

Major League System

Chapter 701 - 701: 1st Inning (1)

Ken was stunned by the ruthless call of the coach just moments after the mistake was made. Sure he thought that the guy was an idiot, but he didn't expect that such a move would get him tossed from the game immediately.

'Is this what college ball is like?' Ken thought, assessing the situation with a frown on his face.

However, he shook his head. This was more than likely Coach Brown asserting his power over the players. Since this was his first year as Head Coach, it was understandable that he would be harsh, at least in the beginning.

The problem was, Ken hated this type of dictatorial coaching method. It was one thing if the coach was harsh on their mistakes, but something else entirely if he was just throwing his weight around for the sake of it.

But he could only remain silent. His playing time hinged on his ability to show off his skills in this game, so no matter how much he didn't agree with it, he needed to hold his tongue.

Zachary trudged off the field with his head lowered, obviously upset with himself. He was about to walk past the coach and into the dugout, but he was stopped.

"Zachary, you're a Center outfielder, do you know what that means?" Coach Brown asked, placing a hand on the guy's shoulder.

Before he answered, the coach continued. "It's your job to direct the outfield. That means you need to be evaluating the play and making the right calls. If you had have looked where the ball was going, you would have seen that Ken was in the better position to make the catch."

His tone was steady, like that of a father softly correcting one of their children. While Zachary was still disappointed, he nodded, "Yes coach."

"Okay good. Go sit on the bench and reflect for a little while, I'll put you back in the game after the 3rd inning." He said, patting the guy on the back.

Zachary's body froze before he nodded like a pecking chicken and made his way past. If they were using regular game rules, once substituted, a player couldn't come back onto the field. Of course this was just a practice game.

"Liam, you're up." Coach Brown said, looking towards a lanky guy on the bench.

"Y—Yes coach!"

Once Liam took his place in the center outfield, the game resumed once more.

Steve wore a wry expression on his face after receiving two bad pitches in a row. He sighed in his heart, wishing that Ken would come up to the mound already.

'What's with this guy? He's not throwing it to where I want it...!' He complained inwardly.

His eyes moved to Coach Brown who had just ruthlessly taken the outfielder out of the game moments earlier, half expecting him to move Blake off the mound. However, his prayers were not answered.

In fact, the coach seemed to be rather confident in Blake's abilities, at least from what Steve could gather.

'Is he just a slow starter or something?' he considered

Steve shook his head. Blake was a division 1 college player, even if he was just a 2nd string pitcher. This should mean that he had some skills that the coach's approved of.

'Alright, I've got no information about my pitcher and we have 2 runners on base with no outs, not to mention that the next two batters are the clean-up crew...'

Instead of pumping himself up, Steve only felt even more depressed.

'Wait... Maybe they're testing me?' He thought, his eyes narrowing. He had just told Ken the same thing earlier when the guy was sulking.

When he thought about it, it started to make sense. Why else would they have paired him with a pitcher he didn't know, especially when they were aware that he and Ken had been a battery for well over a year in High School.

Thinking this, Steve's lips turned up into a grin.

"Alright, challenge accepted." He muttered.

'If this guy is a slow starter, let's try work out of the zone for now and get his arm fully warmed up. I'll avoid any breaking balls first and get a feel for his pitches.'

With that, Steve placed his glove outside of the strike zone and called for a fastball.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

'Lucky~'

Thankfully, the batter had swung for the ball, probably thinking that he would get an easy hit like the last two batters.

PAH

"Ball."

'Good. Now let's see what your slider looks like.'

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

'Not bad, not bad. It's got some nice movement.' Steve assessed. 'I can work with this.'

With a 1-2 count, he decided to take a risk, calling for a fastball in the zone in hopes that the batter would be anticipating another ball.

The wind-up came before the pitch was thrown perfectly. Steve's eyes widened in delight, seeing that he was receiving what he asked for.

'It worked!'

But in the next moment his expression morphed.

WHOOSH

WHACK

The ball was struck dead on for a line drive straight back to the pitcher.

Everyone in the stadium held their breath as the ball rocketed towards Blake on the mound who was still following through from his pitch. Just as everyone believed that the guy was going to be struck, something unexplainable happened.

Blake twisted his body, just managing to move out of the way in time. It flew right past his ear and headed towards Yu who was near 2nd base.

The guy was quick on his feet as he dove in the air, sticking out his glove.

PAH

But the force of the ball caused it to bounce out of the webbing and onto the ground in front of him. Instead of panicking, Yu grabbed the ball and stood on 2nd base before throwing it to 1st.

"Out!"

"Holy crap, a double play!"

Everything had happened so fast that no one really had the time to react to the play.

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

Chapter 702 - 702: 1st Inning (2)

From the point where they thought Blake was going to get hit, to the dropped catch, the batter and two runners had stalled.

"HOME!"

Amongst all of the chaos, Ayden decided to sprint towards home plate, his small and lithe figure gaining some serious speed.

The freshman on 1st base wasn't slow to react, sending the ball back to Steve at home plate. It was a good throw, allowing him to step into the path of the runner, essentially blocking his route to the base.

Steve lowered his posture, clasping his glove close to his body. With his physique, he had some confidence that the smaller Ayden wouldn't be able to run through him.

As he got closer, Steve tensed his body and braced for the hit. However, it didn't come.

Ayden darted to his left prompting Steve to move forward in an attempt to tag him. But in the next moment, Steve's eyes widened in shock. He saw the small body of Ayden suddenly leave his vision, juking him completely.

Steve tried to correct his body, but he'd already committed. He could only turn his head and watch Ayden cruise past him to step on home plate with ease.

"Nice run Ayden!"

The main squad whooped and cheered for Ayden's flashy play, which put a damper on the otherwise awesome double play from earlier.

Steve managed to pick himself up off the ground and felt a little embarrassed. He had underestimated Ayden's agility and overcommitted on the tag. In hindsight, he should have stayed stationary since the plate was right behind him.

Clap Clap Clap

"Nice play." Coach Brown shouted, clapping his hands. Despite the fact that the main squad had scored a run, he seemed pleased with how the 2nd team had responded.

However, Steve still felt a sense of disappointment with his mistake. His gaze turned to Ayden who was walking back to the dugout and shook his head.

'I should have known he would be good. Ken said he played for the U18 American team back then.'

"Two outs! Let's keep it going!"

Steve's ears perked up as he heard a shout from the distance. He turned his head only to see Ken shouting from the outfield. Despite being so far away, he was heard clearly on the field.

For some reason, Steve felt a warm sensation inside. It was as if those simple words lit a fire within him, making him forget about his recent mess up.

It wasn't just him, everyone on the team seemed to be full of motivation after Ken's few simple words.

Coach Brown watched on with interest as he saw the team begin to rally. He brought his hand up to his chin and stroked it gently, as if deep in thought.

The next batter that came up was average height, but his shoulders were quite wide. From a glance, he looked like one of those typical guys who had been in the military for quite some time.

Steve remembered his name, only because it was two letters.

'DJ... I didn't think he was the clean up batter.' Steve mused.

While they'd been doing practices all week, it was mostly strength and conditioning, as well as some role specific regimens. Therefore, this was the first time where he was seeing just what the players were capable of.

With his mind back on track, Steve turned to Blake on the mound and called for a fastball on the outside.

PAH

"Strike."

PAH

"Strike."

PAH

"Ball."

WHOOOSH

CLICK

"Foul."

"Foul."

"Foul."

"Ball."

After 7 pitches, Steve felt stifled. Despite the guys status as a clean up batter, DJ felt cunning. His plate discipline was unlike Steve had ever seen before.

It was as if he knew if the ball was going to be a strike or a ball the moment it left the pitchers hand. For a batter at number 4, one would usually think of a heavy hitter who could hit a home run at nearly every at-bat.

Whereas when he saw DJ, he was calm and collected, methodically picking the pitches apart, like he was waiting for something.

And it turned out he wasn't wrong.

The 8th pitch came, a misplay. Instead of a low inside ball, it turned out to be a meatball, right down the middle.

'Crap...'

WHOOOOSH

THWACK!

DJ didn't let the opportunity go, smashing the ball into right field high into the air. From the moment the sound of the ball and bat colliding happened, Ken had already taken off towards the back fence.

He didn't even need to see the ball to know that he'd be fighting for it above the fence.

However, he didn't panic. This was something that he'd managed to pull off quite a few times, despite not being a true outfielder. His long limbs and tall frame gave him an advantage when it came to these things.

As he continued towards the back fence, he glanced up at the ball and adjusted his course. Everything that happened next would rely on his calculations.

But with his mental capacity now sitting at an EX-, he was filled with confidence.

He once again turned towards the fence, jumping off his right leg and planting his left onto the fence. Ken launched his body skyward, pushing his left arm upwards and into the path of the ball.

His timing was impeccable, allowing him to reach his apex height, just as the ball came into his range. The arena seemed to hold its breath as the ball flew towards Ken's open glove.

PAH

Ken felt the weight of the ball enter his glove, but the momentum made it feel as if it was going to roll out. He squeezed the leather glove as hard as he could, willing for it to stay within its cage.

As he descended towards the ground, he was able to bring his right hand over and keep it contained.

His landing felt a little jarring, but he was able to successfully touch down without issue.

With a grin, he held his glove towards the umpire.

"Out!"

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

Chapter 703 - 703: Establish Dominance (1)

A wide grin was painted on Coach Brown's face as he witnessed the play from Ken in the outfield. From start to finish, the guy had been calm and calculated, pulling off such an athletic stunt with relative ease.

While the coach was 100% sold on Ken's pitching abilities, he wanted to see just what the kid could do in the outfield. His results from the showcase were good—great even, but numbers only told half the story.

After all, what was the point in throwing fast from the outfield if they couldn't field a ball properly?

But upon seeing a play like this, Coach Brown could tell that Ken was capable. Not only did he have great intuition, his athleticism was good, even for college standards.

"3 outs, changeover!"

With the double play from earlier, and Ken's catch, it brought an end to the main squad's attack with only Ayden's scored run. All in all, it could have gone a lot worse if it wasn't for the two freshman's plays.

Ken jogged in from right field and met up with Steve on the way back to the dugout. The latter had hung back, obviously wanting to talk about something privately.

"Nice catch man." Steve said, though he was wearing a wry smile.

"Alright, tell me what's up." Ken replied rolling his eyes, though he felt like he knew the answer.

Steve let out a small groan before lowering his voice, "Man, that guy just isn't throwing to where I'm calling..." He complained bitterly

Ken scoffed, "Why are you telling me that? Talk to your pitcher..."

"..."

Steve didn't reply right away, as if considering the words. He didn't know why he came and complained to Ken in the first place, when he should have gone directly to the source of his frustrations.

The problem was, he was still a freshman—a walk-on at that. He had literally been at Columbia for a week, so it was rather daunting talking to someone who had been there much longer.

As if seeing through his dilemma, Ken let out a chuckle, "I could always tell him for you?" He suggested, trying to hide his smirk.

"N—No... Thank you..." Steve shuddered, just imagining what Ken would do. He could already picture the guy bluntly telling Blake that he can't throw worth crap.

"Suit yourself." Ken said, shrugging his shoulders. Things would change when he was put in the game, Ken just hoped that they wouldn't be too far behind by then.

Swallowing down his nervousness, Steve approached Blake who had already taken a spot on the bench. Unlike Ken who was a freak, Blake wasn't a two-way player and used a DH like a normal pitcher.

"Hey Blake... Got a moment?" Steve asked, feeling a sense of trepidation.

Blake turned and saw it was Steve before his expression shifted to one of disdain. "What do you want, walk-on?" He asked, turning his attention away from him, as if just looking at Steve was not worth his time.

'Ohhhhh so that's how it is?' Steve instantly felt his chest tighten in annoyance. It took a considerable amount of restraint to keep his temper in check.

"I just wanted to talk about our signs." He stated politely.

"What's there to talk about? They're pretty straight forward." Blake said rudely, dismissing Steve as if he were an annoying fly.

"Are they? Then why can't you ever throw to where I'm leading?"

Blake froze on the spot, his head turning towards Steve slowly. The guy wore a frosty expression, showing that he had been offended by the words.

"What did you just say?" He asked coldly.

"Holy crap..." Steve uttered, his expression turning pensive. "It's no wonder you're on the 2nd string team. Not only are you vision impaired, you're also hard of hearing..."

"PFFFT... HAAAAHA!"

Ken who was staying at a small distance away had heard the interaction and was taken off guard by Steve's sharp response. It was clear that he had failed in his mission to iron things out between them.

Ken's loud laughter drew the eyes of everyone in the dugout, including the coach.

"Something funny Ken?" He asked, raising an eyebrow.

Singled out, Ken shrugged, "I guess that depends on your sense of humor coach."

Not expecting such a casual response, Coach Brown was slightly taken aback. However, a small grin formed on his face in the next moment as he approached.

"I'm partial to a good joke." He said, "How about you tell me what's so funny that you would interrupt such an important game."

His words echoed in the dugout. Though he was smiling and the words were rather soft spoken, no one believed that he was in a good mood.

Ken frowned, not expecting things to escalate to such a degree. To call this an important game was a bit of a stretch, which meant that the Coach was likely intentionally making things difficult for him.

This, in addition to the issue on the field with Zachary earlier, made Ken begin to doubt the coach's values. Perhaps he had been lucky with coach's in his lifetime, but he had never felt this kind of stifling sensation when facing a coach.

The coach didn't stop until he was right in Ken's face, which looked rather comical from an outsider's perspective. Since Ken was 6'5 and the coach was at least a head shorter, it was tough to see who was intimidating who.

Ken didn't answer the coach's question, feeling as if it was a trap of some kind. Instead, he shot straight for the heart of the issue.

"Is laughing not allowed at Columbia?" Ken asked, wearing a deadpan expression.

"Not when it disrupts the flow of the game." Coach Brown retorted, his gaze still locked onto Ken's.

'What a ridiculous answer.' Ken thought. They were currently in the 1st innings, the game had barely started.

The freshman and 2nd string players in the dugout watched on in silence, not daring to utter a sound. Steve had paled considerably, worrying that he had gotten his friend in trouble with his antics.

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

Chapter 704 - 704: Establish Dominance (2)

"Forgive me coach, if my laughter has somehow disrupted the flow of the game." Ken stated, though he didn't sound sincere.

The two stood in front of each other in silence for what seemed like an awfully long time before the Coach made the next move.

"Let's have a chat in my office later." He said, patting Ken on the arm.

Like that, he turned and walked back up the stairs to the top of the dugout, leaving the rest of the players nearby to breathe out a sigh of relief.

Steve on the other hand was mortified. He waited till the coach left the dugout and dragged Ken by the arm away from everyone.

"Dude, what the hell was that about?"

Ken was wearing a sour expression on his face, but he was also confused. At first he had thought Coach Brown was a harsh but fair coach, not unlike Coach Takashi from the U18 National Team.

But from how he'd acted in this game, Ken felt that he made a mistake.

"I don't know... I started playing baseball because it was fun. If we can't even laugh and carry on in the dugout, then I might have made the wrong choice coming here." Ken stated, his gaze on Coach Brown's back.

"B—Bro... Don't say that kind of stuff out loud." Steve said in a hushed tone.

However, Ken ignored him. He was quite annoyed with the coach's conduct, but he wasn't in the position to do anything right now, especially since he'd only just come to Columbia.

"Strikeout!"

While this was happening, the lead-off batter for the 2nd string team had already struck out on the field. After hearing this, Ken grabbed his helmet and bat, before heading up to deck.

He ignored the coach and began to go through his warm ups.

Ken's eyes moved to the mound and saw Ethan, the guy who had been hostile towards him on orientation day. The guy turned to him, his gaze fierce.

'Good timing... I was just wanting to let out some pent up stress.' Ken thought, tightening his grip on the bat.

He took a few big swings, causing the sound of rushing wind to echo in the vicinity. A few more pairs of eyes looked towards him, filled with mixed emotions.

Ken paid them no mind, his eyes focused on the big guy on the mound. He had seen Ethan pitch in practice, albeit only a couple of times. He was a solid pitcher who could throw upwards of 95mph consistently.

But Ken knew that it wasn't his fastball that made him so tricky to hit.

He watched as the ball snaked out of Ethan's hand, dipping low on an angle on the way to the catchers glove.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

The thing about Ethan was his almost identical pitches. Both his slider and his slurve had very similar flight paths, right until the last moment, making it a nightmare to pick.

One could usually tell the difference by the speed and trajectory, if they paid close attention, but the guy was great at throwing both consistently. With the addition of a changeup and a wicked two-seam fastball, it left batters constantly guessing where to strike.

As if to back up his concerns, the next ball was a slider which easily beat the batter once more.

Ken had managed to time the pitch with his practice swing, but that was only half the battle. He needed to make sure that his barrel was in the right position, otherwise it would easily get past him.

"Strike."

PAH

"Strikeout!"

The final ball was a fastball to the inside, catching the batter off guard. After chasing two different outside pitches, he was not ready for the final ball to be on the inside.

With that, it was now Ken's turn to step into the batters box. He made his way up, doing his usual routine of hitting the plate and the toe of his cleats before getting into position.

Ken took a cursory glance at the coach, as if waiting for instruction, but all he received was a tip of the hat, indicating he was free to do as he pleased. Since there were two outs already, this made quite a bit of sense.

He turned his attention to Ethan on the mound, only to see the guy smirk. It seemed that he was pleased to be facing Ken from his position on the mound.

'Let's see what you've got.' Ken thought, tightening the grip on his bat. He had been wanting to humble this guy for a while, and this was the perfect opportunity.

There was also the fact that the coach was watching him intensely from the side.

Not wasting any time, Ethan entered his wind up. His powerful body lunged forward and whipped out the ball towards him, causing Ken's eyes to light up.

The ball seemed to be heading towards the center of the strike zone, but Ken felt that something was off.

With sharp reflexes, Ken stepped back, only to watch the ball break and head towards him.

PAH

"Ball."

"Nice read."

Ken turned to the catcher behind him who had just commented, feeling a little odd. But he soon remembered that this was an intersquad match and that they were actually teammates.

"Thanks." He responded simply. If he remembered correctly, this guy's name was Clinton Tully and was a Senior this year. He seemed rather nice, giving Ken a good impression.

Since they would be working together in the future, Ken wanted to remain on good terms with his catcher. To form a battery, there must always be a level of mutual respect and trust between the pitcher and their catcher.

Clint threw the ball back to Ethan who was still wearing a cocky grin. He seemed to enjoy the fact that Ken was forced back from the plate earlier.

However, this only made Ken more inclined to hit the crap out of the next ball. With his new batting technique, he was confident of getting far more power into his swing than before.

WHOOOOOSH

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

Chapter 705 - 705: I Play to Win (1)

PAH

Right at the last moment, the ball snaked to the outside of the strike zone, just evading Ken's bat by a inch.

"Strike."

Ken frowned slightly, but he didn't dwell on it too much. He had picked the slider, but underestimated how far it would break.

His gaze looked up to Ethan who shot him a haughty glance, something he had been expecting. Having faced many cocky players in his time, Ken easily shrugged off the blatant attempt at getting under his skin.

'We'll see how long you can keep up such an expression.' Ken mused, looking forward to wiping off the smug grin as soon as possible.

The next ball came on a similar path, this time a slurve. Ken's eyes lit up as he tilted his body and swung at it with power.

He wanted to send it flying over the fence.

WHOOOOOSH

CLICK

The bat nicked the ball, sending it flying into the foul zone and right past the fielder on 1st base.

"Foul."

Just like that, Ken was now on a 1-2 count and his back was against the wall. However, he didn't panic. It wasn't like he couldn't hit the pitches, he had trained far too much for someone at Ethan's level to get the better of him.

Elsewhere in the crowd, Coach Johnson was watching on with interest, assessing Ken's batting form with an insightful eye.

"What do you think Coach? Who is going to win, your new golden boy or your protege Ethan?"

Coach Reynolds thought for a while before shrugging. "How should I know? This is the first test for Ken against a college pitcher." He turned to the Aussie coach and grinned, "I should be asking you if you think Ken can hit against Ethan."

"Hehe, you're right old man. But to answer your question... I don't think he's ready quite yet." He replied matter-of-factly. "After all," Coach Johnson continued, "he's only just learned a proper batting technique."

The older man nodded. "It's still only early days, he'll have plenty of time to adjust to college level." While he had the ultimate faith with Ken's pitching, the same couldn't be said about his batting.

THWACK!!

"Eh?"

Both Coach's faces faltered as they heard the loud echo of the ball being struck by Ken's bat. The two watched as the ball flew into center field, seemingly disappearing into the horizon.

"Or maybe not..."

The two looked at each other, noting the surprise on each of their faces before breaking into chuckles. Not often were they made to eat their own words, so soon after they were spoken as well.

Ken followed his ball for a few moments before locking his gaze onto Ethan. 'Come on. Look this way...' Ken said in his heart, placing his bat down on the ground.

The moment Ethan turned and faced him, a brilliant smile bloomed on Ken's face as he saw the result of his hard work. Seeing Ethan's somber expression was enough for him to feel quite satisfied.

"Nice hit Ken!"

As Ken jogged around the bases, he received some encouraging words from the main squad on his way last.

Tristan especially seemed to be in a great mood, almost fondling him on his way to 3rd base. Apart from Ethan, everyone appreciated his home run.

"Didn't you say he just learned this batting technique? How come he looks like he's been doing it for years?" Coach Coleman approached Coach Johnson and asked in puzzlement.

"I have no idea..."

What the three coach's didn't know, was that Ken had been crazily practicing the new technique in his Image Training for the past week. Finding out that there was a way to get more power while keeping his balance, of course Ken would be excited.

This, paired with the new batting missions that he'd been putting off for a while, made for great timing.

When Ken made his way to the dugout, Coach Brown gave him a cursory nod, as if he was satisfied with the play. I mean, it was difficult to look sour after your player just hit a massive home run.

"Dude nice homer!"

The 2nd string and freshman players were hyped up from the play, bombarding him with high fives and fist bumps in the dugout. To them, even getting a single home run against the main squad was something worth celebrating.

"Don't be satisfied with just this..." Ken said, his expression turning serious for a moment. "I want to beat them."

"Eh?"

A look of confusion broke out amongst the 2nd squad. To them, this game was one where they were meant to showcase their own abilities. Winning and losing didn't matter in the long run.

"Ken, why are you focused on that? You should just be looking to make some good plays yourself." Blake, the pitcher from earlier spoke up. Despite being in the same position as Ken, it was clear that he recognized the latter's abilities.

"What do you mean?" This time, Ken was getting a little frustrated. It was attitudes like this that likely prevented these 2nd string players from making it to the main squad to begin with.

He continued, "I have never played in a game that I didn't plan to win... To do otherwise, goes against my kind of baseball."

There was silence for a few moments as everyone took in his words.

Behind Ken, Coach Brown's eyes lit up before he quickly turned around. He couldn't hide the wild grin that crept onto his face after hearing such a line. It seemed that he and Ken held a similar ethos.

"But do you really think we can beat them?" Yu asked meekly, his tone showing how little confidence he had in actually doing so.

Ken turned to Yu and smiled, "Guys, we're college players too. Just because they might be a little older, or more experienced, doesn't mean that we will lose."

"Baseball isn't a game that is based around such certainties." He said matter-of-factly.

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

Chapter 706 - 706: I Play to Win (2)

A few mutterings came out from the players in the dugout as they thought about his words. But before they could respond, Ken approached Blake.

"Hey man, we need to talk about your pitching..."

Steve suddenly paled, waiting for the inevitable harsh words to come out of Ken's mouth.

"I don't know what you're doing out there, but you need to trust in Steve's leads as a catcher. He and I played together for over a year and a half and won both the State Championship and WWBA National Tournaments together." Ken stated, pointing to Steve's unassuming figure.

'Eh?' Not expecting such a line, Steve felt a little embarrassed. If this was any other time, he'd likely crack a joke to subvert the warm fuzzy feeling he felt on the inside.

Blake however, was silent. He turned to Steve with an obvious dislike, but in the next moment his features softened. "Look, I guess you're right Ken. I'll stop making things hard for him."

He held out his hand towards Steve, as a peace offering, "Truce?"

Steve was taken aback, 'This bastard was messing with me? Here I thought he just sucked.' However, he accepted the offered hand, keeping his commentary to himself.

With that settled, Ken felt a lot more confidence going into the next inning.

"Strikeout!"

"3 outs, changeover."

"Good timing." Ken muttered, grabbing his glove and cap. Out of habit, he walked over to the mound, only to freeze in place in the next moment.

'Ah damn it... ' His earlier motivation taking a critical hit, Ken changed his course and headed out to right field.

Thankfully no one had seen his actions earlier, otherwise he might never live it down.

It was currently the top of the 2nd innings, with the score all tied up at 1-1. The first to come up to the plate was the tallest guy on the team, but also one of the quietest. Ezekial, or Zeke as he was referred to.

At 6'7, he was only slightly taller than Ken, but he had a huge wingspan. This was why his position at first base was unshakable.

As for the guy himself... Ken hadn't quite got a read on him just yet. The guy often muttered when he talked, making it difficult to understand what he was saying. It was quite odd for someone so big to be so timid.

Ken shook his head, turning his attention back to the game. He looked at Blake who was just about to begin his wind up and hoped that the guy would actually heed his words.

He wasn't surprised that there might have been some bad feelings from the 2nd string towards the freshman players, especially with Steve's status as a walk-on. This was the same with every team, even in Japan.

But when players felt a sense of entitlement, that's when teams would begin to crumble apart.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

Ken let out a small whistle of appreciation as the pitch entered the glove and made a crisp sound. 'I guess he's not too bad after all.' He thought.

PAH

"Strike."

The next ball was just as potent. Now that Blake had truly started to trust and truly follow Steve's leads, things were beginning to look up.

WHOOOSH

CLICK

"Damn it!"

The ball was smacked along the ground and straight towards the short stop. He easily scooped it up and sent a throw back to 1st base for a quick out, making light work of the tall Zeke.

"Nice fielding."

The whole team seemed to have turned a corner. No longer were they quite so nervous, but everyone was very vocal, shouting out praises to one another and communicating effectively.

Coach Brown was extremely satisfied with the shift, causing his whole mood to brighten. His eyes moved out to Ken in the outfield, his eyes showing appreciation, but also something beneath.

'Just having him on the field is such a huge boost to morale... ' He thought silently. Unconsciously, Coach Brown began to tap his foot, deep in thought.

Having Ken as a starting pitcher was fine, but what would happen when he was ultimately taken off the mound? Would the team's morale plummet?

What about the games where he couldn't pitch due to the NCAA regulations?

From the coach's perspective, Ken was almost like a double-edged sword.

'But can I move him to the outfield after pitching?' He thought. Coach Brown had originally thought of using Ken as a Designated Hitter. With his batting skills, there was no doubt that he'd fit right in.

However, seeing that Ken's skill in the outfield was also great, it would make more sense to put him out there. There was also the flexibility of having him start pitching,

then moving to the outfield during the game. Since he wouldn't have been substituted, Ken could pitch again in the same game if needed.

"You've given me a lot to think about..." Coach Brown muttered.

The game continued on with no one else scoring until the 3rd inning. Blake and Steve managed to get both Ayden and Tristan with grounders thanks to the latter's leads.

However, they were not so lucky against DJ. The guy made up for the home run that Ken robbed him of and sent it into center outfield this time, making sure that no one would be able to reach the ball.

With that, the score was 2-1 in favor of the main squad.

When it was finally time for the top of the 4th, Coach brown stopped Blake at the top of the stairs. "You've played well."

He didn't need to say anymore for Blake to understand what he meant. His expression shifted for a moment before he nodded his head, turning around to go back to the bench.

Before he could sit down, Coach Brown spoke up. "You're moving up to relief pitcher this season, make sure you keep up the good work."

Blake froze, not expecting the sudden news. He quickly turned around, his face showing his excitement.

"Thank you coach! I won't let you down."

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

Chapter 707 - 707: Payback (1)

"Ken!"

Ken was in the middle of heading towards the outfield like he had done the last few innings, when he heard his name. He turned, only to see the coach beckoning for him to come back.

For a brief moment, he thought he was being taken out of the game. However, his intuition perked up in the next moment.

'Is it my turn to pitch?'

If he had a tail, it would be wagging at a million miles per hour. Thankfully, for his dignity, this was not the case.

"Are you ready to step onto the mound?" Coach Brown asked, his expression unreadable. There was still a little tension remaining from their altercation at the beginning of the game, but the topic made it easier to ignore.

"Yes sir!"

Coach Brown nodded, "Show us what you can do." He said simply.

Ken felt a wave of elation as he nodded like a pecking chicken. There was nothing better in baseball than pitching, at least according to him. When on the mound, it was as if he had control of the entire game.

Like a General who fought on the front line's with his army behind him.

Unable to wipe the grin off his face, Ken walked over to the mound and took a moment to gather himself. He closed his eyes, and took a few deep breaths.

Today would be his first time pitching against college level players, not just one, but a whole team. How he performed now, would likely dictate the level of trust the coaching staff would have in his abilities.

Not only would this directly be tied to his playing time, but also the amount of resources that Columbia spare for him.

Ken opened his eyes, determination flashing behind them. But the first thing he saw was Steve's face up close to his own, causing him to almost let out a shriek of surprise.

"Dude, what the hell are you doing?"

"Sorry, I didn't want to interrupt your meditation session." Steve said, "I wanted to have a quick chat before we start. I was think—"

Ken shook his head and interrupted his friend, "No need to explain it to me. I'll follow your leads."

Steve frowned, and was about to speak up, but Ken was already turning him around and pushing him towards home plate. "Get off my mound." He said, giving him a little shove in the back.

Steve could only shake his head in exasperation, returning to his spot while muttering something under his breath. The two had known each other for long enough that Ken probably already knew what he was about to say.

'Let's hope that's the case.' He muttered in his heart. .

In the main squad's dugout, Kaden grabbed his bat and walked onto the field. He was beginning his stretches like usual before approaching the batters box, but upon seeing Ken on the mound, his whole body froze.

He blinked a few times, not understanding why the guy was standing there instead of Blake. Kaden suddenly felt his stomach begin to cramp up, something that had been happening since the last few days.

'I'm going to die...!' He cried inwardly.

But then, he felt a hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry bro, I'm sure they're not stupid enough to throw a beanball at you in front of the coach. Coach Brown doesn't look like he's in the mood for such antics either." Ayden said, gesturing towards the coach.

Kaden paused, assessing his brother's words. Everything he was saying seemed to make sense, in fact, it was extremely logical. Why would a freshman pitcher put a mark on his debut by throwing an intentional beanball?

'Surely he's not that petty to throw away his future just for some little prank I pulled.' Kaden thought, his eyes landing on Ken.

Ken so happened to turn at the same time and sent him a small smile. Even from such a distance, he wasn't able to see any malice within the expression, allowing Kaden to breathe a sigh of relief.

'Oh thank god...'

With his newfound peace and clarity, Kaden watched on as Ken began his warm up pitches. Each of the throws were accurate, as well as fast, showcasing his skill even though they weren't proper pitches.

The sound of the ball landing in the glove was loud and crisp, echoing out across the field. Even his teammates let out whistles of appreciation after witnessing it.

Ken gave the signal to the umpire and the game began once more.

Kaden stepped into the batters box and got ready. He brought his bat up and waited patiently for the pitch to come.

'Let's see what you've got.' He thought.

He watched as Ken entered his wind-up and stepped forward with a large stride. Kaden's eyes narrowed as he tried to predict the trajectory and timing of the ball.

But in the next moment, he quickly leaned back, causing the ball to narrowly miss his chest on the way past to the catcher.

PAH

"Ball."

Kaden felt his heart begin to beat frantically at the near miss. He turned to Ken first, then the umpire, but as his eyes moved to Steve, he saw a dark and mischievous smile planted on the guy's face.

'N—No way...'

Kaden paled, feeling his anxiety reappear. Whatever false sense of security he had lulled himself into prior, had now been shattered.

'They're trying to hit me...!' He thought, feeling a cold sweat drip down his back.

Immediately, Kaden wanted to step away from the batters box. There was no way that he would willingly get hit by a 100mph fastball, that was just crazy talk. Not to mention that his frame had very little fat to protect him.

But he couldn't back away now. This game wasn't just about the freshman, this also involved his status on the team. If his form were to fall off, there was a possibility he could be moved to the 2nd string in the future.

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

Chapter 708 - 708: Payback (2)

So with no other choice, Kaden sucked it up.

'I just have to take it...'

Now back in position, he turned to Ken and gripped his bat tightly. If the guy was going to hit him, then he just needed to be quick enough to get out of the way.

In the next moment, Ken's arm swung past, sending a blizzing fastball to the inside once again. Perhaps it was because he was so conscious of being hit, Kaden instinctively backed away from the plate, allowing the ball through to the catcher's glove.

PAH

"Strike."

'Damn it!' Kaden cursed inwardly. The ball wasn't close enough for him to panic, but subconsciously, Steve's mischievous smile was still imprinted in his mind.

Shaking his head, he got back into position and glared at Ken.

'I won't let you make a fool of me.'

PAH

"Strike."

Kaden flinched. The next ball had been slider to the outside, but he did not react in time.

"What are you doing Kaden? Swing at the pitch..." Coach Daniels called out, obvious annoyance in his tone.

It wasn't just Coach Daniels, even the Head Coach was looking at Kaden weirdly. They didn't expect such a seasoned player to be so timid, especially against a freshman.

Feeling like a fool, Kaden had no one to complain to. He couldn't exactly tell the umpire and coach's that the two freshman were aiming to hit him with a pitch. Not only did he have no evidence, none of the pitches were blatant enough for his words to be believed.

'That's it... I'll just take the damn beanball. I don't even care anymore.' He resolved in his heart. He would rather take a 100mph pitch than be tossed off the main squad because he was skittish.

And just like that, he turned to Ken once more, like a soldier facing off against the hero of the opposing army. Either he would repel the enemy, or he would die spectacularly in the final standoff.

'Alright you bastard... Show me your worst.' Kaden gritted his teeth and waited.

Ken was expressionless as he looked down the lane at Steve, waiting for his next lead. But upon seeing it, his eyes narrowed slightly. He was about to shake his head, but Ken stopped himself.

He had already told Steve that he would follow his leads. If this was what he wanted, then he needed to trust him and just throw what he asked for.

Ken lifted his front leg and brought his hands to his chest before taking a long stride forward. The power generated by his spectacular form was electrifying, making good use of his tall frame and long limbs.

As the ball left Ken's fingertips, it spun rapidly down the lane right towards Kaden.

'DAMN IT!' Kaden shrieked in his heart, closing his eyes and tensing his body instinctively as the ball approached him rapidly.

PAH

"Strikeout!"

"Eh?"

Kaden's tensed body suddenly relaxed as he heard the call, but his confusion only grew.

He turned to the umpire and then Steve, as if waiting for some kind of explanation. However, all he received in turn was the same mischievous grin plastered all over his stupid face.

"Y—You..."

But before he could complete his sentence, Coach Daniels had already approached Kaden with a frown on his face. "How could you miss that easy slider?"

"Slider...?" Kaden blinked, his confusion growing.

However, suddenly everything finally made sense. The ball which seemed to be flying towards him must have broken before it had the chance to hit him.

"Damn it!" He cursed under his breath. If he had not closed his eyes, it would have been an easy ball to hit since the slider would have ended up in the middle of the zone.

Grinding his teeth, Kaden was forced to leave the batters box, feeling a level of embarrassment that he had not felt in quite a long time. The two freshman had played him like a fiddle throughout his at-bat.

Coach Brown and Coach Daniels didn't have the backstory, so both of them were rather confused. However, they had a feeling that something else was at play.

'Was it this freshman battery that made this possible?' The Head Coach pondered.

But since this was only the first at-bat, he didn't want to jump to any conclusions. Even he was curious how the High School battery would hold up against the fully fledged Columbia main squad.

After securing the out, both Ken and Steve felt a sense of vindication. While they might not have verbalized their plans, both of them were satisfied with the outcome.

Steve sent Ken a mischievous grin, feeling proud of himself. This had felt much better than just calling for a beanball.

But Ken just waved him off, telling him to hurry up and get ready. Striking out Kaden was only a side quest. He still had the main quest to go.

The next batter Levi came up to the batters box. He was a thick guy which was why it was surprising to see him batting at 7th, especially with the amount of power he held.

Steve called for a fastball on the outside of the strike zone, wanting to bait a swing from the big guy. Ken nodded, eagerly beginning his pitch wind up.

WHOOOOOSH!

PAH

"Strike."

Ken felt a cold sweat form on his back in that moment. The sound of the air being displaced by the swing was like a plane taking off from the runway. Now that he was much closer to the plate, he could finally hear it properly.

'That guy is dangerous... ' Ken thought, receiving the ball from Steve.

'But if he is only at 7 in the batting line up, there must be a flaw in his batting.'

Ken threw the next ball, a slider this time. With his eyes locked onto Levi's frame, Ken did his best to analyze the swing.

WHOOOOOSH!

PAH

"Strike."

In the midst of looking closely, he saw the ball actually move after the swing had missed it by an inch. The displacement of air was enough to alter the course, causing Ken to pale even further.

'He's so powerful, but he must lack accuracy...'

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

Chapter 709 - 709: Unsatisfied (1)

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout."

Thankfully, Ken's pitches were lucky enough not to be clubbed by the ridiculous swing of Levi. However, it felt like in a matter of time, being struck by such a swing was inevitable.

Next in the batters box was Clinton Tully, the catcher for the main squad. He seemed to have good plate discipline, only swinging on anything that looked to be headed for the strike zone.

Unfortunately for him, he was unable to keep up with the sheer speed and movement of Ken's pitches. It was one thing to consistently throw at a high speed, but another thing entirely for the balls to move so much in the air.

"Strikeout. 3 outs, changeover!"

As Clinton was heading back to the dugout, his expression was deep in thought. Though usually quiet, he was one of the most Senior on the team apart from Tristan, the captain.

After experiencing Ken's pitches and Steve's leads, it left him a lot to think about on how this team would progress.

"Hurry up Clint. We're going to embarrass that kid this inning." Ethan's dark voice appeared, breaking Clint out of his train of thought.

"Haaahh..." He couldn't help but sigh softly to himself as he watched Ethan walk onto the field. He wasn't sure why Ethan was acting in such a way, particularly towards Ken.

'Does he feel inadequate or something?' Clint thought, not daring to voice his concerns.

However, when he thought about it, things didn't make sense. Ethan was in his Junior year of college, which meant he would be eligible for the draft next year as long as he could declare.

Someone with his skills would be guaranteed to be drafted. So why did he have something against Ken? Deciding to leave it for now, Clint took up his position behind the plate, waiting for the next batter to arrive.

He glanced towards Ethan whose eyes had not left Ken the entire time.

"Give it a rest..." He muttered.

Thankfully, he didn't have to intervene. When the next batter came up, he was easily dealt with by some efficient pitches. The pattern never remained the same, so it made it difficult for batters to predict the balls that would come.

"Strikeout."

Soon enough, it was finally Ken's turn to bat. Having already sent Ethan's pitch over the fence, he felt confident that he could do the same once more, as long as he wasn't intentionally walked.

Ken assessed Ethan's expression and instantly knew that there was no chance he'd intentionally walk him. After all, not only was this technically a practice match, but he also likely wanted to avenge the previous at bat.

'Hehe, that's good. Get angry.' Ken mused inwardly, performing his ritual.

As Ethan was about to get into position, he saw a figure walking onto the field, causing him to frown.

"Pitcher change. Ethan, come off the mound." Coach Daniels said, waving him in.

"What!?" Ethan was so shocked that he almost dropped the ball. Just as he was about to have his next showdown with Ken, the assistant coach had stepped in and pulled him off.

A part of him wanted to dig in his heels and stay on the spot, but as his eyes moved to Coach Brown on the other side of the field, he quickly did as he was told. Even though the Head Coach didn't make the decision, Ethan knew that he would treat the disobeying of orders harshly.

Feeling deflated, Ethan made his way off the mound and over to the dugout. He handed the ball to the other starting pitcher, Bryton.

"Tch. I wanted to hit him into the stands again..." Ken mumbled.

"Hahaha, calm down. You're teammates remember." Clinton stated, happening to hear Ken's murmurings.

Ken shrugged before stepping back from the batters box, allowing space for Bryton to do his warm up throws.

"Ken."

"Hmm?" He turned around only to see Coach Brown beckoning him to come over. In an instant, he felt his stomach sink.

'No way... This is only my 2nd at-bat. He can't take me out of the game right?'

"Go head to the bench." Coach Brown said, pointing to the dugout with an unreadable expression.

Ken was about to argue, but he could feel the eyes of all his teammates on him in this moment. He had already pissed off the coach earlier, it would do him more harm than good if he were to cause a scene now.

So he just grit his teeth and nodded, making his way back to the dugout. Inwardly though, Ken was seething. He had only batted a single time, and had only pitched a single inning.

'He definitely has something against me...'

The gloomy atmosphere that he was giving off was easily seen. The 2nd string players remained silent when he returned to the dugout, not wanting to get involved. Even Steve felt oppressed by Ken's mood.

"H—Hey man... Don't worry about it. I'm sure he's only taking you off because he's seen enough to make a decision." Steve said, trying to console Ken.

Ken raised his head, causing Steve to flinch. The anger and frustration within Ken's eyes was something that he was not used to seeing.

"This coach has it in for me..." Ken stated softly so only Steve could hear.

He had not come across this sort of discrimination throughout his baseball career before, so Ken didn't know how to handle it. All he knew that it left a bitter taste in his mouth.

However, Steve grabbed Ken's arm. "Are you a kid playing in the little league or something? Snap out of it."

"What?" Ken's expression darkened. This was the first time that Steve had spoken to him like this. Usually he might have been shocked, but he really wasn't in the mood right now. Search* The website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Just as he was about to say something he would regret, Steve continued.

"You need to shift your mindset. This isn't High School anymore, this is College man..."

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

Chapter 710 - 710: Unsatisfied (2)

"And so what of it? I barely did anything in this game, but I've already been taken out." Ken shot back scathingly. A whole lot of frustration had bubbled to the surface over the coach's conduct in this match.

First it was the Zachary situation in the outfield, followed by the dugout confrontation. Then, so soon after being put on the mound, he was promptly removed from the game before he could even warm up properly.

This was enough to shake his confidence in the ability of Coach Brown.

Steve let out a sigh. He was not used to Ken being the irrational party in situations like this. Usually, the guy would take things in stride and handle them maturely, yet today he seemed far more volatile than usual.

"What is the purpose of today's game?" Steve asked patiently.

Ken's expression showed his annoyance as he stared at his friend. It was clear that he wasn't going to answer the guy.

"Ahem..." Steve cleared his throat and continued. "The main purpose is to select the first squad for the upcoming season. The fact you got taken off means the coach has already made his decision. Either you made the team, or you'll be left in the 2nd string."

"It's obvious which one you got though." He added.

However, Ken wasn't so sure. He turned to the coach who was busy watching the field. A large part of him wanted to believe in Steve's explanation, but Ken didn't want to get his hopes up, only to have them dashed later.

Unfortunately for him, there was nothing he could do but sit back and wait for the teams to be announced in the future.

Like that, Ken took up his position in the dugout for the remainder of the game. Blake, the 2nd string pitcher was a ball of energy, his mood significantly improved from earlier after finding out he had entered the pitchers lineup.

He tried to start a conversation with Ken a few times, but Ken just gave him a few curt responses, his eyes locked onto the field. He was like a kid watching a match, his emotions evident on his features.

'I want to play...'

The game lasted for another hour, with many of the 2nd string players being replaced over time. Steve was taken out in the 6th inning, while 2 other pitchers were used after Ken.

The more he watched the match, the more he understood that what Steve said was probably true. With the amount of interchanges, it would seem that the coach was testing all of the 2nd string players.

He was especially surprised with Zachary was told to enter the game once again in the center outfield. The rules of baseball would forbid a substituted player from reentering the game, but this was only a friendly match.

Once Ken subbed out, the subsequent pitchers had mixed performances.

Against the Columbia main batting line up, they ended up giving up 6 runs throughout the remaining 5 innings. On the other hand, Ken's team did not score again, leaving Ken the only one who had scored.

"Game set." The umpire called, prompting Coach Brown and Coach Daniels to head onto the field.

"Alright, gather up everyone."

They waited a few minutes for everyone to get together before the Head Coach spoke up.

"Well done to everyone who played today. I've been quite surprised with your tenacity and improvements so far, and I hope you all continue to strive to get better." He stated with a smile.

"As for the results," Coach Brown continued, "The staff and I will be discussing this over the weekend."

As he looked around the group of players, there were mixed expressions on each of their faces. Some looked confident, while others seemed hopeful. This just showed how much weight that Coach Brown's decision held on a person's life.

"Grab your things, the bus will be leaving in 10 minutes to head back to campus."

The address was short and sweet, not giving anything away. A few of the players seemed anxious, particularly Yu, the half-Japanese player that Ken had met in the first inning.

Ken wasn't in the mood to console the guy, so he silently walked back to the dugout to grab his things. The sooner he could head back to campus, the better.

"We're going to do some training when we get back..." Ken nudged Steve and let him know. After only throwing just over 10 times and jogging around the bases after a home run, Ken had far too much energy remaining. [search the website](#) to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Steve paled, but he nodded anyway.

The group got into the bus and arrived at the Columbia campus 15 minutes later. As Ken and Steve were about to leave the bus area and drop off their equipment back at the dorms, someone approached Ken.

"Are you free now?" Coach Brown asked Ken, his expression still unreadable. For some reason, it was as if this guy also possessed a legendary poker face.

Ken felt like he didn't really have an excuse that he could use, so he could only nod his head. He felt a pit in his stomach as he remembered that the coach had wanted to see him in his office.

"Okay, let's head to my office then." Coach Brown said, patting Ken on the arm casually before walking away.

Ken turned to Steve who was nearby, as if looking for some kind of moral support. However, Steve looked just as anxious as himself.

"G—Good luck man... I'll wait for you back at the dorms." He said, stammering.

Ken let out a sigh and nodded before grabbing his bag and following the coach towards the Dodge Fitness Center. Throughout the entire walk, neither of them spoke, leading to an oppressive atmosphere.

It felt like he was being taken to the principal's office after doing something wrong, however, Ken felt a sense of indignation when he remembered the reason.

Eventually they made it to the Coach's office. The place was clean and well organized, reminding him of Coach Hanada's set up.

"Close the door on your way in and take a seat."

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

Chapter 711 - 711: Talk (1)

Ken did as he was told, closing the door and moving towards the seat opposite the coach's desk. The chair was rather comfortable, or at least would have been if it weren't for the current circumstances.

He could feel the hawk-like gaze of Coach Brown, assessing him, giving him even more anxiety. But when Ken thought about what he'd done, none of this situation made any sense.

Even in Japan where respect was paramount, he felt that his actions wouldn't have been met with punishment. In fact, Coach Hanada would often join in on his antics; such was the rapport that the two shared.

"Ken. Are you dissatisfied with today's game?" Coach Brown asked, his expression unreadable.

'What kind of question is that?' Ken thought, his eyes narrowing. He wasn't sure if this was some ploy to get him into trouble, or if he was sincerely asking.

"Which part are you referring to?" He probed, not comfortable answering such a broad question.

A small smile pulled at the corner of Coach Brown's lips, yet his gaze never left Ken's.

"Me taking Zachary off the field, calling you out in the dugout and limiting your playing time." He said matter-of-factly, promptly listing out the 3 things that Ken had issues with.

Ken's eyes widened in surprise for a moment, not expecting this. His mind whirred, trying to understand what the coach was doing.

'Is he messing with me? Or is he just that perceptive...?'

The fact that he could already pinpoint Ken's issues with him, whilst also coaching a full game either meant he was watching Ken closely, or he was very perceptive.

It wasn't clear at this point, but Ken decided to be upfront and honest. The last thing that he wanted was to have to walk on eggshells for the full 3+ years he would be spending at Columbia.

"I'd say dissatisfied would be a rather strong description, but I'm willing to be enlightened coach." Ken said carefully, not wanting to start any drama.

Coach Brown's smile grew even wider, as if he was amused by the response. He nodded, sitting back in his chair and taking a more relaxed position.

"Good, I don't like being lied to." He said plainly, "I also hate inflexible players who can't see the bigger picture."

'Eh?' Ken's mind blanked as he blinked a few times in confusion.

The coach continued, "Ken, you strike me as a smart person. Of course I know your academics, but that's not the kind of smart's I'm referring to."

He tapped the desk a few times, letting the silence drag out a little.

"So why did you come to Columbia?"

"..."

Ken was suddenly speechless at the question that came out of nowhere. What was he supposed to say?

Seeing that Ken wasn't responding, the coach decided to elaborate on his question.

"The number 1 High School recruit in the country committing to Columbia, a team that's not even in the top 25 national rankings for baseball. It doesn't make sense."

"And don't tell me that its because you want an Ivy league education. You and I both know that you'll be entering the draft in 3 years." Coach Brown stated.

Ken listened to the coach's words, but he didn't really like the tone. As far as his reasonings for coming to Columbia, was that really the concern of the coach? Or anyone for that matter?

But in order to keep the peace, Ken decided to humor him, at least for now.

"My girlfriend attends FIT in New York City. I wanted to be close by so I could see her." He responded simply, though his expression was rather stiff.

Coach brown let out a laugh, almost as if he found the reasoning absurd. "To think we would be able to secure the number 1 High School recruit for such a reason."

"Is that funny to you?" Ken asked, his tone rather cold.

This time, the coach raised his hands in front of him, looking a little panicked. "No no, sorry I didn't mean to be disrespectful. I'm just saying, of all the reasons I expected, this wasn't one of them."

Ken nodded, but he was still on guard.

This time, the coach let out a sigh, realizing that he might have messed up.

"Look Ken, the reason I brought you in here was to chat about the future of this program. Since this is my first year as Head Coach, there's a lot of pressure on my shoulders to bring the club into prosperity. Even more so now that you've joined the team."

He continued, "This means that I not only need to establish myself in the minds of the players, but I also need leaders who can implement a culture that will serve as the bedrock of the team."

"You have a certain magnetism about you. It's as if just a few words from you are enough to boost the morale of everyone on the team."

Ken's eyes flickered with shock. It seemed that Coach Brown's perception was indeed amazing, pinpointing both his Charismatic Air and Dauntless trait abilities from only a few interactions.

"So I guess what I'm saying is, I want you to become one of the pillars of the team." Coach Brown stated, his expression serious.

"Pillar? What do you mean exactly?" Ken asked in confusion.

"I mean, I want you to lead by example. You don't have to change your workout routines or anything, maybe just make sure that you're doing it in the open. As long as the players see this, it will push them to work harder."

Ken thought for a few moments, considering the words carefully. It didn't sound like there was any issues with the request, especially since he had the Training Demon skill. As long as they trained together, the players would receive a boost.

But he was still confused. How did they go from talking about Ken's dissatisfaction, to this?

"I don't see why not." Ken stated, "But this is not the kind of conversation I was expecting." He admitted.

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

Chapter 712 - 712: Talk (2)

"You're right, I suppose I should explain myself." The coach said, fixing his posture.

"I'm fine with you being dissatisfied with some of my decisions, that is entirely your right. Many coach's have certain ways of coaching, I'm no exception to this fact." He said, casually.

"However, this ties into my earlier point of you becoming a pillar. With you setting the standard and culture of the team in the future, your actions will have a direct effect on the other players perception of me and the staff."

The coach leaned forward, "If you're dissatisfied, I need you to not show it, at least in front of the others. You can always come to me afterwards and we can work things out personally, but we need to work together."

'Ah... That makes sense.' Suddenly the penny dropped. He had thought that the two topics were different, but it seemed he was wrong.

Ken nodded. It seemed that the coach was far more reasonable than he had initially expected. Despite being a first year Head Coach, he had a lot of foresight and planned on turning the team into a single unit.

"I can do that." Ken stated. He didn't mind doing such a thing, as long as it would help the team. However, that didn't mean he would pull his punches in his meetings with the coach.

"Excellent. It seems we've come to an agreement then." Coach Brown said with a grin.

"Oh, also what would you rather? Playing in the outfield or as a designated hitter?"

"Hmm?" Ken raised his eyebrow. He had never thought about being a designated hitter before. If he became a DH, then he wouldn't have to go into the outfield.

However, Ken shrugged. "I don't mind where I go, as long as I get to play." He admitted.

Coach Brown nodded in satisfaction, "Good. I like flexible players the most." He said, getting to his feet in the next moment.

Ken did the same, not wanting to be rude.

"Well, I'm sure you knew this, but you'll be a starting pitcher this upcoming season. On your off days we'll rotate you between designated hitter and the outfield, just so your arm doesn't get too tired." He stated.

Ken's eyes widened, feeling a sense of elation. While he had heard some words from Coach Reynolds about his starting pitcher status, hearing it confirmed by the coach made it more concrete.

The addition of the outfield and DH positions were just a bonus for him.

"Thank you coach." Ken said, bowing slightly.

"Mmm, thank you as well. I hope we can work together and bring this team towards the top of the nation." Coach Brown said, holding out his hand.

"Sounds good." Ken responded, grasping the hand firmly.

With that, Ken was led out of the office before Coach Brown walked back to his desk and sat down, letting out a sigh of relief.

"Things went better than expected..." The coach muttered.

He had been worried that Ken might be one of those egotistical players who only thought about themselves. In fact, he had been secretly dreading Ken coming to Columbia, particularly because he was a newly appointed Head Coach.

After finding out that Ken didn't have any ulterior motives and was rather flexible, he could let down his guard a little. But that wasn't the end of it.

With the number 1 High School recruit, the school board had very high expectations for the team. So essentially, Ken was a double-edged sword. If they still failed to breach the top 25 in the nation, then his job would be on the chopping block.

But after not only seeing Ken's work ethic, but also his abilities, Coach Brown had gained a lot of confidence. With this guy at the forefront of the team, it would only have positive benefits both within the team and in the media.

"It should be a fun season..." He muttered with a grin.

Meanwhile, Ken made his way back to the dorm, his footsteps light. Now that everything was out in the open, he felt a lot better. Not only did he learn he was on the main squad

as a starting pitcher, he was also guaranteed playing time on the days he wasn't pitching.

This was the best case scenario.

As he opened the door to his room, he saw the figure of Steve pacing back and forth with an anxious expression on his face.

"Ken! What happened man? Did they take you off the team?" He asked worriedly.

"Dude, calm down." Ken said, moving past him.

Ken took a seat on his bed and got comfortable before answering. "Coach confirmed my position on the main squad."

"Eh? Is that all?" Steve asked in confusion, "Why did he have to act all serious if that was the case?"

Ken shook his head and quickly explained things. There was no real reason to keep it from Steve, especially since he trusted the guy.

After hearing the explanation, Steve let out a sigh of relief. "I guess it makes sense why he wanted to speak to you alone. Even I could see the frown on your face while you were in the outfield."

"Really?" Ken was surprised.

'So that's why he singled me out...!' He thought.

"Mmm, it's weird. Sometimes you wear your emotions vividly, but other times its like I'm staring at a blank slate."

'Crap, I really need to make use of my poker face skill more often from now on.' Ken said in his heart. Now that he had promised the coach to keep his dissatisfaction to himself, it would be useless if his face gave his thoughts away.

"I'll have to work on my poker face." Ken remarked with a grin.

"You play poker? I thought all you cared about was baseball." Steve asked curiously.

"...That's not what I mean."

Steve shrugged, "So what are you doing on our rest day for tomorrow? Wanna go bowling or something?"

Ken shook his head, "I'm meeting up with Ai tomorrow. Why don't you hang out with our neighbor Tara instead?" He replied with a wink.

"..."

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

Chapter 713 - 713: Odd Interaction (1)

"Hey there stranger."

A soft voice called out to him in broken English, causing Ken to turn around. He saw the smiling face of Ai looking at him warmly.

Ken couldn't help but grin in response, swiftly standing up and taking the woman into his embrace. The two hugged for a while before he planted a kiss on her lips.

"Hello beautiful." He replied in Japanese.

They were in a busy little cafe not far from FIT which was there designated meeting place. The two had come here frequently while Ken was helping Ai settle into NYC.

"How was your first week of College?" Ken asked, gesturing for her to sit down.

"Mmm, it was okay. I'm still struggling a little to understand the lectures, so I need to keep improving my English." Ai replied, looking a little uncomfortable.

Although she had been learning for quite some time, the lecturers would often speak quickly, not stopping for any international students. Of course the resources would be online afterwards, but this was not common practice for Japanese students.

Ken had been helping Ai by only speaking English while together for the past few months, but it was still a gradual process. In fact, he thought that she was even more cute while trying to speak English to him.

"Just keep trying, I believe in you." He said with a sweet smile.

The two had breakfast and decided to roam the city. Despite arriving earlier together, they had yet to go sightseeing as they were busy moving Ai into the dorms.

"Where did you want to go?"

"I hear Central park is very much nice." Ai stammered.

A grin pulled at the corner of Ken's lips, but he didn't tease her. He softly corrected her pronunciation and planted a kiss on the top of her head. Speaking a new language took a lot of guts, Ken didn't want her to get discouraged.

The two arrived at Central park and marveled at the greenery. Having seen some parts of the city, it was bizarre to see such a large area like this right in the middle of everything.

There were people jogging and others walking their dogs, but it just added to the harmonious atmosphere that the two were experiencing.

However, the two looked a little mismatched. While Ai was always fashionable, Ken had grown quite fond of his Columbia tracksuit which he now wore everywhere and anywhere.

Eventually, they ended up at Shakespeare Garden, a romantic place filled with flowers and cobblestone paths. Ai's eyes lit up as she took in the view, her beautiful features intermixing with the scenery.

Ken felt a strange warmth overcome him as he gazed at her visage against the backdrop of the garden. His mind turned blank, save for a yearning which tugged at his heart incessantly.

'I want this girl to be my wife...'

Ken flinched, not expecting the thought to flash into his mind. For a moment he was too stunned to move, too busy trying to understand where such a thought had come from.

He had never thought about marriage before. In fact, the only thing that had been on his mind was baseball, even before he regressed. So why was this thought appearing right now?

But even as he was trying to wrap his head around it, the thought took hold, its roots digging deeper into his heart until it had a stranglehold.

"What's wrong?" Ai asked, her once smiling face turning concerned.

"Ah... Nothing." Ken replied, swallowing down the feelings that seemed ready to burst. For the first time in a long while, he felt some embarrassment and uncertainty in front of Ai.

But it seemed that these words were not enough to satisfy her as she walked forward and grabbed Ken by the hand. Her soft blue eyes locked onto him, filled with a mix of care and stubbornness that he had come to know and love.

"Tell me what's wrong." She said, this time in Japanese.

Ken's heart skipped a beat. His anxiety peaked reared its head, threatening to overwhelm him. The woman he loved was right in front of him, so why was he feeling so stifled?

Was he afraid of rejection?

They had already decided to chase their dreams together, so wouldn't marriage be something that they would eventually do down the line?

Feeling her gaze upon him, Ken squirmed slightly.

"I just had a thought... We just started college and will be super busy, I don't want to make things any more—"

"Just say it." Ai said, her hands tightening on his own. He saw a flash of uncertainty behind her gaze, as if she was bracing for some bad news that he might divulge in the next moment.

He felt a sharp pain in his heart as he saw this, prompting him to quickly make the decision to tell her the truth. The last thing he needed was to hurt Ai because of a misunderstanding.

"I..."

However, when Ken opened his mouth, the words seemed to be stuck in his throat. His face reddened, and it took all of his willpower not to shy away from the beautiful woman in front of him.

Swallowing hard, Ken's face turned determined. "I want to marry you."

The words seemed to echo in Shakespeare Garden, causing some passersby to turn their gaze with question. Thankfully the words were in Japanese, so they failed to understand the true meaning of the words.

Ken felt Ai flinch, yet her expression was frozen. For a few silent moments, Ken believed that she was going to reject him on the spot, causing him to slip into despair.

But before he could try and take back his words to salvage his feelings, Ai's face turned bright red and tears pooled at the corner of her eyes. She suddenly surged forward and wrapped her arms around him, burying her head into his chest.

Ken blinked a few times in confusion, not knowing what to do.

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

Chapter 714 - 714: Odd Interaction (2)

"You idiot... How could you mess with my emotions like that." Her muffled complaints entered his ears, stunning him.

'Playing with her emotions? What does she mean by that?'

"I thought something was wrong... That you were going to break up with me." She admitted, not removing her face from his chest.

"EH!? Why would I do that?" Ken's jaw dropped, not understanding how she could have gotten such an idea. He stepped back and placed her at arm's length, wanting to understand what he'd done wrong.

However, upon seeing the tears streaking down her face, Ken felt a pang in his heart once more. He could only blame himself for causing her to cry.

'Is it because I hesitated?'

"I don't know... But you need to be careful with your words in the future so I don't jump to any conclusions." Ai said, wiping the tears away from her face.

Just as Ken was about to respond, a guy grabbed his arm and pulled him back away from Ai.

"Hey, can't you see that you're bothering her." A guy in his late twenties with a thick New York accent spoke up, revealing himself. He was rather tall and had wide shoulders, looking very fit. Yet Ken's height was still above his.

He stared at the guy in both shock and confusion. "What the hell is your problem man? This is my girlfriend." Ken felt his anger rising, especially after his pitching arm was touched.

Ignoring him, the guy turned to Ai and asked, "Is this guy bothering you? I can kick his ass if you need."

This only caused Ken's expression to darken, a dangerous anger brewing beneath the surface.

"H—He's my boyfriend." Ai stammered, doing her best to calm the situation. English still wasn't her strong suit and she had been crying, painting a pitiful scene.

"That's not what I asked." The guy said, turning back to Ken and sizing him up. "Look buddy, don't think you can treat your girlfriend like this just because she's weaker than you. It might work like that in your home country, but not in New York."

"Who the hell are you? What do you mean treat my girlfriend like this? I just asked her to marry me you bastard." Ken was burning with anger, ready to strike at a moments notice. Not only was the moment ruined, but this guy was butting into his affairs and making assumptions.

"Huh? Is that true?" The guy's face was dumbfounded as he turned to Ai for confirmation. His whole body froze, as if he was now filled with uncertainty and regret.

"Yes, he did." Ai replied swiftly.

"Ah crap..." The guy's body language changed in that instant, showing his remorse. He turned to Ken and began to apologize profusely, his attitude doing a complete 180.

Though still annoyed, Ken decided to let it go. Getting into a fight in Central Park wearing his Columbia tracksuit was a one way ticket to getting suspended, something that he couldn't afford to do.

"It's fine... I'm sure your heart was in the right place." He said eventually, though it was clear his anger had not completely subsided.

The guy let out a small sigh of relief and reached into his pocket, pulling out something. Ken was on guard until he caught sight of the two tickets now in the guy's hand.

"Here, you two should take these VIP tickets to the game tonight as an apology. If you arrive early, I'll take you on a tour through the locker rooms and you can meet all the guys." The man said, handing the tickets over to Ken.

Ken looked down at the tickets and sure enough, they were the VIP tickets for tonights game. New York Yanks vs Boston Red Socks at Yank Stadium.

"How did you get these?" Ken asked, his shock evident.

"Oh? You don't know me? I guess that makes things a little awkward. I'm Alex Cole, one of the starting pitchers for the Yanks." He said, holding out his hand towards Ken. .

Ken grasped the hand by instinct, but that didn't mean he had processed what was happening in front of him. Of all the ways to meet a bona fide MLB pitcher, it had to be in Central Park off the back of a huge misunderstanding.

"I'm Ken... A freshman pitcher at Columbia University." He managed to say, though it sounded quite lame when compared to the man's accolades.

"Oh, a fellow pitcher? Excellent. Maybe I'll be able to give you some tips to get into the starting line up." He said, smiling.

"He's already a starting pitcher." Ai said, doing her best to speak coherently.

"Mmm?" Alex's expression shifted, and he took a proper look at Ken, as if evaluating him. "I didn't think that Columbia would start a freshman. You must be pretty good then." He said, nodding.

Ken didn't know what to say. He wasn't one to brag, especially if it was in front of an already established MLB pitcher. While Ken didn't exactly follow the Majors, he had at least heard of Alex Cole.

So he decided to respond modestly, "I still have much to learn before I'm ready for the Majors."

A grin tugged at the corner of Alex's lips as he heard this, "You're confident in making the big leagues huh? Very good. You can show me what you've got tonight before the game."

Before Ken could reply, Alex said his goodbyes, "Well, I better get back to it. I'll see you two later tonight before the game."

With that, he turned around and waved goodbye, leaving both Ai and Ken to watch his retreating figure.

"What the hell was that...?" Ken muttered, still in disbelief.

But instead of an answer, Ai wrapped her arms around him and pulled him close. "Isn't that great? We'll be able to meet the Yanks players." She said brightly.

"Y—Yeah, I guess..."

Ken felt his chin get grabbed from Ai's small hands before his face was brought down to her level. She placed a deep kiss on his lips and whispered, "If you were to ask the question... I'll say yes."

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

Chapter 715 - 715: Number 1 Fan? (1)

For the next few hours, Ken truly felt blissful. The fleeting thought which had run through his mind was now firmly implanted, filling him with both excitement and satisfaction.

If it wasn't for the fact he was caught up in baseball, Ken would have rushed out and bought a ring in a flash before popping the question. Marriage was something that he'd never entertained before, but with Ai, it felt exciting.

As he thought about his life before regressing, Ken wondered if things would have been different if he started dating Ai after being injured. Would he still have been depressed?

Or would he have lived happily with this woman by his side, leaving behind the game that he loved.

"A penny for your thoughts?" Ai hugged his arm tighter, and spoke up in a soft and caring voice.

Ken who had been thinking silently for a while turned his head to look at her. There was a hint of melancholy in his voice when he replied.

"Would you still be with me if I never played baseball?"

The question lingered in the air for a few moments without a response. Ai's expression changed a few times as she realized he was asking a serious question.

"What drew me to you was how hard you worked. It doesn't matter if its baseball, basketball or even art, as long as you tried hard, I would have noticed you eventually." She replied sweetly.

Ken blinked a few times, not expecting such a response. When he had chased her in his previous life, Ken enjoyed baseball a lot, but he certainly wasn't as hard working or driven as he was since regressing.

In fact, he lost count of how many times he had chased after Ai before getting injured in his second year of High School. It turned out that he had approached things wrong from the beginning.

"So if I were to quit baseball... Would you go and get married with me right now?" Ken asked, his gaze locked onto Ai's.

The question was ridiculous, especially considering how far they had come already. But Ken's deep brown eyes were serious, as if he was willing to drop everything he'd worked so hard for in that moment.

Ai was taken aback at his resolve. The guy who only had baseball on his mind all these years was putting her above all of his dreams.

She hesitated. There was a warm feeling that spread throughout her body and she truly experienced the love that Ken felt for her.

"Mmm." She nodded, her face turning red. Ai pulled herself into his body, trying to hide her expression.

"You've made your point. But I couldn't take away your dream, I'm not that selfish..." Ai said, her voice trailing off. "I promise that I'll support you, no matter what. So let's not talk about abandoning baseball okay?"

Ken felt his lips turn up into a smile as he held the woman he loved closely. He couldn't ask for more, this was all he needed. A good woman who would share in his triumphs and failures, always supporting him.

The two spent the rest of the day together, visiting various places in Central Park. It wasn't until the baseball game was getting closer that they caught a cab and made their way to the stadium.

Ken was a little nervous, particularly since Alex had said he wanted to test him out. While it was nothing official, he didn't want to embarrass himself in front of some Major players whom he might meet again in the future.

They arrived at Yank Stadium over an hour before the start of the game, but there was already a line. As the two lined up, Ken spotted a line for the VIP area and grabbed Ai by the hand.

Upon arrival, there was a large security guard which made even Ken look small. The guy almost looked like he was a football player, deterring anyone from making a ruckus.

"VIP's only in this line." He said gruffly, blocking the way. Ken couldn't blame him for assuming that they weren't VIP's since he was only wearing a tracksuit.

"Here are our tickets." Ken said, handing over the two tickets that Alex had given them.

He took the tickets and inspected them carefully. "Oh, you're the guy Alex told me about." He said, nodding.

"Oi Chuck, take these two in to see Alex." He shouted to one of the other security guards before directing Ken and Ai further in.

"Thank you."

With that, the two were led into the stadium by the one named Chuck. He didn't speak, however he was inspecting Ken out of the corner of his eye, his expression unreadable.

Ken tried to ignore it, feeling a little uncomfortable.

Eventually they made their way onto the field at Yank Stadium, showing the pristine grounds of one of the most beautiful fields in the world. Ken felt the urge to take off his shoes and walk barefoot on the well maintained grass, but he was able to resist.

They were then taken over to the bullpen towards the back of the field.

"Are you nervous?" Chuck, the security guard asked. It was a little odd since it was his first time speaking during the 5 minutes they had already walked.

"Hmm? Why would I be nervous?" Ken asked, his expression showing his suspicion. What did this guy know that he didn't?

"Well, Alex said that you were his number 1 fan. Who wouldn't be nervous meeting their idol?"

"..."

'This bastard...' Ken felt his eye twitch at the shameless words of Alex Cole. The guy had interrupted his beautiful moment with his girlfriend and gave the tickets as a gift, yet this was what he was telling the staff?

Ai began to giggle, feeling that it was rather funny. Only after hearing her infectious laugh did Ken manage to calm down a little.

"Hey Alex, I brought over your number 1 fan." Chuck announced upon arriving.

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

Chapter 716 - 716: Number 1 Fan? (2)

Ken saw the 10 or so people in the dugout turn in his direction in that moment, causing his annoyance to rise. But he couldn't exactly refute the guys words, in fear of making a bad impression.

"Thanks Chuck." Alex said, walking over to Ken and shaking his hand enthusiastically. "I'm glad you were able to make it." He added.

"Oh, how could I pass up the opportunity to meet my idol." Ken stated, emphasizing the final word.

"Hehe~ don't sweat the small stuff. It makes it easier to get you in the stadium" Alex chimed shamelessly

"Here, let me introduce you to everyone." Alex said, bringing the two into the bullpen. Ken could already see a familiar figure amongst the pitchers, one of the famous players from his home country.

Ken's eyes widened in surprise, feeling his nerves instantly come to the surface.

'That's Masaru Tanaka... No way.' Ken's inner fan girl reared its head as he saw the familiar figure turn towards him. What Japanese baseball fan wouldn't recognize Masaru, the famous Japanese pitcher.

"Here is Masaru, Jason Paxton, DJ Happ, Arnold Chapman and Gerald Green. These guys are on our pitching rotation, you've probably heard of them before." He said casually.

"Guys this is..." Alex paused, realizing that he didn't remember their names.

"Ken Takagi and this is Ai Koyama." Ken said, bowing towards them in greeting to show his respect. Ai followed, even though they were in America and bowing wasn't customary.

Masaru was the first to come forward, "Nihonjin desu ka?" he asked Ken.

"Mmm, we're both from Yokohama."

Hearing the two speak in Japanese, Alex felt slightly awkward. The way Ken was looking at Masaru made it seem as if he was that guy's number 1 fan and not his own. Feeling his pride a little wounded, he could only let out a chuckle.

"Anyway, I brought this guy over because I heard that he is already a starter as a freshman at Columbia."

"Oho? Is he that good then?" Jason replied, a small grin forming on his face.

A few of the guys let out some chuckles, clearly not taking the claim too seriously. It was clear that they were just humoring him, but Ken couldn't expect these Major League players to take him at his word.

However, Masaru's face changed in the next moment after hearing he was a pitcher. "Did you play at Koshien a few years ago?" He asked, this time in English.

Ken nodded. "We won in my first year of High School with Yokohama High."

"Ah! You're that wonderkid." Masaru said, pointing at Ken with shock.

"Hmm? What are you talking about Masa?" Alex asked, feeling a little odd that this guy would recognize Ken, someone he randomly bumped into in Central Park.

However, Masaru didn't reply, a small smile gracing his lips. "What is your shoe size? I've got some spare cleats."

The other players were confused, but they quickly shrugged it off. They would find out how good the kid was in a few minutes and be able to make their own decision.

It turned out that Masaru had quite a large foot despite being shorter than Ken by a few inches, so they fit him perfectly. Now equipped with cleats, Ken looked a little odd wearing his Columbia track suit and holding a glove.

"Ah, does anyone have a cap?" Ken asked. It felt too odd to be pitching without a cap on.

One of the pitching coach's who had been observing silently walked over and handed him a cap. He was rather unassuming, but he looked to be rather interested in what was going on so he hadn't objected despite the interruption.

"Oi Sanchez, can you catch for the kid?" Alex asked Garrett Sanchez, the starting catcher for the team, much to Ken's surprise. He had expected one of the staff to catch for him, but it turned out to be such a guy.

"No problem." He replied stoically, heading over. "What pitches do you know?"

Feeling the pressure begin to mount, Ken took a deep breath before responding, "Changeup, slider, curve, fork, two-seam, four-seam."

Garrett nodded, quickly going through the leads with him before walking over to the plate and squatting. "Warm your arm up and let me know when you're ready."

Ken gave a thumbs up and tried to center himself. He was pitching in front of the New York Yanks pitching team, as well as a few of their coach's. Everything had happened so quick that none of it felt real.

This was certainly not in his itinerary when he woke up this morning.

Upon focusing, Ken felt a cool sensation spread within his body, calming him down significantly. His Dauntless trait had activated, allowing him to ignore the pressure bearing down on him.

He then began to throw a few balls with the intention of warming up his arm. As usual, it only took around 10 throws for him to get warm, meaning he was now ready to perform in front of these people.

Ai watched from the side, gripping her bag tightly. She watched on, silently praying that Ken would be able to show the results of his hard work in front of these famous players. At the very least, she wished he would be satisfied with his own performance.

"Ganbatte" She whispered, watching him intently.

Ken gave another thumbs up, indicating that he was ready. Garrett placed his face mask on and squatted, giving the signal for a fastball on the outside of the strike zone. He nodded and got into position.

Taking a deep breath, Ken lifted his front leg, bringing his knee close to his chest. His back leg bent slightly before pushing off the pitchers strip and taking a large stride forwards.

His pitching form was fluid and beautiful with no wasted movements, showing just how technical and well practiced his fundamentals were. As his lead leg planted, his arm came through like a whip as his body rotated with force.

Ken's fingertips raked down on the ball, giving it an intense amount of spin which made the ball snake through the air like a dragon soaring through the clouds.

PAH!

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

Chapter 717 - 717: Impressive (1)

"Boston aren't the team they were last season. It's still a mystery to me how they won the world series anyway."

"We still can't count them out as we'll be facing them in the post season. A win tonight would put us in a great position though."

Two men chatted back and forth as they walked around the edge of Yankee stadium. The man who just spoke was in his late 40's and kitted head to toe in Yanks gear.

As they arrived at the Yanks bullpen, he froze. He saw a figure on the mound dressed in a light blue tracksuit, which was obviously not the NY Yanks gear. Just as he was about to say something, the guy threw a ball into the open glove of the catcher.

PAH

The sound echoed in the quiet stadium, eliciting silence from the onlookers.

The man opened the door to the bullpen and saw all the pitchers and staff staring at the figure on the mound with their jaws dropped.

"What the hell is going on here? Who is this guy?" The man asked, feeling immense confusion.

"Ah, Coach Boone... T—This is Ken, he's a fan of mine so I brought him over to give him some pointers." Alex said, sounding like a child being caught doing something wrong.

"Huh?" The coach looked from Alex to Ken on the mound and was speechless for a moment. "Why have you got a fan pitching in the bullpen right before an important game? This isn't the time to be messing around..."

He seemed displeased and was about to blow his lid. However, his eyes moved to the numbers on the screen behind Garrett, causing him to freeze on the spot.

"100mph?" he muttered in disbelief.

Coach Boone was silent as he tried to come to terms with the evidence in front of him. His eyes moved to Ken who looked out of place after being caught, it was as if he didn't know whether to hide or stand his ground.

"Ken is it? Did you just pitch before?" the coach asked, his tone even.

"Yes sir."

The coach moved his gaze to the unassuming pitching coach sitting on the sideline as if to confirm this. The latter nodded, indicating that it was indeed Ken who had thrown just before.

"Alright, throw the exact same ball as last time." He stated, not waiting for an answer.

'What the hell is going on?' Ken thought, his heart racing. He hadn't expected the coach Adam Boone to arrive while he was in the middle of pitching. This had turned into something that he wasn't ready for.

Garrett Sanchez threw the ball back to Ken who once again took up his position on the mound. With the added pressure of Coach Boone watching, he took a few extra moments to calm himself down.

Once again the cool sensation of his Dauntless trait rescued him, allowing Ken to focus his energy on pitching. Sometimes it felt like a cheat code to have this trait, but he had long gotten over the guilt of having his system.

Letting out a deep breath, Ken once again entered his pitching form. He performed the action in an almost identical fashion, sending out another blitzing fastball towards the outside.

PAH

Now knowing what to expect, the other players and staff in the bullpen were less shocked, but that didn't mean they weren't impressed. The only one who was wearing a knowing expression was Masaru Tanaka, who had heard of Ken's exploits from friends and family in Japan.

Everyone looked towards the speedometer behind the catcher and sucked in a cold breath of air.

"101mph!? That's even faster than before..."

Adam Boone's expression morphed into a smile as he saw the scene. The graceful movements of Ken's pitching action were wonderful to watch, not to mention the sheer velocity and sharpness of his pitches. Search* The website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"Let's see some breaking balls." Coach Boone announced.

Ken threw a wicked slider next, one that would have been difficult to catch if it were any other catcher. The movement of the ball was great, exactly what one would want in a breaking ball.

"Throw a few more."

Like this, Ken threw every ball that he knew how. Changeup, slider, curve, fork one after the other. He was pitching consistently, despite the pressure exuded by the onlookers.

After each ball, Alex paled. At first he had thought that Ken might be a regular run of the mill College pitcher, but he was wrong. Not only was there speed in his pitches, the control was enviable.

Unlike a lot of youngsters who lacked control, Ken had yet to miss where Garrett was calling for the balls. It was suddenly obvious as to why Columbia were willing to make Ken a starting pitcher despite only being a freshman.

It wasn't until Ken had thrown around 10 balls that the coach Adam Boone stood up and began to clap slowly.

"Well done. Are you declaring for the draft next year? We'd love to invite you for a closed tryout if that's the case." He said, walking over to Ken.

Ken was thrilled in that moment. Hearing that the Yanks of all clubs would be interested in him trying out made him almost jump for joy. However, he scratched the back of his head in embarrassment.

"Coach, he's still a freshman." Alex spoke up before Ken could.

Coach Boone's face morphed into one of shock. "You're a freshman!? At College!?" While he had done well to keep a straight face for the duration of Ken's pitching, he couldn't do so now after hearing this information.

"I just started classes this past Monday." Ken said sheepishly.

The coach stammered before he let out a curse. "Damn it, what do they feed kids these days?" He muttered.

A look of disappointment fell onto his face as he shook his head, "What a pity. We could have picked up a steal." He said, his voice tinged with regret.

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

Chapter 718 - 718: Impressive (2)

However, his expression changed after. "Well, enjoy the game tonight. Maybe we'll see each other again in 3 years, if I'm still Head Coach by then that is." Coach Boone said with a grin, holding out his hand.

"Ah, thanks coach!" Ken said, gripping the outstretched hand.

"You guys stop slacking, we have an important game tonight." He stated before leaving the bullpen, followed by the guy who was trailing behind him before.

Once the coach left, things were silent for a little while until Masaru came over to Ken and nudged him. "So you haven't lost your touch I see." He said with a grin.

"Ah haha I guess not..." Ken replied nervously. This was one of his biggest idols Ma-kun talking to him so casually, even with his Dauntless trait active, he might not be able to hold his cool.

"Last I heard, you were going through a bit of a slump. Don't worry, it happens to the best of us." He said casually, "What's even more great is that you're in America! Most Japanese choose to remain in Japan."

These words were said in Japanese, making Ken feel a little more at ease. "I've always wanted to make it to the Majors, so the best chance is to go to an American college." Ken replied.

"What are you guys talking about?" Alex asked, wrapping his arm around Ken's shoulders.

Masaru smiled, "I was just saying he made the right choice coming to America to chase the Majors. As long as he keeps up his form, there's no way he won't be drafted."

"Heh, no kidding. If I had known you were a monster like this I wouldn't have invited you." Alex replied cheekily.

"Um, excusa me. I can take photo?" Ai's sweet voice and broken English spoke up from the sideline, holding her phone up.

"Ah sure thing. Make sure you get my good side though." Alex responded, turning himself and Ken towards her.

Ken dreaded photos, but he was happy to be getting one with Masaru.

'I wish this guy would leave... He's ruining my photo with Ma-kun' Ken thought, shooting Alex a glare.

"Say cheese."

Ai snapped many photos of the 3 standing on the mound in the Yanks bullpen. These would be a priceless treasure for both her and Ken before he made it to the majors.

"Why don't you go up too, I'll take a photo of you all together." The unassuming pitching coach from earlier approached Ai and offered to take her phone.

"Sank you!" She said, bowing a few times before swiftly heading over to the mound.

They then took a few photos together before Garrett Sanchez and a few other pitchers joined in. Eventually, the whole bullpen lined up for the photo, surprising both Ken and Ai.

"Send those photos to me through LINE" Masaru said to Ai. "I will be able to tell everyone I met Ken before he was famous." He said with a chuckle.

"Eh?" Ken blinked a few times, not expecting one of his idols to say such words. Today was like a dream come true, and it all sparked from the guy on his right interrupting a sweet moment between him and Ai.

'I guess I can forgive him...' Ken thought. However, the smell of body odor wafted into his nose from the guy's armpits, almost causing him to reel backwards.

"Alright, we've had enough fun, its time for us to get some warm-ups in. Have a seat by the side and I'll get Chuck to take you to the VIP suite before the game starts." Alex said, patting Ken on the back.

Meanwhile, Coach Boone had already returned to the lockers by now. He had been silent for the walk back, muttering to himself every now and then.

"Coach, why do you look like you swallowed a fly?"

"Don't even ask..." He replied, not even acknowledging the 6'7 beast in front of him. Coach Boone walked past and went straight to his office, not even addressing his follower who had been behind him all this while.

"Coach... The starting lineup for the game was meant to be released 30 minutes ago." The guy said, looking a little nervous.

"Damn it. Just send them the last line up." He said, waving the guy off.

"But coach, the staff said Stanton should be fine to play today. Should I leave him off the line up?"

Coach Boone took off his hat and ruffled his hair in frustration, "Damn it Boyle, you just do the line up today. Can't you see I'm busy right now?"

The one he called Boyle flinched before nodding like a pecking chicken and leaving the office. It wasn't often that Coach Boone was this annoyed about something, so he should have known to leave the guy alone.

It was just that he had people from the media constantly asking him to release the line up.

Back in the office, the Head Coach calmed himself down after a few minutes. He opened up his laptop and searched for Ken's name. He hadn't gotten the last name, so he had to work for a little while before finding it.

He was taken to the Perfect Game website and onto Ken's profile. It was there that he got to learn that Ken was the number 1 rated High School recruit for 2019. There were also articles about him deciding to join Columbia, a team who had struggled in recent years.

"Why did he choose Columbia of all places? Scratch that, why didn't he declare for the draft instead of High School?" Coach Boone was utterly confused.

Of course since he had no background, he wouldn't know Ken's reasoning. In addition to wanting to stay near Ai's College, Ken wanted to net the most amount of benefits from the system missions as possible.

He believed that if he went straight to the majors, he would be missing out on possible College missions and rewards that would help him in the long run. This wasn't a guess either, since Mika had confirmed this information.

But since the coach was in the dark, he could only lament his misfortune, "Such a shame..."

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

Chapter 719 - 719: Fame (1)

Ken opened the door to his dorm room, trying to be as quiet as possible. Since it was already late, he didn't want to wake up his friend if he was asleep.

"Dude, where have you been? Didn't you say you'd be back in the afternoon? I've been worried sick." Steve called out, causing Ken to almost jump in fright.

The room was completely dark, which meant he had to have been waiting all this time.

With a flash of annoyance, Ken flipped the light switch on, only to see Steve with his arms crossed sitting on a desk chair. He looked like a father who was about to have a stern talking to his son who had missed curfew.

"None of your business." Ken scoffed, though he was wearing a small smile.

Steve let out a chuckle, "No but seriously, fill me in. I've been bored this whole time by myself."

Ken didn't answer him right away, taking off his shoes and heading over to his bed. He flopped onto it, letting out a sigh of contentment after being on his feet most of the day.

"We just saw the Yanks and Red Socks play at Yank Stadium." He said casually.

"What!? And you didn't invite me?" Steve exclaimed, his bottom lip quivering slightly. He looked like a child who had found out they missed out on Disneyland.

Ken shrugged, "I only got 2 VIP tickets, I couldn't have invited you even if I tried."

"WHAT!? VIP Tickets? Just how rich are you man?"

"I didn't pay for them. You know how much of a miser I am." He replied dismissively.

"Mmm, that's true. But you've been helping me out with my meals, so I wouldn't exactly call you a miser." Steve scratched his head in thought.

"Wait, so if you didn't buy them? How did you get the VIP tickets?"

"Alex Cole gave them to me."

"..."

Steve's expression changed to one of incredulity, "Sure man. Next you're gonna tell me that Adam Boone offered you a contract for the Yanks." He let out a few scoffs, as if the whole premise was absurd.

Ken couldn't help but grin, "Well, he didn't offer me a contract. But he invited me to closed tryouts, at least until I told him that I was a freshman at College."

Steve frowned, "Alright alright, can you stop kidding around now. I really want to know how you got the tickets. Maybe next time you can get an extra one for me."

"I already told you, Alex Cole gave me the tickets. We met in Central Park when... When Ai and I were walking along." Ken's face turned slightly red thinking about what had happened in Shakespeare Garden.

"And I suppose you met the team too right? After all, if Alex Cole gave you the tickets personally, he would have also offered you this right? Right?" Steve's tone was getting a little sharper as he spoke, clearly not believing Ken's words.

Ken let out a sigh before pulling out his phone. He went to the image gallery of the photo's he'd received from Ai and handed the phone to Steve.

As Steve grabbed the phone, his expression changed almost instantly. He began to furiously swipe through the photos, not believing his eyes.

Until he stopped on one where his eyes widened. His face turned beet red in the next moment before his gaze moved to Ken. Jealousy and something else was evident in his features.

"Maybe I wasn't meant to see this one." He said, handing the phone back to Ken.

Ken frowned and grabbed the photo, only to see a picture of Ai dressed in raunchy lingerie. He quickly locked the screen and shoved the phone in his pocket, feeling his face heat up.

"Ahem... You will not speak a word of this." Ken announced, a hint of both embarrassment and a murderous edge in his tone.

Steve shuddered, but he nodded his head obediently.

"W—Well... I guess you did get the tickets from Alex then." He stated, finally believing his friends words. He couldn't be blamed for not believing them right away, after all, who just randomly meets a professional pitcher in Central Park.

Not only that, why would he approach Ken and give out free VIP tickets to the game? Even inviting him into the bullpen.

"But what I don't understand, is why he gave you tickets?" Steve continued.

"I don't want to talk about it." Ken said plainly.

"Right... Well do you think you can hook me up?" Steve asked, hoping for a miracle.

Ken shook his head, "It was just a one time thing. I'm gonna go grab a shower, it's been a long day." He said, scrunching his nose. The smell of Alex's body odor still lingered on his hoodie.

'I'll need to burn it if that smell doesn't come out.' He mused inwardly, moving to the bathroom.

He prised the door open slowly, checking to make sure that it wasn't in use. He didn't feel like walking in on one of the neighbors like last time, it was far too awkward.

Thankfully there was no one present, so he walked in and swiftly got undressed, hopping into the shower. As the water cascaded down his head, he decided to open up the system, as he usually did during his downtime.

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS (1)

-SYSTEM SHOP

-LOTTERY (Locked)

-IMAGE TRAINING

-IDENTIFY

-TRAINING PLAN

-MENTOR

"Hmm? What is this?" Ken muttered with confusion. He hadn't remembered seeing a new mission before now, so why had it appeared so suddenly?

Not wanting to get his hopes up, Ken tentatively opened up the missions window.

#HIDDEN MISSION: Climbing the Social Ladder

*Task 1: Leave a lasting impression in front of the New York Yanks players. [Complete]

*Task 2: Create a social media account. [Pending]

*Task 3: Post a picture from today. [Pending]

REWARDS:

>Increased Fame and recognition.

>Upgrade Charismatic Air skill to Magnetic Charm.

'What the hell kind of mission is this!?'

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

- Chapter 720 - 720: Fame (2)

Chapter 720 - 720: Fame (2)

As Ken stared at the mission in front of him, he truly didn't know what to think. The fact that the system was asking him to do this made absolutely no sense to him.

While he could understand the benefits of making an impression in front of the Yanks, the other two tasks seemed completely unnecessary. And what was with the rewards?

Ken had already complained about the Charismatic Air skill, so why would he want to upgrade it? Especially to a skill with such a weird sounding name as "Magnetic Charm."

'Mika, can you tell me more about this mission?' He asked politely.

[No.]

"..."

'Please?'

[User already has all the information needed. No further explanation is required.]

Ken clicked his tongue in annoyance, but quickly moved past it. If the system was asking him to do something, it should only bring him benefits... Right?

'I don't know anything about Social Media. Where would I even begin?'

As Ken was deep in thought, he went through the motions of showering and toweling himself dry. He stood in front of the fogged up mirror and wiped it, revealing his well defined body.

He wasn't really a vain person, but even Ken had to admit that he was in great shape. While he could probably use some more mass on his frame, his muscles were both aesthetically pleasing and functional.

The sound of a door creaking open entered his ears, causing him to flinch. He turned his head to see Tara sticking her head in from the other door.

"Are you finished?" She asked politely, her eyes quickly glancing at Ken's bare chest and abs. She was so quick with her movements that he didn't have time to cover up before she was done.

"Yeah, I'm done..." He replied, sounding a little despondent.

Just as he was about to turn, he froze in place.

"Hey, do you know much about Social Media?" Ken asked. He guessed that a college girl would likely have an interest in such things, particularly one who was on the cheer team.

"Hehe~ who do you think you're talking to? I study Digital Marketing." She said, sending him a wink.

Ken's eyes lit up, feeling as if he'd just found fresh water in the desert.

"Do you think you could help me set up a Social Media account?" He asked, "I'll pay you of course."

Tara opened the door fully and approached him slowly, taking a finger and running it in between his abs. "What will you pay me with?"

Ken's face turned into one of horror as he quickly backed up, bumping into the door behind him. In his panic, the towel around his waist became loose. If it wasn't for his godlike reflexes, he might have lost his dignity in that moment.

"I—I have a fiance!" He exclaimed, holding his towel with both hands.

"Hehe~ I was just kidding." Tara stated, letting out a giggle. She turned and made her way out of the bathroom before adding, "Meet me tomorrow after practice in my room. We'll work out the details then."

With that she closed the door, leaving Ken's distraught figure still clutching his towel.

"W—What the hell man..." He muttered, feeling that it was a close call. The look in Tara's eyes told him that she wasn't actually joking to begin with.

A feeling of guilt struck him after the close encounter. Being a staunch and loyal man, he would never cheat on Ai, especially after realizing his feelings.

He quickly grabbed his phone and began to type a message to Ai. He wanted to let her know that he was meeting a girl tomorrow to talk about digital marketing and to get a Social Media account.

Thankfully, Ai seemed to be cool with it. According to her, Professional athletes needed a presence online since it was how they reached their fans and gained popularity. Unfortunately, like Ken, her knowledge of American social media was almost nothing.

"What was that about in there?" Steve asked. He was in the exact same position as earlier, as if he'd been waiting for Ken.

Ken shot him a weird look, but explained his situation, leaving out the shocking part.

"Bro, if you wanted help with social media you should have just asked me?" He said, grabbing his phone out of his pocket.

He swiped a few times before pulling up his account. "See, I have 225 followers. Pretty impressive right?"

Ken squinted, looking at the profile picture of Steve. It was him pulling a goofy face, dressed in his High School baseball uniform. But it wasn't that that caught his eye, it was the guy in the background.

"Is that me in the background of that photo?"

Steve shrugged, "So what if it is? We're friends right?" he said nonchalantly.

Usually Ken wouldn't have an issue with it, but his face was turned up in a scowl, as if he was looking down on Steve who was being an idiot.

Ken groaned before getting changed into something more comfortable. It was such a long day that all he wanted to do was sleep. As he laid his head down, he remembered the interaction he had with Ai earlier that day.

Just thinking about it made him blush. Thankfully the room was only lit by a dim desk lamp so no one could see his face.

'Once I get drafted, I'll ask her to marry me.' Ken thought, his determination growing even more. He would need to take a quick trip back to Japan to see Tetsu and ask for his daughter's hand in marriage.

'Maybe I can go see Daichi while I'm over there...'

Thinking about his brother, his emotions became rather mixed. The guy had decided to enter the NPB draft after all, being picked up by the Hanshin Tigers, just like in his previous life.

Sometimes Ken felt that it was as if the world was trying to correct itself, after the changes he'd made. No matter what he said to Daichi, the guy was adamant to stay in Japan.

'Will we ever achieve our dream of playing in the Majors together?'

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