

Major League System

Chapter 781 - 781: New Season (1)

Once the news dropped that Ken's suspension had been reviewed and an internal investigation opened against a former employee, the media had a frenzy. The scandal brought other cases back from the woodwork, and many other athletes who had been a victim of Michael's twisted justice came forward, telling their story.

Luke Emmert the President of the NCAA received enormous backlash for allowing the farce to continue for as long as it did. While he had made the right decision in the end, it was too little too late in the eyes of the media.

And so under such pressure, he was forced to announce his resignation as President to appease the masses. His 10 year reign on top of the NCAA had come to an end, and whatever good he had done was tarnished thanks to a single employee.

While it might seem sad, things like this happened all the time in the world of business. Luke had gracefully stepped down and chosen to retire completely, handing the reigns to the next in line.

It wasn't until the start of the season approached that the news surrounding the scandal began to die down. Ken had long moved on from the issue and had been focusing on his academics and the upcoming season.

The batch of freshman that were recruited into Columbia this year were talented. Particularly Brian Sweeney who had been a top 5 recruit coming out of High School. Not only was he quick on his feet and good with the bat, the guy was loud and boisterous, not afraid to bark out orders in the infield.

Brian was quickly integrated into the lineup, taking up the vacant short stop position which had been left by Tristan, the former captain.

When asked why he had chosen Columbia, the red-haired fellow said it was because he planned to get the Bobcats their first national trophy. This, of course was laughed off by most of the media, but not Ken.

After feeling the guy out for a while, Ken realized that he was not only hard working, but also quite respectful and willing to take criticism. Something that many top recruits would balk at.

Ken was even more surprised upon using Identify on the kid.

NAME: Brian Sweeney

AGE: 18

TALENT ASSESSMENT: SSS

POTENTIAL: EX-

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: SSS

>Pitching: C

>Fielding: SSS

>Game Intelligence: SS

>Mental: SSS+

Additional Notes: Extremely motivated.

Not only was he in great shape, the guy's game intelligence and mental grade were outstanding. It was clear from a glance that Brian would definitely make it to the majors in the near future.

Which was why Ken quickly took him under his wing. Every training session that they attended, Brian would tag along, including their morning runs. His fitness was even ahead of Steve, which happened to have an even better effect than Ken had expected.

Feeling as if he was being replaced, Steve became hyper competitive. Small things such as who crossed the finish line first in their runs became a source of bragging rights in the petty struggle between the two.

On this morning's run, Ken felt the two begin to sprint with over 400 yards left to go. They were either side of him, and began to pull away as they dashed towards the tree in the distance.

At first Ken found the competitions amusing, but seeing as how they planned to leave him in the dust, he could no longer hold back.

'Mika, use limit break.'

Ken picked up his speed, reducing the gap between them and waiting for the burst of speed from the skill. However, it didn't come.

[Skill is unavailable since the user is not currently playing a game.]

The monotonous voice replied to him, causing a surge of panic to hit him.

'N—No... I can't let them win.' Ken thought, his eyes darting between the two figures. It was one thing if the two were competing against each other, but he had seen the smug looks from Brian and Steve as they passed him.

He had a feeling that if he lost this unofficial race, that he would not hear the end of it for the entire season, perhaps even his whole life. Now that he thought about it, there had never been a time where he'd lost to either of these two, so doing so now would cause his place as the big brother to be at risk.

"ARGHH NOT TODAY YOU BASTARDS!" Ken cried out, pumping his arms and legs furiously. He was not about to let these two think that they were better than him and lose whatever respect he'd built up.

The tree began to get closer and Ken was already in line with Steve and Brian, yet he was unable to pass them in a short time. Desperation began to sink in and thoughts of sabotage entered his mind, however he quickly disregarded it.

They were all sprinting, if one of them were to fall on the path, it could cause injury.

300 yards

200 yards

100 yards

50 yards

Ken squeezed every bit of energy from his muscles as he furiously pumped his long arms and legs towards the goal. At the very last moment he pushed his head forward, sprinting past the tree first.

A sense of relief washed over him and he began to slow down, feeling his heart pumping in his chest. Placing his hands atop his head, he turned around only to see the two figures of Steve and Brian laying on their backs gasping for air.

"Better luck next time fellas." He said between harsh breaths.

The two didn't have the strength to reply, too busy trying to catch their breath. This suited Ken just fine, who didn't want to appear weary in front of them.

A small chuckle escaped his lips as he recovered enough to properly function once more. The season was not far away and he felt even stronger and more focused than last year despite his physical grades not increasing.

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

Chapter 782 - 782: New Season (2)

"I almost had you!" Brian called out, slowly getting to his feet. His freckled face was covered in sweat, but he wore a toothy grin.

"You think you'd beat me with those short legs?" Ken scoffed.

Brian grinned, "I'll get you one of these days." He then turned to Steve who was still on the floor, an arrogant expression now on his face, "It's too easy to beat this guy."

"Y—You bastard." Steve huffed, "You didn't beat me. We were tied!"

"Yeah, yeah." Brian retorted, quickly losing interest. "What are we doing next? I've still got some energy to burn."

Ken saw Steve's face turn even more red with subdued rage and couldn't help but laugh inwardly. He shook his head, "We're heading to Virginia tomorrow for the first game of the season, you should consider resting and recovering since you're starting."

"Ah, boring~" Brian retorted.

"Just don't let us down in the first game of the season." Ken said, placing his hand on the guys shoulder.

Brian didn't have the fatigue management skill like him and Steve, yet it seemed the guy had an abundance of energy all the time. It was quite bizarre, but Ken enjoyed training with the guy. Not only did it push Steve, it also pushed him.

"Heh, don't worry about me. I heard you might be a bit rusty since you haven't played in so long." Brian quipped.

Ken raised an eyebrow, "You wanna face a few of my pitches and find out?"

However, Ken quickly regretted it since the guy practically jumped up and down in excitement. It seemed as if he wanted to drag him to the batting nets right away.

"I can't right now. I want to see my fiance before we leave on the first road trip." Ken said, putting a stop to the excitement.

At the mention of fiance, Brian got quiet. "Women are big distractions, Ken. I pray that you don't let her come between you and achieving greatness." He said with a serious expression.

"PFFT. HAHAHA!" Steve who had finally recovered, let out a peel of laughter and placed his arm around Brian's shoulder. "Spoken like a true virgin."

Brian delivered a short elbow into Steve's ribs, causing the guy to let out a groan and fall to his knees. "I'm saving myself for marriage, you heathen." He spat.

Now Ken couldn't control his laughter, seeing Steve's bullying get turned on him.

"You don't need to worry, Brian. When you find the right girl, they make your goals seem even easier to achieve." He said, ruffling the guy's hair. .

Brian still didn't seem convinced, but he accepted it nonetheless. Before Steve got up to his feet, he bid his farewell and began to jog back towards his dorm.

"That bastard packs a punch." Steve mumbled, rubbing his ribs.

"He's a fiery one, I'll give him that." Ken replied with a grin.

"Yeah... almost too fiery." Steve shivered, "It's freezing, let's go get changed before we catch a cold. Wouldn't want to miss out on your first game because you got a chill."

Ken agreed and they made their way back to the dorm.

He visited Ai later that afternoon and spent some quality time together. It had been hard for Ken to go in public ever since receiving those photos of him and Ai together, so he was far more vigilant.

Ken would always get receipts for any purchases, be it at restaurants or retail stores. There was no way that he was going to allow the same thing to happen once again.

Soon enough, the day of the road trip arrived and the team shuttled onto the plane for the hour and a half trip. While Ken still wasn't great with planes, it sure beat driving 6 hours on a bus to their destination.

They soon arrived and were taken into their hotel for the weekend. It was nothing special, but Ken was used to it by now, in fact he had stayed at much worse places while in Texas.

With the first game of the season later that night, the team were buzzing. Coach Brown also seemed to be in a wonderful mood, despite the few changes to the roster after some players graduated.

With Tristan now gone, there was currently no Captain on the squad. Usually he would have announced it during the off season, but the coach had been putting it off until the start of the season to see if anyone stepped up without prompting.

He noticed that apart from Brian and Ayden, most of the team weren't loud during practice. Tristan was great because he not only talked a lot, but he was well liked by the team.

Ken on the other hand, seemed a little reserved at times, but he would let his actions do the talking. When it came to training, there was no one who put more effort into the drills than himself.

'If only he were more talkative...' Coach Brown thought, scanning his players.

They were currently in the midst of a film study session prior to the game starting tonight. The lineup had already been decided, he just needed to announce it, as well as the new captain who would lead the team.

"Coach? Did you want to announce the lineup." Coach Coleman got his attention, snapping him out of his reverie.

"R—Right." He stammered briefly before turning towards the team.

The lineup was the same apart from Brian the freshman taking over Tristan's position at short stop, and Steve now being the starting catcher in place of Clinton who had graduated.

"As for the new Captain, how about you nominate who you think would be best." Coach Brown stated. If he couldn't make the decision then it was best to find out from the players themselves.

Steve instantly stood up and point to Ken next to him. "I'd like to nominate Ken."

"I second this." Brian stated.

"Third!"

"Me too."

One by one, the players spoke up for Ken who by now had his jaw dropped in shock.

'EH!???'

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

Chapter 783 - 783: Improvement (1)

Walking onto the field, Ken was filled with mixed emotions. He had dreamed of this moment for the past 6 months, yet never in his wildest dreams would he imagine that it would be as the Captain.

Even as he stood atop the mound he could hardly believe how it had all played out. The overwhelming support from the team when he was nominated as Captain had been both surprising and heartwarming.

The older players in the team like Ayden, Kaden and DJ had been the loudest in their support. Some even looked relieved that they had not been given the burden of captaining the team, leading him to question if he had made a mistake.

But as he looked around the field he could see the eyes of his teammates locked onto him. He could feel their trust and their belief in him, making Ken feel warm inside.

'I can't let them down.' He thought, gripping the ball tightly in his right hand. His eyes moved to Steve behind the plate and he felt his confidence surge. With his best friend behind the plate, there was no one in college that he couldn't defeat.

With this belief, he slowly raised his leg and kicked off the pitcher's plate, taking a large stride forward. Dirt kicked up from the ground as his front foot planted, followed by his arm whipping past his face.

PAH!

After the scandal had died down, the media moved onto their next big scoop. They had a seemingly short memory, focusing on the juicy drama or relevant events in the area to get their clicks and views.

For much of the season, Columbia flew under the radar, at least in the media's eyes. Perhaps they were neglected due to being in the news for so long, but by the middle of May, the team could no longer be overlooked.

With the new addition of Brian Sweeney, and the emergence of a few others in the team, the Bobcats had clawed their way to 6th in the NCAA Division I rankings and secured a berth in the Regional playoffs for the second year in a row.

"Welcome to ESPN+ the home of College Baseball. The Bobcats are set to face Penn in the Ivy League conference final to decide who takes home the championship. After their heartbreaking loss last season, there's no doubt that they'll come out swinging from the beginning."

The commentator's voice spoke from the TV in Chris and Yuki's lounge as they sat ready to watch the final game. There was a sense of excitement in the house as they prepared to watch their son take the field.

"What do you think will be the deciding factor for today's game?"

"Well Phil, I think the obvious answer is Ken Takagi who has been pitching lights-out for the entire season. If you remember the finals last season, he was suspended and unable to play which ultimately led to the Bobcats surprising loss."

"I agree. But it's not only his pitching that has been lights-out, he's also 5th in total home runs in the division, behind his teammate Stephen Adams who has improved tremendously this season."

"Exactly! Where did this guy even come from? To go from sitting on the bench to leading the division in home runs, just where is Columbia getting these kids from?"

The two chatted back and forth while they waited for the game to start, playing highlights from previous games and talking about the match up.

"I can't believe Steve has improved so much." Chris said, his bewilderment evident.

Yuki giggled, "He's been training with Kenny this whole time, of course he'll get better."

Chris nodded, but inwardly he was skeptical. He had seen Steve play in High School, and while he had some power, he struggled to make contact with the ball. But now, it was as if anything within the strike zone would easily be struck.

'You can't teach that...' He said inwardly.

"Oh! There's Kenny!" Yuki called out, pointing to the screen.

Ken was dressed in the trademark blue uniform for the Bobcats, his tall figure walking out onto the mound. He looked even bigger on the screen.

"Honey he looks nervous..." Yuki said with worry. She had watched Ken play in big matches before in both Koshien and the U18 World Cup and it never got any easier.

"Nervous? Can't you see that devilish grin?" Chris scoffed.

Yuki shook her head, "I've seen him make that face when he's constipated." She replied matter-of-factly, "He's definitely nervous."

Chris rolled his eyes, "I'm more worried for the Penn batters. I remember how crushed Kenny was last season when they lost, he'll want to get payback tonight."

"Shh, it's starting!"

Yuki tensed up as the match began and Ken got into his wind up. The angle changed to behind him and they got to watch the fastball rocket into the top of the strike zone.

PAH

"Sheesh, 101mph on the first pitch. I'd hate to be batting for Penn today Phil."

"You can say that again. Ken is currently leading the division in ERA and strikeouts, will he hold on tonight and do it in back to back consecutive years?"

"If he keeps pitching like this, I don't see why not."

Hearing the commentators praising her son, Yuki smiled sweetly. "I like these guys." She added, cuddling up to her husband.

Chris simply smiled. These were home commentators, so it wasn't out of the ordinary for there to be some bias towards the Bobcats. Though this didn't bother him at all. Who wouldn't like to hear people talk well about their son?

Yuki shouted with glee as Ken took out the first 3 batters in the Penn lineup with ease. She didn't know a lot about baseball, but she knew that getting a strikeout was a good thing.

Chris on the other hand was blown away by not only the leads, but also the pitches. Being a coach himself, he wished that their team had the same level of talent as these two.

'I wonder if we'll get to play each other in the post season...'

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

- Chapter 784 - 784: Improvement (2)

Chapter 784 - 784: Improvement (2)

On the field, it was currently the top of the 8th inning in what looked like would be a blowout game against their rival Penn University. Ken had been taken off the mound and it was now Blake, the once arrogant 2nd team pitcher who had stepped up.

Ken had been moved to right outfield, something that was now common for him. He had no regrets learning this position, since it allowed him to play during the long breaks between games he was pitching in.

He couldn't understand how pitchers could cope with missing out for sometimes more than a week. As someone who loved baseball, being told to sit on the bench while his team played was little more than torture.

His eyes moved to Blake who sent a slider to the outside.

WHOOOSH

WHACK

"Mine!" Ken called out, his eyes focused completely on the ball. After taking a few steps he held out his glove and easily caught it, showing the umpire the ball.

"3 outs, changeover!"

Ken smiled, turning his gaze to the scoreboard. It was currently 8-0 in favor of Columbia and they were only a single inning away from securing payback against the team who upset them last season.

On his way to the dugout he knocked shoulders with Steve who had his usual grin painted on his face. The guy had improved dramatically with the new Legendary skill, giving him the ability to practically hit anything thrown at him.

This paired with the slugger skill, had propelled him into another level of popularity both online and in the baseball circle.

Apart from using it as bragging rights against Brian, Steve managed to keep a level head even with his success. Which allowed Ken to give a sigh of relief. He wouldn't mind disabling the skill if the guy was overly annoying about it.

"Looks like the coach will owe us dinner at this point." Steve said in amusement.

Ken laughed, gesturing to the coach who was wearing the biggest smile he'd ever seen. "I don't think he cares how much we spend as long as we win."

The two made it into the dugout and were joined by Brian shortly after. He had his phone out and was checking something furiously.

"Don't let the coach see you with your phone out." Ken advised, "He's in a good mood now, but if he thinks you're slacking, you'll be spending the rest of the game on the bench.

"HAH! Jake Reynolds just hit another homer, you guys are tied for the lead." Brian said, shoving the phone in Steve's face.

Steve's face grew solemn and snatched the phone, refreshing the list.

"Looks like you're not the Home run King you claim to be." Brian said with a smug grin, "Maybe I'll call you the Home run Queen from now on," He said laughingly.

"The game isn't over yet..." Steve replied, handing back the phone. This was probably the most serious Ken had seen him throughout the whole season, making him feel incredulous.

As someone who had never properly chased individual stats, he didn't understand why people paid so much attention to things. As long as they won, he couldn't care less. Of course this would change if it was tied to a system mission.

"Oh, isn't it?" Brian replied, "we've only got one more inning left to bat. Who says you'll even get a chance to step up to the plate?"

"No way..." Steve looked on the field and began to count. He was 5th in the batting order and Yu was currently batting at number 9. If 3 of them were to get out before his turn, then Brian would be right.

"K—Ken, Brian... You guys have to get on base no matter what. Please just don't get out." He cried, grabbing Ken's uniform.

Brian burst out into laughter and Ken felt a flash of irritation. "When would I ever try and get out?" He turned to Brian and gave him a stern look, "Don't you get out on purpose either, otherwise I'll tell the coach and you'll be relegated to the bench for the post season."

"Tch, you're no fun." Brian replied, clicking his tongue in annoyance.

"Strikeout!"

"Well, I better get ready." He said, grabbing his helmet and bat. "Even if I don't get out, I can't say the same for Ayden and DJ."

Ken shook his head in exasperation.

Ayden continued the Bobcats momentum and hit a ball into the outfield for an easy single. Brian also didn't falter, getting another hit for the team.

Ken was up next and approached the batters box with determination. He was planning to knock this one out of the park and keep it going over to Steve since the guy had worked so hard.

He went through his ritual and stood ready for the pitch.

The wind up came and the ball rocketed out, right towards him. Ken tried to move out of the way, but the ball missed his arm and fired directly into the left side of his rib cage.

The ball bounced off and Ken went down onto one knee instantly, feeling the fresh pain surge through him.

"Sorry, the ball slipped!" The pitcher called out, but Ken didn't believe him.

"You! Outta here!" The umpire called, ejecting the guy in an instant. He would have to have been born yesterday to believe such a blatant lie.

Ken saw a funnel of players leaving the dugout, ready to rush onto the field. He stood up and held out his hand, cringing at the pain briefly, "Stay back!" he called. The last thing they needed was a brawl on the field to mar such a substantial win.

The opposing coach got into a war of words with the umpire while Ken threw his bat aside and jogged to first base. He took off his elbow guard and handed it to the first base coach, feeling the spot where he was hit.

Thankfully it felt like it would just be a bruise at the worst.

Only after the Penn university coach was ejected as well did the game finally resume. The crowd cheered with glee and hurled insults at the disgraced coach and pitcher, getting their money's worth.

DJ managed to get a hit into right field, allowing both Ayden and Brian to cross home plate, bringing the score to 10-0. If this was played in Pennsylvania, the spectators would have long left by now.

Ken took his position on 3rd base, watching as Steve came out to the batters box. His face was determined, as if he didn't care about the score. While this was good, but Ken didn't exactly like his motivation for it.

'Just don't hurt yourself idiot...!' Ken thought, letting out a small chuckle.

Steve's stance was a little unorthodox, but even Dave Johnson the batting coach could not say anything about it, since it completely worked. All he could do was advise anyone against copying the guy.

The first two pitches were balls, of which Steve completely ignored with great confidence. The next pitch was a curveball which was 100% out of the zone, but Penn got lucky with it being called a strike.

Steve didn't fret, remaining calm and collected. He waited for the next pitch which was an inside ball and let loose.

WHOOOOOSH

THWACK!

The ball flew into left outfield along the foul line, heading right for the foul post. Steve had already started jogging towards first before anyone knew definitively if it was fair or not.

DOOOONG

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

Chapter 785 - 785: Big Mouth (1)

The crowd erupted in cheers, making the whole of Satow Stadium buzz with electricity. Steve pumped his fist as he jogged around the bases, securing his final home run of the season to take the top of the leaderboard.

Ken and DJ waited by home plate for Steve to arrive. By the time he rounded 3rd base he slowed down, turning to the pitcher and sending one of the coldest stares Ken had seen from his friend.

When he eventually touched the plate, both Ken and DJ celebrated with him.

"You know he's not the pitcher who threw the beanball right?" Ken said in exasperation.

"He's wearing the same uniform." Steve replied, "He's lucky I didn't send a line drive right back at him."

Ken let out a laugh and pat his friend on the back, "Alright alright, one more inning and we can be finished. Ai booked us a nice place for dinner tonight."

Steve paled, "I have dinner planned with Tara... I'm meeting her parents for the first time." All of a sudden, his bravado was no longer present, replaced by severe anxiety.

"Ah... My condolences." Ken made a gesture of prayer, but it made Steve feel worse.

"Damn it. My Tomohawk steak..." Steve cried.

Upon returning to the dugout, the coach instantly crowded Ken. "How are your ribs? Is anything broken? Can you move alright?" The guy was pale as he inspected Ken.

"I'm fine, it's just a bruise." Ken replied, though he felt warm inside.

The coach shook his head, "Those bastards knew they were losing so they tried to take you out. I'll be following up with the NCAA after this and have that guy suspended."

Ken was about to speak up, but Coach Brown had already moved on, "Go see the medics, I'm taking you out of the game."

Ken withheld a sigh and did what he was told, he knew that when the coach got into this mood, there was no way to change his mind. It kind of reminded him of his mother, which was both funny and annoying at the same time.

"Don't worry bro, we'll strike out the last 3 no problems." Steve said, putting an arm around his shoulders.

Ken winced slightly, realizing that his side did in fact still hurt. He was almost 100% certain that it was no more than a bruise, but there was no harm in getting checked out.

While he met up with the medics, Steve was busy rubbing in his home run to Brian who looked as if he'd swallowed a fly. For the whole season, Brian had had to deal with the guy's boasting, and it seemed it would continue well into the off season.

After around 5 minutes of mobility tests, the medical staff gave Ken the all clear. "The ribs aren't broken, but you should have a mighty bruise. Try and take it easy for the next week or so." She said, giving him a small smile.

Ken thanked her and she promptly left, heading towards the coach to tell him the news.

With the score currently 13-0 it was only a matter of time before the game ended in victory. Steve held true to his word and secured 3 consecutive strikeouts to put a final stamp on the championship match.

The dugout cleared and everyone joined in on the celebrations on the field, including the coaching staff. This might only be the Ivy League Championship, but it was clear that it meant a lot to everyone.

A trophy was brought out and some team photos were taken. No doubt that they would find them posted somewhere in the Dodge Fitness Center at some stage in the future.

"Alright, we're going to celebrate!" The coach called out, his smile practically falling off his face.

"YEAH!"

Since it was an afternoon game, there was still some time before he and Ai's dinner date, so Ken didn't have to awkwardly refuse. After all, what kind of celebration would it be without the Captain in attendance.

The team was in a great mood as they headed towards the locker room to get changed after their post-match celebrations and media obligations. Both Steve and Ken were interviewed after the match, to which only one of them was excited.

Having such attention and success was rather new to Steve, but he took to it like a duck to water. Seeing the guy's personality on full display for the nation, Ken couldn't help but shake his head in exasperation.

With no media training, Steve spoke his mind, which was a breath of fresh air for those viewing, but not necessarily for the organization.

"To be honest Claire, that last home run was for my brother here." He stated, putting his arm around Ken and pulling him in. "They had the audacity to throw a beanball at my Captain after they knew they were losing. Of course I'm going to punish them."

Claire looked amused, but she kept her professionalism. "You guys are set to face Wright state in the first game of the regionals next week, do you have any thoughts about the match up?"

Ken was about to answer, but he was too slow.

"Let me put it this way, Claire. This season we're aiming for the top. I don't care if it's Wright state, or Wrong state, we'll beat them and advance. We're taking home the College world series trophy this season, don't you worry about that." Steve said, beating his chest.

'Oh my god...' Ken was speechless. He could already imagine the media frenzy after this game.

"Well there you have it everyone, Columbia have set their eyes on the trophy this post season. You can catch all the upcoming matches on ESPN in the coming weeks. This was Claire Michaels, signing off." She turned to the camera and spoke the closing remarks before the light from the camera turned off.

The moment it did, Ken sent an elbow to Steve's stomach, causing him to double over.

"Idiot." He said, walking off.

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

Chapter 786 - 786: Big Mouth (2)

Steve's interview played over and over on both social media and across the baseball sphere. Many found it funny, and his antics got him a lot of attention online by even those who didn't follow baseball.

However, for every fan he gained, there was always an internet troll lurking in the shadows, ready to spread their hateful wings. Many condemned his actions, calling him arrogant and slamming him with hateful comments.

The coach let it slide at least for this afternoon since everyone was celebrating, but even Steve could see the intense gaze every now and then from the man.

"Don't look at me." Ken said, shrugging off a pitiful glance from Steve. "If you think it's bad now, wait till you go see your girlfriend after this." Search* The * website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"AH!" Steve wailed, realizing how much he'd messed up. Tara was the one who would have to deal with the backlash online, so he had essentially made her job far harder. Not to mention he was meant to meet her parents tonight for the very first time.

He could already imagine the tense situation at the dinner table.

After the celebrations were over, everyone went their separate ways. It was Summer break so no one had to worry about studying, not that they would after being crowned the Ivy league Champions.

Ken met Ai at her dorm and took her out that night. They spent some quality time together, but this time was a little different. She would be flying back to Japan alone for the Summer to stay with her parents.

He also planned to join her, but only once they finished their run in the post season. If they made it to the College World series he could fly out at the end of June, if not it would be sooner.

This meant they would be apart for a whole month, something that he wasn't looking forward to. Despite living in different dorms, the two made an effort to see each other every week, regardless of their busy schedules, even if it was just for a few hours.

Like this, their relationship thrived.

After a nice meal, they retreated to the usual Park Central hotel to stay the night. The next morning, Ken took her to the airport and said his goodbyes.

"We really gotta stop doing this." Ken said, his tone carrying some sadness.

Ai giggled, "You mean saying goodbye at the airport? Yeah, it's getting a little old." She replied softly, hugging him tightly.

"As soon as I'm done with the post season, I'll fly over." Ken reiterated, like he'd done many times before.

"Mmm. Don't miss me too much." She said, getting on her tip-toes and placing a deep kiss on his lips. Ken relished in the sensation and held her close, only letting go after some time.

"I can't promise that." He stated bitterly.

She giggled once more and walked away, waving goodbye. Ken tried to smile but felt a little depressed, he waved and didn't leave until her figure was no longer visible.

He let out a sigh and turned on his heel to leave, his mind preoccupied. Ken was thinking about next year when he would be eligible to enter the draft. There was an overwhelming chance that he would not be drafted to a local team, not with his draft stock.

Which meant that he would likely be away from his fiance for an entire year until she graduated. Just thinking about this made him depressed.

Of course he could opt to finish out his final year at College, but he was unsure of what decision to make. The system mission for this years NCAA Div 1 Tournament was exactly like last seasons, except it no longer had the tasks that he had completed.

#MISSION: NCAA Division I Tournament.

*Task 1: Win Ivy league Championship

*Task 2: Qualify for NCAA Super Regionals

*Task 3: Qualify for College World Series

*Task 4: Win College World Series

*Task 5: Win MVP (Tiered rewards for each Tournament)

REWARDS:

>Task 1 rewards - 100,000 Major points + Trait selection

>Task 2 rewards - 150,000 Major points + EX-Grade Physical Elixir

>Task 3 rewards - 250,000 Major points + EX-Grade Mental Elixir

>Task 4 rewards - 250,000 Major points + Diamond Lottery Ticket

>Task 5 rewards - [Based on Performance]

He stared at the window distractedly while walking through the airport. Based on this information, he could assume that once he completed a task, they wouldn't renew for next seasons mission.

Therefore, if he were to complete all the tasks this year, there would be no point staying for his final year in college, apart from wanting to finish his degree. But he could always do this remotely while in the league, so there was almost no merit to doing so.

As he was walking, he suddenly bumped into somebody, causing his body to be knocked off balance for a moment. Ken was a tall guy and he had put on some significant muscle since training at Columbia, so not many people could achieve this.

"S—Sorry." Ken called, turning to apologize. It had felt like he bumped into a brick wall.

When the person turned around, Ken's eyes widened in shock. Standing in front of him was someone who looked like they'd walked right off a model runway and into the airport.

The sandy blond hair and chiseled features were familiar. It was a face that Ken would never forget.

"Leo?" He asked in disbelief.

"Ken? What are you doing here?" Leo asked, a small smile creeping onto his face.

"I just dropped my fiance off at the airport... I could ask the same of you."

"I had a closed tryouts with the Yanks, I'm headed back to Florida now." He said coolly before looking him up and down, "You've grown taller."

"Thanks..." Ken responded feeling a little odd. "Are you still playing for the Crocs?"

"Mmm. This is my last post season before the draft in a couple of months. Maybe we'll even play each other soon."

"If not, we can meet each other in the Majors." Ken replied, feeling a surge of determination. Hearing that Leo was entering the draft this year had helped him make up his mind.

No matter what tasks remained in the system missions, he would enter the draft next year.

"I look forward to it." Leo replied simply, "See you round. Ken."

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

Chapter 787 - 787: Lead up (1)

'Did you use Identify on him Mika?' Ken asked, resuming his walk back out of the airport.

[Affirmative]

Ken learned his lesson and decided to stop in place before opening up the system window and taking a look. Back in the U18 World Cup, he had still been a little cautious using his system too much.

This was why he didn't use Identify on Leo back then, which he now regretted. But since he had been given this opportunity once more, he wouldn't miss out.

NAME: Leo Cameron

AGE: 21

TALENT ASSESSMENT: EX+

POTENTIAL: L

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: EX+

>Pitching: A

>Fielding: EX

>Game Intelligence: L

>Mental: EX-

'Now that's just unfair...!' Ken thought. His motivation faltering momentarily. To see such a disparity in abilities was almost disheartening.

But then a surge of competitive spirit assaulted him, causing his body to thrum with excitement. He knew that Leo was an amazing player, but even he had underestimated his capabilities.

'This is the first time I've seen a Legendary grade...!' He thought, clenching his fists tightly. This monster would be unleashed into the Majors this year, and yet Ken still felt he was so far behind his level.

He soon left the airport with a whole lot of motivation to improve. However, he didn't want to rush things, especially since it could cause injuries if he overworked himself.

Ken had calmed down from his ridiculous training style back in Japan. It was only now that he properly understood just what kind of risk he was putting on himself back then. The problem was, the sport was so competitive back home that kids were driven to the brink by not only themselves, but the coach's as well.

Just one mistake and baseball could be taken from them for the rest of their lives, just like it had happened in his previous life.

So Ken caught a taxi and returned to his dorm. He had a few ways that he could improve, but by far the best way was to complete the mission tasks and claim the rewards. With the tickets and Elixirs, he would be able to take the next leap in his physical grade.

Upon returning to Columbia, he noticed that it was basically deserted since it was Summer break, which suited him just fine. Ken enjoyed the quiet atmosphere since there were less distractions.

But as he was walking along the path to his dorm, a woman caught his eye. Dressed in a flowing white sun dress, Amelia was walking in his direction, causing a knot to form in his stomach.

Every time he'd spoken to her, it felt awkward. There was some clear mutual attraction between the two, but with Ken's chaste and loyal heart, he essentially shut her out.

The beautiful woman raised her head, wearing a gorgeous smile briefly, before it froze upon seeing him. She lowered her head almost immediately and continued walking.

For some reason Ken felt some sorrow after seeing such a confident woman act like this. But even as she walked straight past him, he didn't speak. It was not his place to speak, especially since he had basically blocked off any form of interaction with her.

He let out a silent sigh and continued on, trying to put it to the back of his mind. He had too much to worry about instead of this.

Walking into his dorm room, Ken looked around and saw that Steve was not here. It wasn't uncommon for the guy to go missing every now and then so he thought nothing of it.

He placed his bag down and wanted to have a shower. On his way to the closet he jumped in fright, seeing Steve laying on the floor staring up at the ceiling.

"Dude what the hell!?" Ken exclaimed.

Steve merely groaned in response, looking as if he was sulking.

Only now did Ken remember that the guy had been at dinner with Tara's parents 2 nights before. He had been too absorbed in spending time with Ai before her trip to Japan to check in with him.

"That bad huh?" Ken queried, taking a seat on the bed.

"Man... Don't get me started." Steve replied half-heartedly.

Ken shrugged, "It's cool if you don't wanna talk abo—"

"So get this, Tara's dad works in real estate right? The guy was talking about investment properties for half the damn dinner. Between that and Tara being pissed at me, it was practically torture." Steve said, cutting him off.

"I don't care about real estate man..." He said finally, letting out a sigh.

"Mhmm, and what about Tara's mom?" Ken asked.

"Oh she's lovely." Steve replied simply. "I could see her starting to get annoyed with her husband for talking so much, it was kind of funny."

Ken laughed, "It doesn't sound too bad. Tara's dad was probably just wanting to help you set up for the future. Having him help you make some good investments with your Major League salary might not be such a bad thing."

Steve was silent for a few moments, as if contemplating his words. "You're right... If he's my agent then he'll basically be my employee!" He said, shooting to his feet.

"That's not what I meant..." Ken replied, feeling a headache coming along.

However, Steve didn't listen and began to explain how he would use this dynamic in the future.

"So? Did Tara forgive you for the storm you caused?" Ken asked, cutting his monologue short.

"Yeah we're fine, but she told me that I needed to attend lessons from some public relations lady this summer. Can you believe it? It's summer break and I'll have to attend class... I agreed, but I'm not happy about it." He said, crossing his arms in a huff like a child.

"She's right man. You can't just run your mouth like that on TV. Even if you don't do it now, teams will make you do some media training in the Majors, otherwise they might not even sign you."

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

Chapter 788 - 788: Lead up (2)

"EH!? Really?"

"Anyway, make sure you attend the lessons, it will only be beneficial in the long run. Also I'd recommend telling the coach this when you see him next, it might lessen your punishment." Ken said with a small chuckle.

"Okay..."

In typical Steve fashion, he soon got over his blues and was busy with the next topic on his mind; the post season. "How far do you think we'll get?" He asked seriously.

"We're going all the way." Ken responded without hesitation. Leo's stats were burned into his mind, if he wanted to improve significantly, the only way was to complete the mission tasks.

If they could win the College World Series, this would put him in a great position to power up. Of course he still had a full season next year to do so, but they would be missing a few key players.

Ayden, Kaden, DJ, Bryton and Levi had already graduated or declared for the draft at the start of the month. Over half their starting team would no longer be here next season, meaning this would be their best shot to win it all.

"Hell yeah man! See? I knew you'd have my back." Steve exclaimed with glee.

Ken remembered something and looked around briefly, "Where is Tara? I need to speak with her at some point."

"She's at her parents for the summer break, just give her a call though if it's important."

Ken thought for a while before nodding. It was currently the end of May, the NIL deal would come into effect on the 1st July, or at least this was the case in his previous life. There was a good chance that it could be sooner since the NCAA had lost a lot of trust recently with his own scandal and the resignation of their president Luke Emmert.

"I'll call her now."

Ken didn't hide the conversation, even putting it on speaker phone for Steve to hear the responses. After all, he would also be affected by the NIL deal.

After having the situation explained to her, Tara was silent for a while.

"I had heard some things about this deal, but I never thought it would actually go through." She said eventually.

"I can guarantee that it will pass. The NCAA will appeal it, but the court will rule against them. This means that we'll be able to accept endorsements while in college, this is a good thing, but it also means your work load will increase." Ken explained.

Ken was worried because Tara was still a college student at the moment. She had already left the cheer team in order to free up more time to manage Ken and Steve's social media accounts.

"Of course I'd be willing to pay you a percentage of the endorsement deals since its technically not within your wheelhouse." Ken added.

"Can you give me some time to think about it?" Tara asked.

"Yeah no problem."

"Hey can I talk to her?" Steve asked.

"Okay I'll get back to you, bye." She said hurriedly.

BEEP BEEP BEEP

A stunned silence spread out in the room and Ken slowly placed his phone back in his pocket. "Maybe she just has a lot to think about..." He said, feeling a little awkward.

"Y—Yeah, you're right."

Ken got off the bed and stretched, wincing a little from the bruise on his ribs, "Well, I don't know about you, but I could do with a workout."

Steve thought for a moment before dropping back down onto the floor, "I might just stay here for a bit. Have fun."

Ken raised his eyebrow, "Alright, I'll just workout with Brian. I'm sure he won't have much to say about you slacking off in the dorm."

At this, Steve sat straight up, a scowl forming on his face. "Damn it. That kid won't ever let me hear the end of it if I skip training..."

With a groan, he got up to his feet and marched off to get ready, grumbling to himself. Ken found this rather amusing, but kept his comments to himself.

The rest of the week went by rather quick. With the time difference between the US and Japan, Ken and Ai's conversations were a little sporadic, but since there were no classes, he was basically free whenever he wasn't at practice.

With the post season about to start, many people in the media and on youtube were placing their predictions for who would come out on top. Columbia was of course not even labeled as contenders.

While players like Steve, Ken, DJ and Brian ultimately received positive feedback, as a team, they were completely discounted. It was hard to overturn their previous history of never making it past the regionals.

This was why the school had never made it into the top 25 in the national rankings.

However, both the coaching staff and the players thought nothing of this. Just because they hadn't achieved it in previous seasons, didn't mean that they couldn't this year with their star-studded line up.

In fact, there was a fierce determination as the team traveled to Blacksburg Virginia to begin the post season. There was nothing more motivating than being called an underdog.

The Blacksburg Regionals would host 4 teams at their home ground of English Field at Atlantic Union Bank Park, located on Virginia Tech's campus.

Wright State, Gonzaga, Virginia Tech and Columbia would be facing off in a double-elimination style bracket. This meant that as long as a team only lost once before the finals, they would have another shot at advancing to the super regionals.

But if things went well, any team could advance if they won 3 games in a row.

The Bobcats first game was against Wright State and would take place at 9am on the field. Thankfully, the Columbia staff had organized the team to arrive the night before in order to make sure they were fully rested before the game.

As the bus arrived at the stadium the sun shone down onto the well maintained field.

The regionals for the College World Series was about to kick off.

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

Chapter 789 - 789: Regionals Begin (1)

"Welcome to ESPN2, the home of Division 1 baseball. It's the beginning of June so you know what time it is folks, that's right, it's time for some post season action. We've got two games today, The up and coming Columbia Bobcats vs Wright State Pillagers and later in the day Virginia Tech Pokies against the Gonzaga Bullfrogs."

"We will be beginning shortly with the first game after a word from some of our sponsors."

The hosts voice came out from the TV in a small apartment in Tokyo where two women were sat patiently on the couch.

"Hurry up and find the Japanese broadcast, or at least turn on the subtitles." Rie complained.

"Do you really need to hear the commentating? Can't you just watch the game?" Ai asked. She wanted to listen to it in English since she was still practicing the language.

"But I wanna hear what they're talking about." She pouted, giving her friend a pitiful look. If it were a man instead of Ai she was acting towards, the guy might just do anything she wanted.

Eventually Ai agreed to try and find another broadcast since it was still before the game.

The door opened a few minutes later and a figure wearing a tank top came in, holding a plastic bag filled with goodies. "Has the game started yet?" He asked.

"Not yet. What snacks did you get us?" Rie asked curiously.

Hiroki grinned, "I got us some carrot and celery sticks with hummus dip along with some berries."

"EH!? You didn't buy any junk food?" Rie exclaimed, shooting him a pitiful glance. "Not even potato chips for your girlfriend?"

Hiroki scoffed, "If you want to fit into those outfits Ai made you then you shouldn't be eating junk food."

Both girls gasped dramatically, as if he had said something taboo. Hiroki suddenly felt as if he'd entered a wolf's den as the two glared at him with malice.

"I—I was kidding... Here are your chips." He said, digging into the bag and throwing the packet towards them, as if he were trying to ward off a starving wolf.

Rie harrumphed and turned her attention back to the TV, the sound of munching filling the room shortly after. Hiroki let out a sigh of relief and walked into the kitchen, pouring himself a glass of water.

"You know you can't talk about a lady's weight." Ai entered the kitchen and whispered to him. "Plus, it's not her fault that she can't fit into them. Her... bust is getting bigger, not her body."

"Oh... I guess you're right." Hiroki replied, his face reddening, but a dumb smile crept onto his face in the next moment.

"Ugh, men..." Ai mumbled, heading back to the lounge.

Around 10 minutes later, Hiroki took his spot on the couch with his colorful array of healthy food on a plate alongside the hummus dip he referred to earlier.

"You want some?" He offered Rie.

"Hmph." She promptly ignored him, turning towards the TV.

"It's starting!" Ai called out, turning everyone's attention back to the screen. The players in the blue uniforms took the field and the camera panned to Ken standing atop the mound.

"Ken Takagi the captain will be the starting pitcher for the Bobcats. He's pitched brilliantly all season, I'm not surprised that they're letting him start things off. Him and Stephen Adams have been causing havoc for teams of late."

Ai's eyes shined as she looked at Ken's handsome and tall figure on the mound. She hugged a cushion close to her chest and watched on unmoving.

"Damn, he looks even taller on TV." Hiroki commented before crunching down on his celery.

"Shhh, they're praising him." Ai said, her eyes not leaving the screen.

Hiroki rolled his eyes. If this was how the watch party was going to go, he might as well go to bed.

"And here comes the first pitch to kick off the Regionals."

PAH

"100mph, he certainly isn't keeping anything in the gas tank."

"No matter how many times I see his pitches, they never fail to amaze me. I've heard from multiple sources that Ken has been pitching in the hundreds since he was 15 years old, he really is something special."

"Hehehehe." Ai giggled, fidgeting on the couch as she did so. Hearing people praise her fiance was something that she enjoyed the most.

"Let's hope he can keep up his form against the powerful batting line up of Wright State today. He's gotta be careful of Jordan Nunez and Peter Blake especially, the two clean-up hitters are both sitting above 0.320 batting average."

"What does that mean? Is that good?" Rie asked, finally speaking to Hiroki on the couch.

Hiroki nodded, his face serious. "It is good. Batting average is calculated based on your at-bats divided by the amount of hits. This means that almost 1 in every 3 at-bats will result in a hit."

"What's your batting average?" She asked curiously.

"This season? Probably around 0.350 right now. But it usually drops as the season goes on. I do a lot better against left handed pitchers though." He replied after some thought.

"So you're only a little better than those guys." She said, rolling her eyes, "And here I thought you were a professional."

Hiroki's jaw dropped, but he decided not to retaliate. It was clear that the girl was still annoyed at his earlier comments regarding her size.

"There's the first strikeout of the game off a nasty slider. It must be so difficult to predict since it breaks so late." The commenter continued.

"He's got that right..." Hiroki mumbled, watching the slow motion replay.

The trio watched as Ken took down the next 2 batters in a similar fashion. Only the 3rd batter managed to hit a foul ball, the rest were expertly struck out by the battery of Steve and Ken.

Ai watched on with glee as Ken walked off the field wearing a smile. While she couldn't be at the game, at least she could support him from halfway across the world.

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

Chapter 790 - 790: Regionals Begin (2)

On the field, Ayden stepped up to the batters box to face the Wright State pitcher with a level of cool confidence that he usually held. Having been a national representative all through high school, he'd dealt with his fair share of pressure and this was no different.

Disregarding the fact that the arena only held 3000 fans, this was the post season where not only fans around the nation would be watching, but also Major league scouts.

Having declared his intentions for the draft and in the process of looking for an agent, a good performance in the post season would go a long way towards his draft stock. Of course he couldn't sign with an agent just yet or he would lose his eligibility to play as an amateur.

His eyes moved to the lanky pitcher on the mound and narrowed as he waited for the first pitch.

WHOOOSH

PAH

It was a cutter, and a nasty one. Had he not pulled back at the last moment, his fingers could have been hit during the swing.

'They probably did their research.' Ayden thought with a chuckle. He had a habit of swinging for the first ball, and would more often than not hit any fastballs thrown.

After playing 4 years of college baseball, it would be difficult to surprise other teams with the amount of film and study they had to reference. The only way to counteract it was to evolve and get even better.

Ayden's eyes flashed briefly towards the dugout, his gaze falling onto a single player. Ever since facing him in the U18 World Cup, Ayden knew that the guy was special. Not only did he play at full tilt every game, but he trained like a demon.

Once being named Captain of the squad, he pulled everyone along with him in training. Ayden felt like he had improved more this season than he had ever done before. Not only was he in the best shape of his life, but it felt like as long as that guy was around, he would only continue to get better.

He shook his head with a smile, 'Why am I thinking about such things right now?' he thought, gripping his bat even tighter.

If there was one thing that he wanted to do while still in college, it was to bring back a trophy. There was no better way to give his gratitude than winning the College World Series.

The pitcher wound up and sent the next ball slicing towards the outside. It was a fast slider, though it lacked the same break that he was used to.

'I can hit it.'

These were the only thoughts in his mind as he dug his heel in and swung fiercely at the ball.

WHOOOOSH

DOOOOONG

The sound of the metal bat ringing out echoed over the field and the ball was sent deep into right field. Ayden kicked it into high gear as he flew towards first base like a cheetah, he didn't even look at the ball before rounding the base and heading towards 2nd.

The right fielder dived for the ball but it just escaped his grasp, rolling past him and hitting the back wall.

By now, Ayden had glanced up at the 3rd base who was giving him the signal to keep running. Without stopping, he pinned his ears back and went for it, gunning it towards 3rd.

"GO GO!"

The dugout was whooping and cheering at the amazing run from their leadoff batter. The guy had never seemed to fail when it was time to perform, this time was no different.

The throw came from right field and was thrown to the fielder at 2nd base. He twisted his body and fired a throw towards 3rd base, but Ayden slid onto the base before the ball with ease.

The 3rd basemen reached for the ball which was thrown a little wide. He lost his footing briefly, causing the ball to fly directly past his open glove.

"RUN!"

Without missing a beat, Ayden surged to his feet and bolted towards home plate fervently. He was a little tired after sprinting 3 bases already, but he had already made up his mind to finish strong, otherwise it would have all been for nothing.

He saw the panic on the catchers face as he impatiently waited for the ball to be thrown back in time. With his back turned to the fielder and the ball, Ayden could only go on the reactions from the catcher.

'He won't get it in time.' He concluded, but he did not slow down.

Without letting up, Ayden rushed forward and planted his foot down on the base with no hindrance. The crowd roared and the dugout were cheering loudly for the spectacular solo play.

"That's what I'm talkin' about!" Coach Brown said, slapping Ayden on the back and sending him back to the dugout.

"Inside the park home run, very nice!" Brian said with a grin, "But it's a lot easier if you just hit it over the fence."

Ayden laughed, though he was still trying to catch his breath from the exertion. As he walked down the stairs he was greeted by his rowdy teammates who celebrated his amazing play with him.

He saw Ken putting on his helmet and guards before walking over and holding out his fist.

"Nice run." He said simply, but that was enough. The guy didn't need to say much to get his point across.

"Thanks." He replied, fist bumping him. "Keep the momentum going, if we're lucky we can finish this one early and you'll be able to pitch tomorrow as well."

Ken's eyes widened before a fierce grin crept onto his face.

"Bet."

Ayden laughed. He had been half joking, but it really seemed like the guy would be aiming for this. However, it wasn't like they hadn't done something like this before, just never in the post season.

"The next person who gets out will have to join my extra special training session tonight after dinner." Ken announced at the top of the stairs, causing the atmosphere to shift in the dugout.

"Crap..."

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

Chapter 791 - 791: First Game (1)

WHOOOOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout!"

Steve swung for the hills, missing the ball by a hairs breadth. While the last two strikes had been questionable, this one was 100% a ball. With the pressure of a potential overtime training session with Ken looming over his head, he had swung.

The guy looked like he had just lost his life savings as he returned to the dugout in despair.

The coach pat his shoulder, "Don't worry, you'll hit the next one." He said consolingly. Inwardly he was a little surprised that the guy was worked up about a single miss, but he just chalked it up to his competitive spirit.

"HAHAHA that's what you get!" Brian laughed maniacally as he saw Steve's morose expression.

"Shut up..." He replied, tossing his helmet onto the bench in a depressed manner. "The umpire forgot his glasses this morning."

Brian didn't bother to reply, too busy laughing at the situation. Ken on the other hand placed his hand upon his friend's shoulder and smiled. However, to Steve, this was the devilish smile he saw whenever intense training was around the corner.

"Damn it!" He cursed, sitting onto the bench in a huff.

Both Brian and Ken had gotten onto base and were sent home by DJ. With the latter on 2nd base, Steve had struckout, but they were still winning 3-0 with 2 outs remaining.

Zeke and Kaden were next up to bat, both managing to get hits and send DJ back home. Columbia's momentum was almost unstoppable, their first inning only ending after they secured 6 runs, putting a stamp on the match from the beginning.

As they walked up to the field, Ken turned to Steve. "No wasted pitches this match. I want to keep my pitch count low so I can play tomorrow."

If the coach had overheard them, he might have had a few choice words to say, but thankfully Ken was smart enough to do it out of earshot.

"Just don't throw any meatballs and we'll be fine." Steve said, finally recovered from his earlier loss.

"Meatballs? I'm vegetarian." Ken said with a grin.

"They do those plant based ones these days I heard. Can you imagine what it tastes like?" Steve replied conversationally, pulling his face up in disgust.

Ken frowned slightly and left, heading towards the mound. He had tried to sound cool, but Steve had ruined it.

Upon reaching the mound he loosened up his arm. The next two batters were the one's that the coach had warned him about in the film sessions this past week. Jordan Nunez and Peter Blake.

Both were entering the draft this year and this would be their last post season as college players. The latter was a left handed batter, someone he would need to be wary of.

"Batting 4th, Jordan Nunez."

The announcer called out, prompting a wide shouldered player of Dominican descent to walk into the batters box. He had long arms and seemed powerful.

'I should try take advantage of his long arms and pitch inside.' Ken thought.

But before he could think any further, Steve had already called for a fastball on the inside, showing they were on the same wavelength.

Ken let out a small chuckle and got into position.

WHOOOOSH

DING

The ball was hit along the ground towards 3rd base. Levi scooped it up in rhythm and sent an accurate yet fast ball towards 1st. Zeke easily caught the ball for the first out of the inning.

"Nice!" Coach pumped his fist in triumph, seeing the first big fish go down without a fight. With the start they were having, he couldn't have asked for more.

Ken smiled upon the mound, though inwardly he knew that the same trick wouldn't work more than once this game. However, he quickly moved past it and turned towards the most difficult of the two.

"Batting 5th, Peter Blake."

This guy was considerably smaller than Jordan, at least in terms of stature. But his body still seemed powerful, something that Ken was well aware of.

'Mika, please activate showdown.'

[Affirmative]

[Activating Showdown on Peter Blake.]

Ken reveled in the sweet sensation of his muscles filling with power. No matter how many times he experienced this, it never lessened the euphoria.

In the batters box, Peter paled. He could feel an oppressive atmosphere as he stared at the tall figure on the mound. With the sun on his back, Ken's figure drew a long shadow which seemed to be crushing him beneath its weight.

He blinked a few times and the vision disappeared, but he was still feeling rattled. It was as if he was being strangled by the roots of a tree, intent on suffocating him.

PAH!

"Strike."

The first ball came but he could hardly see it before it landed into the catchers glove. Usually he would take this time to get a feel of the pitches and choose which one to go after, but the first pitch had eluded him.

He reset his position and wiped his face with his sleeve before stepping back into the batters box and waiting for the next pitch.

'Watch carefully...!' He told himself.

PAH!

"Strike."

Peter frowned deeply, letting out a curse inwardly. 'Just how fast is he pitching?' He asked, looking up towards the screen.

'102!? What the hell?' He faltered, turning back to Ken on the mound with shock. He knew that the guy had the best velocity in college, but facing them head on was another story.

No matter how much film he watched, the pitches paled in comparison to what he just witnessed. Even after facing two pitches, he was not even close to coming up with a plan to hit them.

Sure enough, as the next ball left Ken's fingertips, Peter swung at the ball, expecting another fastball within the zone.

WHOOOOOSH

...

PAH

"Strikeout!"

Peter could only sigh in defeat after having been toyed with like a child. The changeup had made him swing far too early, making him look like a complete amateur.

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

Chapter 792 - 792: First Game (2)

At the end of 5 innings, Ken had pitched around 50 balls and had yet to give up a hit. He got off the mound and celebrated with the team. They were in the lead 13-0 and the game would end via the mercy rule.

However, after he saw Zeke getting ready to bat, Ken realized that something was wrong.

"Wait, haven't we won already?" Ken asked the coach.

"Hmm? What are you talking about. We might be up 13 runs but the game is not over until the final whistle." He said, wearing a frown.

"But the mercy rule?" Ken asked.

Coach Brown looked at him weirdly. "There is no mercy rule in the post season Ken."

"EH!?" Suddenly Ken felt depressed. He had worked so hard in order to preserve his pitching numbers so he could play tomorrow, yet it seemed that it was all for nothing.

"Anyway, good work out there, I'm gonna put you in the outfield starting next inning."

"Yes sir..."

After around another hour or so the game came to an end with an overwhelming victory for the Bobcats. Their rally in the opening inning set the tone for the game, allowing them to take hold and never look back.

Jordan and Peter were able to get hits against Blake in the 7th and 9th innings, but it was too little too late. At the end of the game the score was 15-2, meaning Columbia would remain in the winners bracket.

They would face the winner of the next match between Virginia Tech and Gonzaga.

"Well played everyone." Coach Brown said wearing a brilliant smile. "You're welcome to stay and watch the next game if you so choose, or you can head back to the hotel. We'll be having a film study session after dinner, but you're free until then."

Funnily enough, no one decided to stay and watch the game, so the bus was fully loaded and went back to the hotel. It was just after noon and Steve, Brian and Ken decided to head out for some lunch.

They settled on an American grill place within walking distance from the Hotel.

"I can't believe you thought there was a mercy rule in the post season." Steve said, laughingly.

Ken frowned, sending a glare to his friend. "Why are you acting like you knew?"

"It's just common sense man." Steve shrugged.

"It's a surprise that you knew it. After all, common sense isn't your strong suit." Brian quipped, inserting himself into the conversation.

"PFFT." Ken held his sides and began to laugh, not expecting the quick and brutal comeback from the fiery youngster.

"You're lucky you're an endangered species, otherwise I'd beat the crap out of you." Steve retorted.

Both Brian and Ken looked at each other in question, not understanding what he was talking about. "Endangered species?" the latter asked.

"Yeah... He's an Orangutan right?" Steve asked, pointing to the orange hair atop Brian's head, his mischievous smile returning.

"PFFFFFFT." Search the * website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Once again, Ken lost his composure, unable to hold back the deep belly laugh that proceeded. Before he could recover, he saw Brian chasing after Steve down the street, yelling obscenities towards him.

"Kids these days." He said, smiling. The two had definitely made this past season a lot less monotonous. Part of him wished that the days could remain like this forever, but inwardly he knew that even if such a scenario existed, he would still choose to move on.

After all, his dream was always to join the Majors. With the skill of these two, he wouldn't be surprised if they were also drafted in the coming years.

With his dream so close, Ken felt a surge of determination.

'I'll win this College World Series first, then dedicate all my time and energy to improving before the draft...' He thought.

Back in Japan, Ai was on the couch and hugging her cushion tightly after watching the game. Seeing Ken perform so well had warmed her heart, but also made her miss him even more.

She glanced to the couch where Hiroki and Rie were currently sleeping. Rie had forgiven her boyfriend and was now snuggled up to him, her heavy bust practically smothering the poor guy.

Ai shook her head and let out a sigh. She walked into the next room and grabbed a blanket, placing it gently over the two before heading to the empty room where a futon was set up for her.

She pulled out her phone and saw a new message, causing her eyes to light up.

"We got the win eventually. Apparently they don't have a mercy rule in the post season..." Ken wrote.

Ai giggled and began to type back.

"You were so cool up there. I watched the game with Rie and Hiroki, but they fell asleep after the third inning. What are you doing now?"

A few minutes later, Ken replied with an image.

A picture of a burger and fries was in the forefront, but in the background she could see two figures who looked in the midst of an argument. Steve and the red-headed Brian looked like a couple of kids fighting, causing her to let out a laugh.

"I didn't know you were on babysitting duties? I hope they're paying you enough for this."

She giggled at her own joke and let out a yawn. Even though it was Summer Break, much like Ken, she struggled to sleep in the mornings. Perhaps it was because of her parents owning a bakery, but she could never wake up past 6.

A new message came, a few laughing emoji's followed by a "I miss you."

Ai smiled sweetly, responding in turn. She sent her goodnight text and placed her phone down, ready to go to sleep. It took a little longer than usual since she was still buzzing from the Bobcats win.

Eventually her eyes felt heavy and she drifted off into slumber, dreaming of the day that she would see Ken again.

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

Chapter 793 - 793: Game 2 (1)

The second game of the day ended in Virginia Tech's victory. However, after the ridiculous score disparity of the first game, the Columbia Bobcat's went into the next match as favorites to come out on top.

It was a little ironic since they had been looked down upon coming into the post season and were now facing the home team, but most in the team didn't care what the media said.

Much to Ken's disappointment, he was not named as the starting pitcher despite only pitching just above 50 balls the previous day. However, he did not complain and took up his usual spot in the outfield.

The game started out even over the first few innings, with both sides trading runs. The leadoff batters Ayden and Brian drew first blood with two doubles before Ken was walked. DJ performed a rare bad hit which resulted in a double play at first and second.

The final out was Steve who hit a fly ball into left field for an easy catch. He had grumbled something about the wooden bat he was using being faulty, but no one believed him.

After some back and forth, the final inning approached with a score of 5-6. Virginia Tech were ahead by a single run and Brian was up to bat in the bottom of the 9th.

The guy looked calm and collected even under the pressure on his shoulders. He acted as if this was just a regular game, not in the regionals of the College World Series.

WHOOOSH

DOOOONG

He chased after an outside ball and smacked it out into right field with relative ease. The fielder was onto it right away, only allowing Brian to make it to first base before having to stop.

Ken approached the batter box with confidence. Now that Brian had secured himself on base, all they needed was a home run and the game would be over.

'It's time to pull out all the stops...!' Ken thought, a small grin forming on his face. He tapped the plate and the tip of his cleats and got into position, ready for the first pitch.

However, he heard a commotion in the dugout in the next moment, causing him to look around in question. It was then that he saw the catcher stand up and call for an intentional walk.

Ken frowned. This would be the 3rd time he'd been walked this game, which was really starting to piss him off. But, there was no use in complaining right now, after all, it was well within the rules.

"Ball four, take your base."

Letting out a small huff, Ken threw the bat to the side and jogged over to first. Brian moved along to second base and DJ was up at the plate next. He had not been playing that well this game, something rare for a player of his caliber.

It seemed that the VT coach had seen this and called for this exact situation to try and get a double play.

Unfortunately for the Bobcats, things happened exactly as the opposing team wanted.

WHOOOSH

DING

It was a grounder, straight back at the pitcher. He bent down to collect the ball, but fumbled briefly, losing a few milliseconds of time before throwing it to 2nd base. Ken pumped his arms and legs before diving forward.

However, the 2nd baseman had received the ball and thrown it over to first before he could touch the bag.

"Out!"

"Out!"

'Damn it!' Ken picked himself up off the ground and dusted himself off, trying to hide his annoyance. He saw DJ walking back to the dugout with a downcast expression and jogged to catch up to him.

"Don't worry man. Steve will finish the game for us." Ken said, patting him on the shoulder.

"Y—Yeah..."

Of course Ken didn't mention the fact that they could also walk Steve and try and pick a battle with another batter. In fact, this seemed like the best option for Virginia Tech.

Steve also believed that this would be the case. His emotions were painted on his face for all to see.

As Steve stepped up to the batters box, he stood there, not even getting into position to wait for the ball. The umpire gave him a warning, to which he was forced to comply with. He lifted his bat half-heartedly and faced the pitcher, waiting for the inevitable intentional walk.

However, the pitch came a second later, a fastball on the inside of the strike zone.

PAH

"Strike."

"Eh? They're not walking him?" Ken said with surprise. It made no sense for Virginia Tech to not walk Steve, especially since the next two batters were not as good as him.

While he had not gotten a hit today, it still stood that Steve had the most home runs in Div 1 this season. Were they perhaps underestimating him?

Steve's whole demeanor changed in the batters box. Ken could almost feel his anger bubbling to the surface from his position in the dugout.

"Oh... They messed up." Ken mumbled.

He knew how much pride Steve had. For VT to decide to take him head on, it meant that they believed he wouldn't be a cause for concern. A single out would secure them the game, and they decided it would end with Steve.

In the batters box, Steve was livid. At first he had been pissed because he believed he'd get walked and not get a chance to redeem himself, but now he was pissed because he felt like he was being underestimated.

Perhaps it didn't make sense, but to him it felt like the other team were laughing at him.

'I'll belt this one into the stands. We'll see who is laughing then.' He thought, gripping the bat tightly.

WHOOOOSH

CLICK

"Foul."

The next pitch was on the outside this time, just outside the strike zone. In his anger, Steve went after it and nicked it with his bat. He was now behind in the count.

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

Chapter 794 - 794: Game 2 (2)

'Damn it!'

With 2 outs and the count at 0-2, he was in a bind. One more strike and the game would be over and they would be relegated to the losers bracket. Of course they would still get another chance since it was double elimination, but who would want to play 4 games, when you can win with 3.

He turned to the coach who looked to be just as stressed as him. But behind him Steve saw Ken who was standing atop the stairs in the dugout. His face was much calmer, causing Steve to feel a slight sense of relief.

Ken raised his hand and gave him a thumbs up, as if saying 'You can do this.'

Steve nodded, this time turning to Brian who was standing at 3rd base. Unlike Ken who was being supportive, the red-haired guy was scowling at him, as if he was annoyed that he hadn't hit the ball and ended the game yet.

Instead of this making him angry, Steve let out a chuckle. For a moment there he had almost let his emotions get the better of him in the exchange.

Now slightly relaxed, he turned back to the pitcher with a determined expression on his face. He gripped the wooden bat tightly and held it high, ready to swing once the ball entered his range.

The ball was whipped out of the pitchers arm, a slider. Steve prepped himself to swing, but quickly realized he had misjudged it.

'That's a cutter!'

In a panic, he adjusted his swing slightly, rolling his wrists to change the trajectory of his bat.

WHOOOOSH

CRACK!

'Ah...'

The ball sailed into the air, deep into foul territory. The bat which Steve had been using all season completely fell apart in his hand, now smashed to smithereens. While many used the metal bat in college, he liked the feel of the wooden one's better.

Out of the whole team, only he and Ken used a wooden bat.

"See! I told you my bat was broken." Steve called out to Ken, feeling a sense of vindication.

He ran over to Ken "Can I use your bat? I promise I'll send it out of the stands." Steve said with a mischievous grin.

Ken was hesitant, but he still agreed. "You break it and I'll make you pay with your blood, sweat and tears." He replied gravely.

"Hehe, don't worry man."

After successfully borrowing Ken's bat, Steve returned to the batters box and apologized to the umpire. Ken's bat was pretty similar to his own that he'd just broken, because he had asked his friend for his recommendation.

With it now secured in his grip, he turned back to the pitcher and waited, overflowing with confidence. He was going to make these guys regret not walking him.

The pitcher nodded and entered his wind up, sending his arm whipping past his face. Steve's eyes widened as he locked onto the ball. In a fraction of a second, he had already picked the ball.

'You wanna strike me out with a changeup!?! AS IF!'

WHOOOOOOSH

THWACKK!

The crisp sound of the ball striking the center of the bat rang out over the field, eliciting a roar from the Columbia dugout. The ball sailed into the right outfield with awesome power, it's fate all but sealed.

"HAHA!" Steve almost jumped for joy as he watched the ball about to enter the stands. He turned to the pitcher and stared at him, flipping the bat as retribution for underestimating him.

The bat which landed awkwardly on the pitch suddenly snapped in half.

Steve's whole body turned cold as he froze on the spot, staring at the scene of the murder. Fear and anxiety instantly gripped him before he was interrupted.

"Run around the damn bases idiot!" Brian yelled from home plate, snapping him out of his reverie.

With his heart beating wildly in his chest, Steve jogged towards first base, dread settling into the pit of his stomach. He turned to see Ken now holding the two pieces of his treasured bat wearing a blank expression.

'What have I done!?' Steve cried inwardly.

He stepped onto second base and could now feel the murderous glare directed at him from the direction of home plate. By the time he rounded third and made his way to touch the plate, He could see Ken's tall figure in the back glaring at him.

The moment he stepped onto home, the whole team swamped him in celebration. Before he realized it, he'd already lost sight of Ken who usually stuck out like a sore thumb with his ridiculous height.

SMACK

"OW!"

He felt a stinging sensation on his backside from being slapped so hard. Steve turned around, trying to find the person who did it, but no one looked guilty.

SMACK SMACK!

"OI STOP IT!"

SMACK SMACK SMACK

"STOP! I'M SORRY!!"

It didn't take him long to realize that it was Ken, dishing out punishment while hiding amongst the team. He was like a ninja, appearing from Steve's blind spots and delivering cutting slaps which reverberated through his whole body.

Thankfully the celebration ended shortly after and everyone dispersed. He could see Ken nearby, still holding the two pieces of his once whole wooden bat.

"H—Hey man... I'm sorry about your bat. Maybe it already ran its course." Steve said, trying to look remorseful.

"It was fine until you flipped the thing." Ken replied coldly.

"Hey... To be fair it was probably cracked during the home run hit. The bat flip just finished the job." Steve replied, making a lot of sense.

If Ken used it in the future while it was structurally unstable, there was a chance that things could have gone a lot worse.

Ken understood this, so he didn't continue to give him a hard time, he was still pissed that the guy had hit the ball so hard that it broke though.

"Have you ever tried to hold back even a little?" Ken asked with a sigh, though he knew the answer.

"Nope~" Steve said with his trademark mischievous smile.

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

Chapter 795 - 795: Shopping (1)

A couple hours after the game ended, Steve, Brian and Ken went downtown to do some shopping. Since the two had broken their bats, they would need a replacement for the final game tomorrow.

They would play the winner from the losers bracket match held tomorrow morning. Virginia Tech would play against Gonzaga once again to see who would come out on top, whereas Wright State had already been eliminated after two straight losses.

There was only a single sports goods store nearby, but Ken was happy upon seeing the size of the store. The trio walked in and were greeted by an expansive building which looked almost like a warehouse.

Shoes, uniforms, equipment for many different sports. Basketball, Baseball, football, it was basically an emporium for American sports.

"Dude, this place is huge..." Steve gaped in awe.

"Good afternoon, are you looking for the Basketball section?" A young woman in her early 20's dressed in a black uniform asked, smiling sweetly.

"Ah no, I wanted to look at your baseball bats if you don't mind." Ken replied. This was not the first time that he'd been mistaken for a basketball player, so he wasn't surprised anymore.

"Oh, sure thing. Please follow me." She replied, turning on her heel.

Steve and Ken followed promptly, but Brian lagged behind for a brief moment. This didn't escape the eye of Steve who was hyper aware of his surroundings.

He saw the dazed expression on Brian's face and instantly knew that he was smitten. A mischievous smile appeared on his face a moment later as a plan entered his mind.

"Here is our baseball section. Is there anything in particular that you were looking for?"

"Wooden bats please. Ours broke in the game yesterday." Ken replied, his tone still carrying some sorrow.

The woman's face lit up briefly and she tucked a strand of her brown hair behind her ear, "You guys play locally? I haven't seen you around here before."

"We're college players from Columbia University." Steve interjected, "This guy right here is our star player, and he's only a freshman."

He placed his hands on Brian's shoulders and pushed him forward in front of the assistant. Not expecting to be thrust into the conversation, Brian's face instantly turned beet red and he was at a loss for words.

"Oh? But I thought their star player was Ken Takagi, the sophomore pitcher?" She asked, raising an eyebrow in confusion.

"Y—Yes, this is Ken here." Steve said, pointing to his tall and confused friend beside him.

"You're Ken!?" She cried out in shock. "Would you mind if I get your autograph? Wait, sorry that was rude of me."

"Um, sure. Would you mind helping us with selecting a bat first?" Ken replied, feeling a little awkward.

"Absolutely." She replied happily, heading towards where the bats were stored.

Ken followed, leaving Brian and Steve in the same position.

"Look man... I'm sorry for embarrassing you like that." Steve said seriously.

"It's fine." Brian replied softly.

Steve had wanted to make the guy feel a little embarrassment because he could feel that he found the girl attractive, but he didn't think that this would be how things ended.

With a glum atmosphere, they eventually moved to where Ken was being shown the wooden baseball bats. The girl was conscientiously explaining the benefits of each wood type to him. It seemed she knew her stuff.

"Most of the Major League players use bats made from Maple since its the hardest of the bunch. Not only is it more durable, the hitting power is said to be better." The woman explained.

For the next 30 or so minutes, they looked at different bats and Ken eventually settled on one. It was a black and priced at over \$300.

"We'll get two please." Ken said.

"Okay, meet me at the counter." She replied happily.

After she walked away, Ken turned to Steve, "I'll pay for the bats, just make sure you take care of these ones..."

Usually Steve would be jumping for joy after receiving such a thing for free, however his mood was a little off, causing Ken to raise his eyebrow. Now that he was paying attention, he could see that Brian also seemed depressed.

"Alright... What's going on?"

After being given the run down, Ken let out a sigh. He could remember back when he would get so easily depressed over a woman so he felt a little sympathy for Brian who was usually so upbeat.

"There's no time for distractions guys. We have our final match tomorrow afternoon which will decide whether we move onto the super regionals." Ken chided, feeling like he was the only adult in the room.

"Yes sir..."

Both of them responded half-heartedly, causing Ken to roll his eyes. "Go wait outside while I pay for these."

Brian and Steve did as they were told and left the store, waiting out the front while Ken paid for the bats. For the first time in what seemed like forever, the duo were not fighting with one another.

"One day I'll be as famous as Ken." Brian said, seemingly out of nowhere.

Steve nodded. "If we win the College World Series, you'll be just as famous."

"Mmm. The reason I came to New York was because of Ken... For some reason I felt like he could help me improve and give the best shot of winning." Brian leaned up against the wall of the building and said so.

He didn't know why he was talking like this, especially in front of Steve, but he was in a weird mood.

Steve was silent for a while before responding in kind. "I moved all the way from Texas to follow Ken. He was the only one who believed that I could go pro... I even played as a walk on for most of last season."

Hearing this, Brian turned to Steve in surprise. Despite spending the past 8 months with the guy, they had never spoken on a deeper level.

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

Chapter 796 - 796: Shopping (2)

"Well, it seems like we're both of the same opinion then. Ken really is special..." Brian replied, letting out a hollow laugh.

A few moments later, Ken walked out from the store carrying two bats.

"Here is your bat, don't break it again..." He stated firmly.

"Yes sir!" Steve replied, his energy returning.

"And here, you take this." Ken said, handing Brian a folded piece of paper.

"Huh? What's this?"

Ken grinned, "Just open it."

Brian did as he was told and looked confused upon seeing its contents. Being the nosy guy that he was, Steve peeked over his shoulder and let out a gasp.

"He really is Goose..." Steve muttered.

On the slip of paper was a name and a phone number and a few words written beneath that said "I finish at 5pm, text me."

Brian raised his head in disbelief. "Why are you giving this to me?" He asked, slow on the uptake.

Ken let out a laugh and placed his arm around the guy's shoulder. "I told the girl that you think she's cute and asked for her number. You should have seen her blush."

"Wait... This is for me? She gave me her number?"

"Dude, how slow are you?" Steve asked knocking against his head as if to check if it was empty.

"Holy crap... This is the first girl's number I've ever gotten..." He muttered in disbelief.

"Alright well don't lose it then." Ken replied, "Let's head back, I'm sure the coach is worried that we've been gone for so long."

Steve was so happy for Brian that he didn't even tease him about the situation. He could understand the guy, after all, he was in a similar boat before dating Steph.

The mood was jovial as the group returned back to the hotel. Brian had moved on from his state of disbelief to one of anxiety.

"What should I text her? The only girls I've talked to are my Mom and Sister's..."

Steve then decided to take point, filling his head with fanciful ideas. As the adult in the group, Ken quickly put a stop to the nonsense and advised Brian to just be himself.

Of course this advice was far too overused and he was promptly ignored by both Brian and Steve who began to come up with a plan to woo this woman they had just met.

Ken could only shake his head incredulously. But if he was honest, it was a welcome change not having the two kids fighting against each other like usual.

Upon arriving back at the hotel, the coach's face was full of relief after seeing the trio return safely.

"Right, we've got a meeting in 20 minutes. Go get settled and meet back in the usual spot." Coach Brown said.

"Yes sir."

20 minutes later everyone had arrived at the meeting spot to talk about the final game tomorrow. Everyone was in a good mood, particularly after the walk off home run earlier that day.

"Alright, I know that our opponent hasn't been decided for tomorrow yet, but I wanted to schedule this meeting anyway." Coach Brown said, addressing the players.

"You saw today just how good Virginia Tech are. While nothing is certain in baseball, we believe that they will likely beat Gonzaga again and play us in the finals. If this is the case then we'll likely have another close match tomorrow."

"But," He continued, "In the event that Gonzaga win, I want us to at least be aware of their team. So we will be focusing on some film from a few of their most recent games."

Like this, the coach went through the meeting like usual. The first 30 minutes focused on Gonzaga, and the latter was film from their game today. Coach Brown always liked to point out any mistakes in the name of progress.

In his words, as long as they were getting better every day, they would eventually be the best.

Once the meeting was done, it was already around 5pm. Brian had been fidgeting the entire time, constantly looking at the clock as the hour to contact the girl approached.

"Did you decide what you'll message her?" Ken asked, only half interested.

"Y—Yeah. I was gonna ask her if she knew any good places to have dinner..." Brian replied.

"What is she your tour guide?" Ken frowned slightly. "Try asking her to dinner, and ask for any recommendations where you can take her."

"He's right. You don't want to come off as a bitch." Steve replied matter-of-factly.

"Who are you calling a bitch?" Brian arced up, sending him a fierce glare.

Steve shrugged, "Ken was the one who had to ask for her number, it sounds to me like you've already been acting like one."

"I—Is that true Ken?" Brian asked, his eyes looking pitiful.

Ken let out a deep sigh, "He's not totally wrong. You need to show some confidence, otherwise women tend to lose interest rather quickly."

Brian was thoughtful for a while, "How exactly do I show confidence?"

"You should go to the date with your shirt off. Not only will you appear confident, you can show off those muscles you've been working on." Steve replied.

WHACK

"OW~"

"Don't listen to this idiot..." Ken said, sending him a glare. "There's a small line between confidence and arrogance. From what I heard from Rose today while we were talking was that she also likes baseball. You both have a common ground."

Brian nodded, pulling out his phone.

"What are you doing?"

"Taking notes."

Ken stopped the next sigh that was moments from slipping out and grabbed Brian by the shoulders. "You need to relax. Treat like its any other dinner. Ask questions about her, what she does, what her dreams are, what her favorite team is. Avoid talking about yourself unless she asks directly, that way you won't ramble on."

"Okay, I got it." Brian nodded along, "I'll message her now."

Ken said a silent prayer for the guy before mumbling about needing to go and stretch his muscles.

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

Chapter 797 - 797: Alone (1)

The next day, Brian was nowhere to be seen during their morning run. While this was unheard of for someone like Brian, both Ken and Steve did not panic. In fact, it was rather good since they could focus on working out rather than trying to get all the details from him.

It wasn't until breakfast time back at the hotel that they saw Brian finally emerge from his room. The guy looked a little tired and his hair was rather disheveled as if he'd just woken up, but there was a crooked smile on his face.

"Here he is!" Steve exclaimed with a wide grin, "Romeo has finally left the arms of his dear Juliet to come see his friends."

Brian's face faltered briefly, but he ignored the guy and walked straight to the buffet breakfast. Steve clicked his tongue, but he was still in a good mood.

"What's this about Romeo and Juliet?" Ayden leaned back and asked them.

"Oh you didn't hear? Brian went on a date with a lovely girl from the sports shop. Rose I think her name was." Steve seemed thrilled that someone would ask the question, and didn't hesitate to begin the gossip.

"Eh? This guy must be pretty confident to be picking up chicks on the road." Kaden piped up, a hint of jealousy in his eyes.

Ken shook his head, "Don't tease him too much. He is still a pure kid."

"Oh come on, I would never do such a thing to our cute freshman." Steve replied, though his words were hardly believable. In fact, Ken knew that this guy would definitely do the opposite.

By the time Brian arrived back at the table, there were more than a few sets of eyes on him, their expressions filled with expectation. The object of their attention ignored them and tucked into his breakfast.

"Oi~ Romeo. You gonna fill us in on the details?" Steve probed.

"A gentleman doesn't kiss and tell." He replied flatly.

"EH!? You guys kissed? Damn, you work fast Romeo."

Ayden laughed, "You shouldn't be surprised. Brian is always quick to get to first base."

"HAHAHA"

The table broke out into laughter. Even Ken had a hard time keeping his composure after the quick and unexpected joke.

Brian's eyebrow twitched in annoyance, but he tried his best to ignore the group. Of course he seemed to have forgotten how persistent Steve could be when he wanted to.

"So tell us, did you only get to first base? Surely you wouldn't have been satisfied with just that." Steve asked, leaning closer to the guy.

Brian raised his gaze from his plate and glared at Steve. "I told you, I am a pious man. There will be no such things until marriage."

"Eh, really? I thought you were just using that as an excuse to explain your virginity..."

Brian's face reddened and he was about to blow his top before Ken stepped in. "I told you to leave him alone. I'm sure he had a respectful date with Rose and even had her back home at an appropriate time."

"Then why does he look so tired then?" Steve added, pointing to Brian.

"I bet he was up messaging her all night. Don't act like you didn't do the same with your first girlfriend." Ken quipped, patting Steve on the shoulder.

With Ken's intervention, everyone lost interest. Brian sent him a grateful glance while the others moved onto the next topic of conversation. It wasn't tough since they had a very important game on today.

"You think we'll be facing Virginia Tech again today?" Kaden asked, casually munching on a piece of toast.

"I think it's pretty clear cut. VT played Gonzaga in the first match and beat them by 8 runs. They've got a pretty strong team after all."

"It doesn't matter who we play, we'll come out on top anyway." Steve said with determination.

"I like your enthusiasm, but you better not slack off. You hit 2 fly ball's and a grounder yesterday, it's no wonder they chose not to walk you in the final inning." Ken added, pouring cold water on the guy.

A few around the table laughed in response.

"H—Hey man, we spoke about this. My bat was broken, those hits should have been home runs. Now that I've got a new bat, It won't be the same." He assured.

"Yeah yeah, just make sure you've got your head in the game. Coach said I won't be starting pitcher today either, but the 8th and 9th inning are mine. As long as we're ahead by then, I'll close them out." Ken replied with deep confidence.

No one rebuked him, in fact they all felt at ease knowing Ken would close out today's game. After all, this was the 2nd year in a row that he held the best ERA 1for a college pitcher, who wouldn't trust him?

"Are you guys going to watch the game today?" Ayden asked, "Coach said that we can head to the field a bit later."

Ken shook his head, "I'll watch it on TV in the room."

The others decided that they would attend the game, which suited Ken just fine. After all, it wasn't often that he would get alone time. But by the time everyone had left and Ken was alone in the room, he regretted not going.

He found himself missing Ai, his family, his friends. A deep sense of loneliness tugged at his heart, threatening to overwhelm him. It had come out of nowhere and he had not expected it.

It was confusing since he had been alone plenty of times in the past, but it had never affected him like this.

Trying to push the feeling down, Ken turned on the TV in the hotel room and searched for ESPN2 in preparation to watch the game. It wouldn't start for another 30 minutes or so, but he wanted to preoccupy himself.

A Major League game appeared on the screen and Ken's eyes flashed.

"Miami Blue Marlins?"

In baseball statistics, earned run average (ERA) is the average of earned runs allowed by a pitcher per nine innings pitched (i.e. the traditional length of a game). It is determined by dividing the number of earned runs allowed by the number of innings pitched and multiplying by nine. Thus, a lower ERA is better.

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

Chapter 798 - 798: Alone (2)

Ken sat up, his attention focused on the game. It was the bottom of the 3rd and Miami was down by 2 runs already with the bases loaded and a single out. The pitcher was someone that he didn't recognize and he looked to be sweating up a storm.

"They're in a pinch..." Ken mumbled. He would certainly not like to be on the mound in this situation.

"It looks like Miami are making a pitching substitution to get them out of this hole. Yep, it's Ryan Smith, the undrafted sophomore coming in for Julio Rodriguez." The commentator announced.

Ken's ears perked up at the commentators words and sure enough, Ryan appeared on the screen, heading towards the mound. His sandy blond hair was barely visible beneath the blue cap.

"Ryan has been even better in his second season in the big leagues, but he has got a lot of work to do this inning. He looks focused, let's hope that he can stem the bleeding for Miami."

Seeing the figure of Ryan take the mound, Ken felt a rush of emotions. In his previous life, this guy had been a prominent figure in the Majors and was well on his way to becoming one of the greats.

This was why when they had met in the U18 World Cup, Ken had made him his rival. But it seemed like their meeting had drastically changed the future of Ryan's life.

Instead of attending a Junior College for a year and entering the league, he had not gone to college at all, instead working his way up through the minor leagues. Ken wasn't sure of the impact of this change, but he was at least glad to see that the guy had still made it.

Ken leaned forward and watched the guy roll the rosin bag around in his hand before throwing some warm up throws to get ready. After 8, he took up his position and nodded to the umpire.

He saw Ryan roll the ball around in his glove, close to his chest so that no one could see his grip. He raised his left leg and strode forward sending a whipping throw down the lane.

With the great camera angle, the trajectory of the ball was on full display as it snaked through the air like a serpent and landed flush in the glove of the catcher.

"There it is, the moving fastball. It still baffles me how he's able to retain so much accuracy despite how much the ball is moving. It truly is a difficult ball to hit." The commentator spoke, saying his praises.

Ken couldn't help but agree. Ryan had shown flashes of his unorthodox grips in the U18 World Cup, but it was clear that he had improved drastically over these past 4 years. Ken tried to imagine himself hitting the previous ball, but it was hard to tell if he would succeed.

This was especially so if he only saw it for the first time.

The next pitch came, this time a slider. With the unorthodox grip it acted almost like a slurve, but it broke late.

WHACK

The batter managed to clip the top of the ball, sending it straight into the dirt in front of him and on the way to Ryan at the mound. Not wasting this opportunity, Ryan ran forward to collect the ball and threw it to 2nd base in a single motion.

From there it was like clockwork.

"Out!"

"Out!"

"A masterful play by Ryan puts an end to the inning, stopping Pittsburgh from increasing their lead. The young guy will be happy with that."

"Yeah he sure looks happy." The other commentator joked as the camera panned to Ryan's face. The only thing evident in his expression was a calm determination, not even a whisper of celebration.

Ken felt chills in his body after watching the play. While it might not have seemed that impressive on the surface, to do so while under so much pressure with thousands of fans in the stands and watching at home, it truly was remarkable.

"If that had been a regular slider, it would have been a deep hit..." Ken mumbled, watching the replay of the play.

Watching it in slow motion, one could see how the spin of the ball was affecting the trajectory, causing the ball to drop faster than usual by the end of its journey. Were it not for this fact, the batter wouldn't have hit the top of the ball for an easy grounder.

Ken continued to watch the match which ended up going into extra innings. The Miami Blue Marlins performed a squeeze play to end the match in the bottom of the 11th, causing quite the celebration on the field.

He laid back on the bed and stared at the ceiling for a while, finally letting out a deep breath. Ryan had pitched for 4 innings and had kept the Pittsburgh Raiders scoreless, allowing for their team to crawl back on the scoreboard.

While he might not be the player of the game, it was true that his actions had turned the tide.

Ken's loneliness had long retreated, replaced by a yearning. Seeing someone who he thought as his rival doing so well in the big league only fanned the flames within him, overcoming everything else.

While his feelings hadn't changed, the drive to make it to the next level had overtaken them, burning brighter than ever.

BUZZ BUZZ

Ken turned to his phone which had somehow found its way onto the floor of his hotel room. He leaned over and picked it up, seeing a bunch of messages from Steve.

"DUDE! Are you watching this?"

"Oh crap, I forgot about the game." Ken mumbled, quickly changing the channel.

But he was not prepared for what he saw. It was currently in a replay, the pitcher threw a beanball, hitting a player high on the shoulder and sending him to the ground. After this, the VT player got up and charged the mound, starting a brawl.

Both dugouts emptied and soon punches were being thrown from both teams.

"What the hell?"

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

Chapter 799 - 799: Consequences (1)

Ken watched on in disbelief as a full on brawl was taking place on the field. By now, the field was filled with a sea of players, including coach's and umpires who were trying to break up the many melee that were taking place.

The commentators were appalled, calling it the worst fight they had seen in the College post season history. This still didn't stop them from breaking down the sequence of events leading up to the fight.

The Gonzaga pitcher threw a deliberate beanball at the batter which had sparked the fight. But there was clearly some bad blood before this, since VT was in the lead and had beaten Gonzaga the game before.

"So what happens now?" Ken mumbled, still coming to terms with what was happening.

According to the NCAA rules, ejections would be handed out for those involved in the fight, which means these players would receive suspensions. Since both teams benches had emptied, what would happen if all these people were ejected?

The game was stopped and after over 30 minutes of reviewing, the umpires on the field called an end to the game. Both teams were forced to forfeit and give up their shot of facing Columbia for a spot in the Super Regionals.

BUZZ BUZZ

The moment the decision was made, Ken's phone started ringing.

"Did you hear what happened?"

"Yeah... I just watched the whole thing. Is coach there with you?"

"Yeah, I've never seen him this angry." Steve replied, "Coach said that there's a good chance that we won't be playing today."

Ken raised his eyebrow, "So does that mean we move onto the Super Regionals?"

"I'm not sure. We're heading back to the hotel now, we'll see you soon."

With that, Steve hung up and Ken turned his attention back to the TV which was still replaying the fight. He had never expected such a turn of events, nor could he have. Both VT and Gonzaga's entire season was now marred by this exchange.

He had only been part of one fight during a baseball game in his life, and it had resulted in their teams suspension for the entire spring. Japan was far more strict than the US in this regard.

"What a shame." Ken muttered.

DING

"Hmm?"

Hearing the system notification all of a sudden, Ken was a little perplexed, but upon opening the mission window, he understood.

#MISSION: NCAA Division I Tournament.

*Task 1: Win Ivy league Championship [Completed]

*Task 2: Qualify for NCAA Super Regionals [Completed]

*Task 3: Qualify for College World Series

*Task 4: Win College World Series

*Task 5: Win MVP (Tiered rewards for each Tournament)

Task 2 had now been marked as completed which essentially confirmed that they had qualified for the Super Regionals on the back of the brawl between the two teams.

'This is good right?' Ken thought. Though part of him wished to play against VT once more and win in a more convincing fashion than the walk off home run last game.

He let out a small sigh and hopped off his bed before heading out of the hotel room and making his way down to the lobby. The team and coaching staff would be returning shortly, no doubt with news about what was to come next.

Around 10 minutes later, the team arrived.

Coach Brown didn't seem to be in a good mood and he ushered everyone to the meeting room for a discussion. With the atmosphere, it almost seemed like their own team was the one in trouble for the brawl.

"In all my years in this sport, I have never seen something so stupid." He said, pacing back and forth at the front of the group. "And for what!?"

The team was silent, no one daring to speak up. Of course everyone was thinking the same thing, "Why are you angry at us?"

"What we saw out there today puts a bad name on our beloved sport. If I ever see any of you doing the same, you will be dropped from the team. I don't care if you're a 5 star recruit or if your parents are one of the school's top donors, behavior like this is unacceptable." The Coach said, pointing at the empty white board.

"Ahem... I think what the coach is trying to say is that we should be aware of such things in the future." The old and fit pitching coach Reynolds stepped in, addressing the team. He placed a hand on Coach Brown's shoulder as if to calm him down.

However, Coach Brown shirked the hand from his shoulder, his eyes still fierce. "I am not saying do not be passionate about our game, but you must remain level headed. All it takes is a single wrong move and you could throw away your future. Those two teams have lost their entire seasons thanks to their stupid mistake, and that's if their lucky."

He continued, "The NCAA have been under fire lately, but I can guarantee they will bring down the hammer when it comes to delivering punishment for this incident. I'm talking about players being suspended, and some may even completely lose their college eligibility because of this."

His words washed over the team, adding to the solemn atmosphere. Even though they were not involved in the incident, the words made them pause and think.

No one wanted to throw away what they'd worked so hard for in a single moment of stupidity.

As the Captain, Ken felt like it was a prudent time for him to speak up and address the players. He didn't often do things like this, so it felt a little awkward.

"The coach is right. I trust that we all have learned something today. No matter what happens on the field, we need to ask ourselves; is it worth risking our future career?" Ken said, his voice even.

Coach Brown seemed to be satisfied with Ken's assessment and placed his hand upon his shoulder. "Well said Ken."

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

Chapter 800 - 800: Consequences (2)

"For now, our game has been canceled while we await the decision of the NCAA. We will either automatically move onto the Super Regionals, or be forced to play against Wright State." He stated.

"Until then, you guys are free the rest of the day." Coach Brown finished.

Suddenly being told there was no longer a game, the team were at a loss. Some decided to go have some lunch while they were at the hotel and others retreated to their rooms.

Ken, Brian, Steve and a few others went to the hotel restaurant and ordered some food. Out of everyone, Ken was the only one who knew that they had already qualified for the Super Regionals thanks to the system.

Of course he couldn't reveal this information, but at least he had peace of mind. Out of everyone present, he was the most relaxed.

"Man, coach was pissed. You should have seen him at the game, it looked like he wanted to jump from the stands and give out lectures to all the players." Steve said, breaking the silence.

"Does anyone know why he was so triggered by this?" Ken asked. It was one thing having a distaste, but the coach seemed truly upset by the fight.

"I think it has to do with his son." This time it was Ayden who answered.

"Hmm?"

Apart from Kaden who already knew the answer and was wearing a morose expression, Ken, Brian and Steve were sending him questioning looks.

"The coach's son used to play baseball growing up, but he was knocked out by a sucker punch by an opposing player." Ayden said with a heavy tone.

"What happened to him?"

"Well... Originally he was fine after regaining consciousness, but things got progressively worse. He started having seizures and was diagnosed with TBI... Traumatic Brain Injury."

"Holy crap..."

Everyone was quiet as the words sunk in. Ken could not imagine the pain that he must have gone through seeing his own son reduced to such a state because of something out of his control.

It suddenly made sense why the coach was so against what had happened today, especially since he had been the victim of a similar circumstance, though with far worse consequences.

"What happened to the guy that did it?"

"I think he was charged with battery and banned from playing in organized baseball for life. But it still doesn't change the fact that the coach's son's whole life has now been affected."

The statement was true and no one could refute it.

They all sat in silence, eating their meals. Only a few hours later did news of the NCAA's verdict get passed onto the Columbia coaching staff. The Bobcats would advance to the Super Regionals after the forfeiture of both Virginia Tech and Gonzaga university.

The brawl sent the media into a frenzy, appearing on national news and severely impacting the reputations of both schools. While the sanctions would be harsh from the NCAA, the schools would also likely come down on the players involved with an iron fist.

The team were flying out the following day, but now that they were free, Ken decided he wanted to watch his father's team play on TV. Only Steve decided to join him, with Brian wanting to meet with his new crush once again.

Ken and Steve didn't tease him, wishing him good fortune before retreating to their room to watch the game.

It was the final game in Austin with the Texas Shorthorns against the Air Force Academy Hawks. The winner of this match would advance to the Super Regionals.

But it was soon clear who would be coming out on top.

In the very first inning, Texas managed to score 5 runs, putting the Hawks in a precarious position. From there, the superb pitching of their starting pitcher Xavier

Coates had kept the team scoreless until the 7th while his team continued racking up runs.

By the time the final inning arrived, the Hawks scored a single consolatory home run before being struck out and ending the game.

The team was both explosive, yet disciplined throughout the game. By the end of the match, both Ken and Steve were wearing serious expressions.

"They are a good team..." Steve stated.

"Of course, remember who the assistant coach is?" Ken said with some humor. Of course this was just a joke. The shorthorns had a deep pitching rotation and some solid batters, it was no surprise that they had gotten this far.

"I wonder if we will meet them in the College World Series?"

"It's certainly possible. Though we'd both need to win in the Super Regionals and be assigned the same bracket afterwards." Ken replied. He had not thought about playing against his father's team, but the possibility made him feel motivated.

The last time his father had been present at his game was in the State Championship in his final year at High School. But before that it was in the U18 World Cup as the assistant coach.

Ken wouldn't mind showing the guy how much he had improved.

With this in mind, he felt an extra bout of determination. He got off the bed and stretched, "I'm gonna go for a run, you coming?" He asked.

"Sure, but give me some time to plan our route. I'm sick of getting lost every time we run in a new city." Steve replied with some annoyance.

"Suit yourself." Ken said, letting out a small chuckle.

He quite enjoyed running without a destination in mind, it helped clear his head. But he had to admit, it sure saved some time having his friend navigate for him.

"You think Brian is still out on his date?"

"Maybe... Why?" Ken asked suspiciously.

"Hehe, maybe we should check in on him while we're out." Steve added with a mischievous smile.

"You mean spy on him? Absolutely not. I've been on the receiving end of stalkers before, I won't subject him to that." Ken replied emphatically.

"Okay okay, damn." However, his smile did not leave his face as he plotted out their route.

'It won't be stalking if we accidentally come across him.' He thought with a silent laugh.

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