, seeming unconvinced.

Rob shrugged, "If MLB teams can't see his potential already, then they would be blind."

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

Chapter 676 - 676: Visitor (2)

"But is this truly the best way forward? How many Major League scouts are looking directly at High School students? Even if Ken has such a great potential, would the big teams really choose him over someone who has played College ball for 3 years?" Chris made his worries known

In a perfect world, Chris would love to take Ken under his wing at University of Texas and make sure that he developed properly for a long career. However, Ken had always forged his own path, so much so that Chris was worried he might even impede his son's growth if he forced him to attend UT.

Such was the dilemma of parents. For their child properly grow, they needed to take a step back and let them make their own mistakes and triumphs, outside of their protection.

Rob sat back in his chair, his intelligent eyes surveying Chris intently. "I can see that you care for your son Chris, there's no doubt about that. But as someone who has seen Ken play both in the Tournament and in the showcase, I can confidently say he is special."

"I think you would be doing him a disservice by not at least talking to him about his options. Even though he is 18 and can make his own decisions, there is no harm in guidance from someone he respects." Rob said softly, tapping on the arm of his chair.

Chris's eyes widened slightly. He had just been thinking that he needed to let Ken make his own decisions alone since it was his own future, but the word's of the man in front of him gave him some food for thought.

While Ken might not need the same level of care as he would when he was a child, that didn't mean that as his father, Chris couldn't still help him make an informed decision.

"I..." Chris paused, his thoughts in disarray. "Thank you for your words, they've truly given me a new perspective." He said sincerely.

"Mmm, it's no problem. I'm sorry for intruding on something that isn't any of my business. I just don't want such a great talent to suffer in College for 3 years for no reason." Rob stated, getting to his feet.

"Well, I did what I came to do, so I'll leave you to it. I'm sure you're a busy man even though it's the off season." He said, smiling.

"Yeah, always busy around here." Chris chuckled, holding out his hand. "Thanks again, I'll talk to Ken when he gets back and we'll set up the interview."

Rob smirked, grabbing the outstretched hand and shaking it firmly. "Until then, I'll see you around."

As Rob left, Chris sat back down into his chair and let out a deep sigh. He wasn't sure what was best for Ken moving forward, and his wife would defer to him in these situations, so there was only one person he could turn to.

Without a word, Chris retrieved his phone from his drawer and dialed a number.

RING RING

RING RING

"Hey Dad, have you got some time to chat?"

"Eh? You're in Texas!?"

"..."

"Alright, I'll meet you there."

Chris hung up the phone, his face filled with confusion. After packing up his laptop and other belongings, he headed out of the office, "I'm heading home early today, if you need me just call."

"No problem Coach T." The receptionist replied with a smile.

Around 20 or so minutes later, Chris arrived home and walked through the door, only to see his father seated at his dining room table.

"Dad, what are you doing here?" he asked.

Mark turned his head, letting out a grin, "Is that a way you greet your father after so long?" He said jokingly.

Chris felt a little embarrassed, but he walked forward and gave the man a hug. "I didn't mean it that way, I was just surprised."

"Hehe, don't worry." He replied dismissively, patting his son on the back.

"I bet you weren't as surprised as me when I learned that my dear grandson is halfway across the world right now." Mark said, his disappointment evident.

"Ah... Yeah, we would have told you if we knew you'd be coming to Texas." Chris said wryly.

"Pft, that would have ruined the surprise."

"Ahem." Yuki made an annoyed sound from the Kitchen, prompting Chris to suddenly look guilty.

"I'm home... sorry honey." He said, coming over to her and giving her a peck on the cheek. Despite living in a different country, Yuki had insisted on keeping the Japanese tradition of announcing when people came and went in the house.

"Welcome home." She said, before ignoring him promptly.

Chris shook his head, a small smile pulling at the corner of his lips. He put his things down and went over to the table, sitting across from his father.

"So, what did you call me for?" Mark said, taking a sip of the freshly brewed tea Yuki had prepared for him earlier.

"Right, I almost forgot." Chris replied, scratching his head. He slowly recounted the discussion that he'd had with Rob, the chairman of the WWBA, sparing no details.

"Oho? Bob came to see you directly? How very unusual." Mark said, his hand scratching his chin in thought.

"Ah, no it's Rob. R-O-B."

"I call him Bob, or Bobbert if I want to piss him off." Mark said with a wide grin.

Chris blinked a few times, unsure of how to respond to such a thing. Thankfully his father moved the conversation along.

"Well, if Bob is going so far as to visit you in person and say these things, I believe he truly thinks that Ken is special." He stated confidently.

"So then what are your thoughts? What's the best move forward for Ken?"

Mark was thoughtful for a few moments, "Well, if you want him to get noticed by Major League scouts, but also not have to compete for 3 years in College, you could always go the JUCO route."

"JUCO? You mean Junior College?"

"Mmm. If he enrolls in a Junior College, Ken will only need to play for 1 year before he's eligible for the draft." Mark replied succinctly.

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

Chapter 677 - 677: Reunion (1)

BUZZ BUZZ

"Good luck out there today man. I'll be watching closely to see how much you've improved."

Daichi read the email he received and smiled before placing his phone away in his bag. He turned his attention to his cleats, ensuring they were tied properly.

"Alright listen up." Coach Narukami addressed his players, banging on the door of the nearest locker to get their attention. It didn't take everyone long to turn their heads, showing just how much respect they had for the old coach.

"As you know, we're up against Koryo today. We've been over tactics this past week so I won't speak about this again. I want you all to trust each other out there and work together." He said passionately, his eyes moving over the players in front of him.

"Out of my almost 30 years of coaching High School baseball, this team is the best that I've ever coached. As long as we play like usual, I don't think there's anyone here that can stop us on the field."

The atmosphere within the locker room was somber, yet filled with a fierce determination.

"Captain, did you want to say anything to your team?" Coach Narukami asked, his eyes focused on a certain individual.

Daichi stood up promptly and made his way over to the coach before turning to his teammates. He saw the familiar faces of his teammates who were like family.

"This is just another game." Daichi announced, "Don't think about the stakes. Try to focus on playing as you usually do and no one will be able to stop us."

His words carried an unshakable confidence, as if nothing could change his mind.

"Bring it in."

Everyone moved forward, placing their hands in the center.

"Victory on 3!"

"1, 2, 3"

"VICTORY!"

The team shouted before making their way out of the locker room and heading through the tunnels towards the field. Upon reaching the field, the crowd erupted in cheers.

"TO~IN TO~IN"

A band began to play music, with large drums beating, adding to the electricity in the stadium. Despite the game not starting yet, things were already loud.

Daichi wore a serious expression as he ran out, leading his team. This was his 3rd Summer Koshien, so none of this was new to him. After winning both the Summer and Spring Koshien last year, he had a lot of expectations on his shoulders as the Captain.

As they began to get the warm up drills started, Kouichi tapped him on the shoulder. "Erm, Daichi... Why is your face in the crowd?"

"Huh? What do you mean?" Daichi replied in question.

He turned, only to see his friend pointing towards the 1st base side of the field.

"EH!?" Daichi's eyes widened as he saw a giant cutout of his face attached to a wooden signpost. The photo looked to be a couple of years old, judging by the baby fat still on his cheeks.

A wave of embarrassment and incredulity threatened to overwhelm him, but it was quickly replaced with annoyance. "Just who is the bastard who made this sign?"

He jogged towards the big sign, leaving Kouichi behind who seemed amused.

"Oi, would you mind putting that away? It's very distracting." Daichi called out. But it seemed the person holding the sign either didn't hear him, or ignored him completely.

'This bastard...'

Daichi was forced to walk all the way over to the barrier and call out. "Please put that away before I call security." He said.

"NOPE, you'll have to take it off me yourself." A voice replied from behind his giant face, filled with teasing.

Daichi felt his eye twitch uncontrollably and was about to call for security. But just before this, the sign was lowered, revealing a handsome face with thick eyebrows and a chiseled jaw.

"Huh?"

Feeling as if his eyes were playing tricks on him, Daichi rubbed them briefly before looking once more. However, it was still his brother's smiling face staring back at him.

"Ken!? Is that really you?" He asked in disbelief.

"Hehehe." Ken laughed cheekily, sending him a wink. "Of course it's me, you think any other person would pay 10,000 yen to print a giant sign with your ugly mug on it?"

Daichi hardly heard the words that were directed at him, his mind blanking in that moment. Before he knew it, he'd already jumped over the barricade and entered the crowd.

He pulled Ken into a tight bear hug, embracing him.

Ken's expression softened a little, patting him on the back. "It's good to see you too bro." He said smilingly.

"How are you here?" Daichi mumbled, his face buried into Ken's shoulder.

"I thought I'd come surprise you and Ai since it's summer break." Ken replied.

Finally after a few more moments, Daichi moved back, holding Ken at arms length. "You should have told me you idiot."

"And miss out on your reaction to my sign? Nahhh." Ken quipped wearing a mischievous grin.

"Hi Daichi." Ai said, waving from beside Ken.

"Oh, hey Ai..." Daichi was a little surprised, but he suddenly realized that he was about to play in a game. He could even feel the burning gaze of his coach drilling into his back at this moment.

"Damn, I better go warm up otherwise the coach will kill me. Let's catch up tonight after the game." He said, taking one last look at Ken.

"Mmm, don't lose."

Daichi turned around and raised his hand, acknowledging that he heard what Ken said. With a light heart, he jumped the barricade and returned to the field to warm up with his teammates.

"What was that all about?" Kouichi asked. From his distance, he still wasn't able to make out who Daichi was talking to.

"That was Ken. He decided to surprise me." Daichi replied with a small smile.

"EH!? Didn't you say he moved to America with your family?"

"Mmm. But it's also summer break over there apparently. Anyway, get your head in the game, we'll be starting shortly."

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

Chapter 678 - 678: Reunion (2)

Around 2 hours later, Ken and Ai left Koshien stadium after watching the match between Koryo and Osaka.

"I didn't expect the match to be that one-sided." Ai admitted, her expression a little odd.

Ken nodded, "I knew they had a good batting lineup, but Kouichi has really improved lately. I wouldn't be surprised if he was taken in the draft later this year..."

"Kouichi... Why does that name sound familiar?"

"He was the starting pitcher for our team at Seiko Middle." Ken clarified.

"Ah okay. Sorry, I didn't really pay attention to anyone else on the team back then." Ai admitted, however she froze in the next moment.

"Oho? So you only had eyes for me even back in middle school?" Ken said, his face turning up into a teasing grin.

Ai's face heated up in embarrassment, "Idiot..." she muttered, hiding her flushed face.

Ken felt rather invigorated. "Well, I can't say that I wasn't looking at you back then also..."

While the two were sharing a touching moment, a man in his late 40's appeared in front of them, blocking their path.

"So the prodigal son has returned to Japan. Nice of you to let us know." The voice was dripping with sarcasm, causing Ken to cringe.

Ken looked up and saw the familiar face with his 5 o'clock shadow, carrying around his clipboard. "C-Coach, it's good to see you." Ken stammered.

"Oh really? I might have thought you were avoiding me after what happened before you moved away so suddenly." Seiji Hanada quipped, raising his eyebrow.

"Geh..."

Ken felt a little bad for how he'd left the team so suddenly, but he hadn't been given much time to make a decision back then. Even now, he still had some regrets for the decision he made, but what was done was done.

"Sorry coach, I'll make it up to you in the future." Ken said, bowing his head respectfully.

"Mmm, don't you forget it." Seiji stated. It was only now he noticed the figure beside Ken who had been hiding her face earlier. "Ai, my dear. Good to see you again."

"You too Coach."

The two shared a brief conversation while Ken waited awkwardly by the side. It wasn't until the coach turned to him that he could breathe a sigh of relief.

"We're staying at the same place as last time, why don't you join us for dinner?" He said, though it seemed like he wasn't really asking.

"Um, how about tomorrow night? I need to catch up with my brother first." Ken felt a little bad rejecting the man, but he had already promised to meet up with Daichi tonight.

Seiji's eyes narrowed a little, but he didn't make it hard for Ken. "Alright, we'll see you tomorrow. I'm sure a few of your old teammates will be pleased to see you." He said before walking off.

Ken finally felt his body relax after the guy had left. It was clear that he still held some guilt over what had transpired before leaving Japan.

Ai giggled softly, "Looks like Coach still holds a grudge over you leaving." She pointed out.

"You don't say..." Ken said, sighing.

"Let's head back to the hotel and get changed, sitting in that sun for so long has made me sweaty." Ken directed, "Plus, I also can't take this giant Daichi head with me to dinner."

The two called a cab and went back to the hotel before getting ready to go out for the night. It felt a little surreal to be in a hotel with his girlfriend alone, but Ken wasn't complaining.

BUZZ BUZZ

"Hello?"

...

"Yeah we're just getting ready. Meet you at the Ramen joint in 30 minutes." Ken stated, hanging up the phone.

It seemed that Daichi was eager to catch up. Since Osaka was known to have film study right after matches, Ken thought that he wouldn't be ready to go until much later in the night.

As Ken was deciding what to wear, Ai appeared from the bathroom wearing a gorgeous black dress which exposed her shoulders. Whatever he was thinking about instantly disappeared from his mind as he blankly stared at her.

"W-What is it?" She asked, feeling a little self-conscious.

"You're so beautiful." He said sincerely, closing in on her slowly.

"Stop..." Ai said, backing away, her cheeks flushing red.

"N—No, you're going to ruin my makeup!" She complained.

Unfortunately, Ken couldn't hear her protests as he took her into his arms, planting a deep kiss onto her full lips. All the loneliness that had built up over the last 4 months seemed to melt away as he held her in his arms.

Ai's protests died down, but by the time Ken came up for air, she slapped him on the shoulder in mock anger. "Now I gotta do my lipstick again." She complained.

However, upon looking at his face she suddenly broke into her trademark giggle.

"Hahahaha, you should see your face!" She said with amusement.

"Hmm?" Ken turned towards the mirror, only to see red lipstick all over his mouth. He couldn't help but let out a laugh before heading into the bathroom and getting himself cleaned up.

Making sure to grab a handful on the way past, Ken returned to the room in order to get dressed. He didn't want to keep his brother waiting for too long, so he quickly chose a nice white button up shirt and some black jeans.

His style was still rather simple, but these clothes were picked out by his girlfriend, the fashionista. The two complimented each other well, looking like a perfect couple as they left the room and walked onto the street.

After hailing another cab, the two soon arrived at a familiar Ramen restaurant.

Ken felt a sense of nostalgia seeing the old restaurant, particularly when he looked at the photos strewn all over the walls. He spotted his own photo, standing next to the older lady.

"You guys made it." A voice called, getting his attention.

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

Chapter 679 - 679: Tense (1)

"Oh hey Miho~" Ai called out in surprise, going in for a hug.

Meanwhile, Ken's eyes drifted to the guy standing beside her with a grin on his face. The two didn't exchange any words, both coming in for a manly hug for the second time that day.

"It's good to see you man."

"Mmm, I thought I'd have to visit you in America to see you again." Daichi replied.

After getting through the greetings, the 4 sat down at the table and began to chat. Ken hadn't expected Miho to be in Osaka, but it made sense when he remembered that Tokyo University was also on a break around this time.

"So how have you been man? The last I heard was that you won that WWBA tournament." Daichi asked with interest.

Ken nodded, "I've been good, just training as usual. You know how it is." He replied nonchalantly. "I had to attend this showcase a few days ago, was the most boring thing I've ever done."

"Showcase? What's that?"

Ken waved his hand dismissively, "It's some stupid thing where they test out your abilities. I thought it might be fun, but half the time you just stand around waiting for your tests."

"And when it actually came time to play, they took me off the mound after only 3 innings and sent me to the outfield... Can you believe it?" He complained.

However, Daichi wore a wry smile. "I bet they did it so the other guys had a chance to hit the ball..."

But Ken was having none of it, "It's not my fault that these guys can't hit my pitches." He said, shrugging.

Daichi chose not to dwell on the subject for long, moving on. "Well, what were your results?"

Ken tilted his head in thought for a few moments before shrugging once more, "I dunno, I haven't checked."

This time, Miho, Ai and Daichi looked at Ken in bewilderment. What kind of person wouldn't have checked their results after attending such an event?

In an instant, Miho got out her phone, "What was the website again? Perfect Game?"

"Ah, you don't have to look. It doesn't mean anything anyways." Ken said, trying to dissuade her.

"Shhh. I'm curious now."

It seemed that Ai and Daichi were also curious since they leaned in closer to get a look at the screen. After a few moments of silence, Miho spoke up. "Okay, here it is, Ken Takagi."

The first thing that they noticed was the strained expression on Ken's face in the profile photo, eliciting a few coughs from both Ai and Daichi. A grin was tugging at the corner of their lips, but they tried to keep the laughs from escaping.

"2020 Grad, Right Hand Pitcher, Outfield... PG Grade of 10." Miho mumbled, reading through the profile.

"Top pitching prospect in the 2020 class, up to 100+ mph with a natural feel for the zone, two-way standout, MVP of 2019 WWBA 18U. Damn Ken, they seem to be singing your praises." She said, her eyes looking up from the phone to inspect him.

"Heh, what can I say?" He replied smugly.

"Bro, it says you're 6'4 and only 200 pounds... You need to put on some muscle." Daichi stated matter-of-factly.

"Mmm he's right. You should really start some resistance training and eat more protein. As for what exercises, you'll need to tailor them so you don't mess with your pitching form." Miho went straight into work mode at the mention of his physique.

Ken could only stare blankly as he was judged by the two of them. He knew that his frame wasn't that large for his size, but he didn't expect to get picked on by his brother and Miho.

He turned to Ai, hoping for at least some support, however she only nodded along in agreement with them. A look of betrayal flashed upon Ken's face as he realized he was being ganged up on.

"Don't worry Ken, I know you can do it." Ai said, touching him on the arm in support.

"Holy crap, these are your results?" Miho almost shouted in shock. Her eyes scanned the results of the showcase, her eyebrows knitting in disbelief.

"What? Are they good?" Daichi asked curiously.

"Good? They're better than a lot of top athletes..." She said in wonder.

"Eh? Really?" This time Ken was even surprised.

"Mmm. Running the 60-yard dash in under 6 seconds is amazing, not to mention your ridiculous fastball speed. Even your exit velocity on the bat is impressive, especially when we take into account you're still in High School..."

"Oh, I see." Ken replied simply. He didn't know what numbers professional players would achieve, but hearing someone like Miho praise him made him feel pretty good. Especially since she was studying sport science at University.

But when he thought about it, things made sense. All of his physical grades were at or above the SSS-Grade. Judging by the systems parameters, he should be at least at the top level of college players.

"You don't seem too surprised." Daichi stated, looking at his brother oddly.

"Well... You know how hard I work. It's only a matter of time before I make it to the Majors." He stated confidently.

To some, this statement might seem overly arrogant. But to those sitting around the table, they felt that there was nothing wrong with what he was saying.

"Oho? You seem pretty confident there boyo." The voice of an old lady spoke up beside him, causing Ken to turn around and see her face.

"Ah! Is that you Ken?" She shouted in surprise after seeing his face.

"Hey Grandma, its nice to see you again." Ken smiled in reply. This was the woman who had asked to take his picture the year that he had pitched a perfect game at Koshien.

"Oh wow, this is my lucky day." She said with a brilliant smile.

"Hi Grandma, good to see you." Daichi spoke up from across the table.

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

Chapter 680 - 680: Tense (2)

"Ah! It's Daichi too... my goodness what a great day." She looked a little flustered by the unexpected visitors. "Are you guys hungry? I'll get you all a special, just wait here."

Before anyone could answer, the short old lady waddled off to the kitchen.

"So she knows your name this time hey bro?" Ken asked, his face turning into a cheeky grin. The last time they had come with their parents, the old lady had simply ignored him the entire time.

"Ha ha," Daichi gave an empty laugh and retorted, "Well, I am the Captain of the reigning Koshien champions remember."

"Ah yes, how could I forget." Ken said, poking his tongue out. "But I don't see your photo anywhere on the wall, could it be that you're not as famous as me?"

But instead of getting angry, Daichi pointed up at the wall behind Ken, wearing a smug expression. Ken turned, only to see the photo of Daichi and the store owner standing side by side in the shop. There was a sloppy signature on the front of the photo showing his brothers handwriting.

"Mmm, touche'." Ken replied, quickly moving past it. He had wanted to tease the guy a little, but it turned out he was already a step ahead.

The four were soon brought their bowls of ramen and began to slurp away at the delicious noodles and broth. Ken's taste buds sang out in pleasure as he enjoyed the traditional Japanese Ramen.

Finding a good Ramen in Texas was impossible. Whenever he felt the urge for Ramen, he would only be able to purchase the cup of noodles, something which paled in comparison to the dish he was now consuming.

"So good..." He mumbled between slurps.

After finishing the meal, they began to talk once more.

"So what are your plans after school." Ken asked, hitting his brother with probably the most difficult question right off the bat.

"Damn man, going straight to the heavy stuff." Daichi replied, letting out a sigh.

"I'm a straight shooter, what do you expect?" Ken winked.

"Well, I'm not entirely sure yet of what I want to do." Daichi admitted, his gaze turning to Miho next to him.

Ken's face stiffened a little. He had forgotten that Daichi also had his girlfriend in Japan, which would likely reduce the chances of him wanting to move to America with the family.

But inwardly, Ken held some hope. The two had vowed to play in the Majors, so that had to count for something.

"If I stay in Japan, I'll likely be able to enter the NPB straight out of High School just like Hiroki." Daichi said, tapping his fingers on the table as if in thought.

"But if I move to America, who can guarantee that I'll be able to find my way to the professional leagues over there? I'd have to try and get a scholarship at a college first and prove myself to all the scouts."

Ken's heart sunk. From the direction this conversation was going, it felt like Daichi was going to make a decision that he didn't want to hear. It might be a little selfish of him, but he wanted his brother in America with him.

"Sometimes you need to take a risk if you want to succeed." Ken said softly, his fist clenching underneath the table.

However, Daichi retorted, "Are you saying that playing in the NPB doesn't qualify as success?" His eyes narrowed as they locked onto Ken.

Ken felt a tension in the atmosphere as feelings began to clash. He didn't want to fight with his brother, but at the same time, he didn't want the guy to make such a rash decision and settle for something just because it was easier.

"Daichi, you know that's not what I'm saying. Playing in the NPB is nothing short of amazing, it's a dream come true for many in Japan... But is it your dream?" He asked.

He let the words linger for a while before continuing, "When we made that vow... It wasn't to play in the NPB." Ken said, his voice trailing off.

Both Ai and Miho were silent as this was going on, knowing it was not their place to intervene.

"Yeah, well things change Ken. You might be fine leaving Ai in Japan while chasing your 'dream' but not everyone wants to make that kind of sacrifice." Daichi snapped, his words harsh as they left his mouth.

Ai froze, her face turning solemn.

Anger flashed across Ken's face for a brief moment before his expression turned disappointed. He didn't have a response, at least not one that would be of any use.

This was something that he was already feeling terrible about, yet hearing it from his brother only rubbed salt in the wounds.

"Daichi, that's not fair." Miho was the first one to speak up, her expression filled with sadness.

"What? Did I say something wrong?" He asked defensively.

"You're being an asshole." She said, getting up from her chair and leaving the table. On her way past she grabbed Ai and left the restaurant, leaving the two brothers alone at the table.

A look of confusion followed by frustration flashed past Daichi's face as he watched his girlfriend walk out. He had considered going to follow her, but he didn't want to face Ai after what he'd said.

So he just decided to sit in silence instead ignoring the presence of his brother who wore a solemn expression.

The two sat in silence for a while, leading to an awkward atmosphere. It wasn't until the old lady came back to take away their finished bowls that it was broken.

"This isn't really what I imagined our reunion would be like." Ken said softly.

Daichi nodded, "Yeah... Look, I'm sorry about what I said earlier. It's just, things are really good right now, I don't want to mess it up." He admitted.

Ken raised his eyebrow, "Your girlfriend just called you an asshole. Are you sure they're good?"

Daichi froze before a wry smile crept onto his face, "It wouldn't be the first time..."

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