

Major League System

Chapter 801 - 801: Wingmen (1)

Ken found himself being led by Steve on a run downtown. Since the guy's fitness had improved tremendously over the past year, he was able to lead without compromising the workout.

Ken wasn't complaining. It was good to switch his brain off every once in a while and focus on running instead of leading the workout himself.

'I should probably let him do this more often.' He thought inwardly.

As they were running, Ken saw Steve suddenly slow down right in front of him, almost causing him to run straight into the guy. If it wasn't for his friend grabbing him and killing the momentum, things could have been ugly.

"What the hell are you doing?" Ken asked with annoyance.

"Shhh. Look there." Steve said in a hushed voice, pointing through a window of a nearby cafe.

Ken turned and his eyes widened as he saw Brian with a brilliant smile on his face, chatting away to a woman with her back turned to them. At a glance, it was obvious they had stumbled upon his date.

"Care to explain yourself?" Ken said icily. He knew Steve, and there was no way that this could be a coincidence. Initially he had been wondering why they were running up and down every street downtown, but now it made sense.

Steve froze, "I—It was just a coincidence..." He replied, though it did not sound convincing.

"If it was a coincidence then you wouldn't have hidden and just run past this place. Didn't I tell you to leave Brian? He's a good kid and he's our friend." Ken was starting to get annoyed with Steve's meddlesome ways.

Steve let out a sigh, "You're right, I planned this. But it's not what you think, I'm just worried about the guy."

"Worried?" Ken scoffed. From the way the two fought, he found it highly unlikely that this was the real reason. More than likely Steve would be looking for ways to tease the guy, or perhaps even sabotage the date.

Steve shook his head, "I knew you wouldn't believe me Ken." He said, wearing a pained expression, as if the words had truly hurt him.

Ken was taken aback, for he actually seemed genuine for once. 'Is he serious?' Ken mused.

"I'm not close with my siblings since they're much older than me." Steve began, his voice sounding a little vulnerable. "Ken, you're like an older brother to me, even though we're the same age. But Brian is like the little brother I never had..." his voice trailed off.

'EH!? No way...'

"We may fight a lot, but that doesn't mean I don't want the best for him. He's usually rambunctious, but when it came to women, he lacked his usual self confidence. I just wanted to check up on him and maybe support him from the shadows." Steve said.

Suddenly, Ken felt bad, remembering Christmas of his freshman year when they played catch at their old field. This was the first time that Steve had opened up to him, revealing the man behind the mask.

Now it felt like he was seeing another part of him. The loyal and fierce protector who tried to support his close friends by any means he could.

"My bad..." Ken said, realizing that he might have been jumping to conclusions.

"It's fine, I know I don't have a great track record when it comes to such things." Steve admitted, wearing a wry smile. "But I want to do something to help him."

"What would you even do?" Ken asked, "It's not like you can go sit next to him during their date."

Steve was silent for a while before his eyes lit up, "I have an idea. Stay here and keep an eye on him." He said, turning on his heel and jogging back down the street.

"Wait, what?" Ken watched him leave, and was forced to do as he said, letting out a sigh.

He suddenly felt like a stalker as he watched Brian converse with Rose inside. From what he could see, the guy looked nervous, but it wasn't to the point where it was affecting the date.

Around 5 minutes later, Steve returned with a bouquet of red roses, causing Ken's jaw to drop. "Dude, what are you thinking?"

"Don't worry about it man." Steve said, sending him a wink. Without another word, he walked into the cafe before Ken could stop him and approached the counter.

Ken watched on, still unsure of what Steve's plan was.

The guy handed the flowers to the server and pointed to the table where Brian and Rose were seated before heading back out and onto the street. He flashed him a grin, "Now let's see what happens."

The server handed the bouquet to Rose who seemed surprised. She smiled brilliantly and smelled the flowers. Brian on the other hand was shocked, but he managed to play it off.

While she was distracted, he looked around, spotting Steve and Ken outside. Steve waved with a large grin on his face. At first Brian seemed a little annoyed, but he eventually smiled and nodded.

"That was a nice thing to do." Ken said, placing his hand on Steve's shoulder. He had thought the guy might have tried to prank him or something, but everything was going well.

"Yeah, wait till she reads the note." He replied with a chuckle.

'Oh no...!' Ken had a sinking feeling in his stomach. Was he about to see Rose slap Brian in the face after reading the note.

Part of him wanted to look away, but the other wanted to wait and see what would happen, so he could decide whether or not to beat the crap out of Steve later.

Rose read the note and it seemed like she was giggling. Without warning she leaned over the table and kissed Brian on the cheek.

His face instantly reddened, but a dumb smile painted his lips a moment later. Steve burst out into jovial laughter and flashed the guy a thumbs up.

"Let's go." He said a moment later, breaking into a jog.

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

Chapter 802 - 802: Wingmen (2)

Ken let out a sigh of relief and followed behind him a moment later. It seemed he had thought badly of Steve, despite what he had said earlier, but it turned out that he was helping in his own way.

The two continued on their run for another 30 minutes before finding a place to stretch.

"So? What did the note say?" Ken asked, unable to hold his curiosity any longer.

Steve grinned, "Just a poem I came up with..."

"Which was?"

Steve turned to him with his eyes misted over,

"My Dear Rose,

A bouquet of beauty, soft and true,

Yet pales beside the charm of you.

With roses soft, I dream of this—

Your tender lips, a stolen kiss.

-Brian"

Ken shuddered unconsciously. Being serenaded by Steve was something that his body had an instinctive negative reaction to. "Dude, don't ever do that again..."

"What? You asked what I wrote." Steve said, shrugging.

"Since when did you learn to write poems?"

"Ahem... Well since you asked, I have bee—"

"You found it on the internet, didn't you." Ken interrupted him, wanting to spare himself from the crap that his friend was about to spout.

Steve gave him a look, but then grinned, "Of course. You think I've got enough time up my sleeve to start studying poetry?"

"Figures..."

The two finished their stretches and made their way back to the hotel, chatting away.

"I wonder how he will go when we have to leave tomorrow?' Steve said.

"Who knows, hopefully they'll keep in touch."

As they arrived at the hotel, there was someone waiting out the front for them. Brian who they had seen in the cafe around half an hour ago was sitting on the ground, looking dazed.

He didn't seem to notice Ken and Steve who approached.

"Hey lover boy!" Steve said with a grin.

Brian turned to him, but his reaction wasn't what they expected. He looked sad, almost like a lost puppy.

"What happened man? Things were looking pretty good a while back." Ken asked with concern.

Brian got to his feet and sighed, "We decided that it was not a good idea to pursue a relationship together."

"Eh?" Steve blinked a few times in confusion, "But didn't she kiss you? I don't understand."

"I don't think we were compatible. When I mentioned marriage, she began to pull away. It was then that I knew that it wasn't meant to be." He said with an even deeper sigh.

"HUH!? You mentioned marriage? Wasn't this only your second date?" Both Ken and Steve were flabbergasted. Just what kind of 18 year old would bring up such a thing even before being in a relationship?

Brian frowned, "Why wouldn't I bring it up? Isn't the purpose of a relationship to get married? If the expectations aren't set out from the beginning, won't we just waste each others time?"

To this, Ken had no response. Brian was not really wrong, but he was about as subtle as a brick to the face. Of course he would scare off a girl by speaking of marriage in the first few days of meeting her.

"Brian, my dear friend... Women are magical creatures and are easily frightened. By bringing up marriage so early, you are just going to scare them off. You need to ease into such things in the future." Steve said, placing his arm around the guys shoulder.

However, Brian brushed him off, "Thank you for your concern, but this is non negotiable. I won't compromise my beliefs for any woman."

Both Ken and Steve were slightly taken aback, but Ken respected his stance. "You're right Brian. You will eventually find someone who will be of the same opinion as you. Maybe next time be a bit more subtle though... Ask them if they see themselves getting married in the future first."

"Alright... Thanks guys." Brian replied, "I take it you're done working out for the day?"

"Why? You wanna sweat out your tears?" Steve asked with a grin.

"OOOOF"

Brian sent a swift elbow to Steve's stomach, sending the air out of his lungs and forcing him to his knees. It was at this moment that Ken knew things had returned to normal.

He let out a laugh, "There should be a gym in the hotel, let's go do some weights since we've got time."

"Sounds good to me!" Brian chirped. The two walked into the hotel, leaving Steve on the ground, gasping for breath.

The team stayed in Blacksburg for the night and made their way to the airport the next morning in order to fly back to campus. Brian had returned to his usual self, and he and Steve continued to fight like siblings, much to Ken's dismay.

With the Regionals wrapping up across the country, the Bobcats soon found out their next opponent. The Florida Crocs had defeated the University of Oklahoma and would be hosting the Super Regionals at their home field at Condron Ballpark.

Once Ken heard the news that he would be facing Leo Cameron once more, his whole body burned with determination. They would have 3 games to go up against each other before the guy entered the big leagues.

This was not an opportunity that he would miss, not for anything. So in the 3 days before they were set to go to Florida, he was laser focused.

For the first time in what felt like years, Ken decided to open up the System Shop. Knowing Leo's stats, there was no way that he would hold back whatever advantage he could get.

#SYSTEM SHOP

>Lottery Tickets (Out of Stock)

>Elixirs

>Skills

He opened up the elixirs menu, but was instantly disappointed. The highest elixirs they had was the SSS-grade, and even then it cost 150,000 major points.

The only remaining option was to check out the skills menu, but he did not have any high expectations. Chances are he would only get better options after upgrading the system once more.

However, his eyes lit up as he saw a certain skill.

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

Chapter 803 - 803: Support (1)

Wind up: Increases Pitching by 1 grade when using your wind up - 5,000 Major points

A wave of nostalgia crept over Ken as he looked at this skill at the top of the list. This was the first skill that he had drawn with the bronze lottery ticket when he had completed his first mission.

Back then he had complained bitterly, since he was still injured and couldn't pitch. At the time it had felt like a low blow, but now that he had come so far, he could look back at the memory with some humor.

Since it was so cheap, Ken decided to buy it, even if it didn't give him a great boost like his other skills. At this point, there was no cap to the amount of skills he could possess, so there were no downsides.

'Everything helps...' He thought, clicking to purchase the skill.

[Congratulations, you have purchased skill: Wind up]

[Skill: Wind up is far below users level and effect is unusable in games]

Ken let out an exasperated sigh, but he wasn't too upset. In reality, he had purchased the ability for nostalgia reasons mostly, the boost would have not meant too much in the long run.

DING

[Would user like to reroll the skill's grade?]

'Huh? Reroll?' Ken stared at the words in front of him curiously. This was the first time that he had ever seen this window, so he did not act immediately.

Next to the Yes button was a price, one that made his heart sink.

'150,000 Major points... That's a steep price.' He mused, unsure of whether it was worth taking the leap. He considered the matter for quite a while, weighing up the pros and cons.

If he were to reroll and the grade of the skill was still something that he could not use, then he would have just wasted all those Major points. However, he had barely touched these points since upgrading the system the last time.

In fact, Ken wasn't even sure if he would upgrade the system next time, even if he had the opportunity. So what was the point in keeping the points? Wouldn't they just go wasted?

However, Ken was a miser at heart. He would splash out on his loved ones with no issue, but when it came to spending for himself, he would be very frugal.

After a few more minutes of consideration, he eventually decided to take the gamble, as much as it pained him. Ken needed to level up ahead of facing Leo in the Super Regionals, otherwise they would be knocked out.

Pressing the confirm button, he closed his eyes, not wanting to see the result.

'Please be good...'

[Congratulations, user has received skill: Domineering Wind up]

[Domineering Wind up: Increases pitching grade by 2 when performing wind up. Causes the batters abilities to decrease]

When he opened his eyes, Ken's jaw dropped. This was the first time he had seen a skill that could negatively affect his opponent, there was no way he could have expected this.

'Is it something like intimidation?' he thought.

Either way this was good news. His pitching had been stuck at the SSS+ grade for almost 2 seasons. With Showdown and this skill, he could increase his pitching 4 grades against one player.

'Would that bring my pitching to Legendary grade!?'

[Affirmative]

'Holy crap...'

Michael Thompson made his way through the airport having collected his luggage after the 5 hour flight, his expression showing his excitement. He had been waiting for this moment a whole 5 years.

As soon as the Super Regionals had been announced, he had gone online and purchased a ticket with his hard earned pocket money. Thankfully his parents had offered to pay for his lodgings, otherwise he might not have been able to afford the trip.

Michael had changed a lot in the past 5 years. He was no longer the timid blond-haired youth who would give up at a moments inconvenience. The bullies that he used to be so afraid of were now too scared to touch him after he had gained the protection of the baseball team seniors.

After he had shown his talent and work ethic, Michael had become the star player for his middle school, which had continued to the present day. With the popularity he'd gained, his life felt like it had done a complete 180.

He stepped into the taxi and told the driver the address for his hotel. Getting comfortable, he pulled out a clear case within his bag, looking at it fondly.

To some it was just a signed ball, but to Michael, this ball was far more. On that day 5 years ago, his idol had come to find him in the crowd and signed this ball.

'Dream big and never give up - Ken'

Perhaps the man who had signed it did not know, but these words had never left him, even now. At the time he had considered quitting the team after being bullied heavily at school, but he was glad that he did not.

Now 18, Michael had already committed to California State for the following season. Originally he had wanted to join Columbia alongside Ken next year, but he thought better. Not only would he be on the other side of the country away from his family, but he did not feel worthy to join him.

There was only 2-3 years difference in age between the two, but to Michael, the man was his idol. He was afraid that he might mess up in front of this person and cause bad feelings. This would all but crush him.

'Perhaps I'm still that timid kid from back then...' Michael thought, a wry smile creeping onto his face. He found it a little funny, but such a thing could not ruin his mood, not now.

After a 5 year long wait, it was finally time.

"I'll finally get to see you play again Ken..." Michael muttered, his excitement palpable.

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

Chapter 804 - 804: Support (2)

The next day, Michael made the trip to Condron Ballpark from the hotel which only took around 10 minutes on the bus. When he arrived, there was already quite a few people lining up to get into the stadium.

Such a thing couldn't change his mood, no, he had been waiting for this moment for far too long. Just knowing that he would be close to Ken was enough for the smile to creep back onto his face.

"Hey, watch it."

"Ah sorry about that." Michael replied. He had knocked into someone beside him by accident while daydreaming.

The man had dark skin and was athletic with thick eyebrows. Despite looking imposing, he had a kind face.

"Don't worry about it. Are you here by yourself?" He asked offhandedly.

"Yeah, flew all the way from California to be here." Michael replied with a smile.

"Oh? That's quite a way. Are you a fan of the Crocs?"

Michael shook his head vehemently. "I only came here to see one player..."

"Oh good... I came to watch UF get smashed." He replied, wearing a grimace.

"You don't like UF? Are you local?"

"I'm originally from Texas, but I play for Florida State right now. The crocs are kind of our rivals I guess." He replied letting out a small chuckle.

Michael's eyes lit up, "You're a college player? That's so cool! I'll be playing next year at California State."

The man turned his gaze and assessed Michael briefly, letting out a small nod of appreciation, "Mmm, you have a solid foundation." He replied, putting a hand out, "The name's Latrell White, I play in the outfield."

"Oh." Michael quickly wiped away the sweat from his palm and took the hand, "Michael Thompson, I play shortstop."

"Nice to meet you Michael." Latrell said with a smile, "You said you were here to see one player... Is it Leo Cameron?"

Michael shook his head, "I'm actually here to see Ken Takagi."

Latrell's eyes lit up and he let out a hearty laugh, placing his hand upon Michael's shoulder, "You've got good taste my friend. Ken is an awesome player, we played together back in High School. He's a tough bastard who will keep training until he makes you either cry or vomit."

Though his words sounded bleak, they were full of cheer.

"Eh? You played with Ken!?" Michael's eyes shined. He had not expected to bump into a former teammate of Ken's while lining up to get into the stadium.

"Hehe, you better believe it. We won the WWBA National Tournament and the State Championship the following year. If it wasn't for him, I probably wouldn't have been scouted so heavily." Latrell replied in good spirit.

"Wow, that's so awesome." Michael said with shining eyes. "I first watched him play in the U18 World Cup... he told me to dream big and never give up. He's the reason why I didn't quit baseball."

His tone turned solemn.

"He's a good guy..." Latrell replied. "Speaking of U18 World Cup, this will be the first time Ken and Leo will match up since then. I wonder if the end result will be the same."

"I hope so." Michael replied. He could still remember Leo facing Ken in the batters box. It seemed that the guy would never get struck out. Every pitch he would foul off, slowly and steadily hunting down the ball to end the game.

If it wasn't for the heroics of the 3rd baseman diving into the stands to catch a foul ball, they end result might have been different.

"Hey, I'm also here by myself if you wanted to sit together. Since we both know Ken we can cheer for him together." Latrell suggested.

Michael nodded like a pecking chicken, "That would be great thank you."

The two chatted for a while before the line finally started moving and people were let into the stadium. It was a fine facility and could usually seat up to 7,000 people. But since this was the Super Regionals, an addition 3,000 seats were sourced.

Latrell and Michael made their way into the additional seating located near the right outfield. Michael's reasoning was to be as close to Ken as possible, even though it was not guaranteed that he would be playing in the outfield this game.

The sun was high above their heads, causing a stinging sensation on his neck and shoulders, but little could detract from his excitement.

It wasn't long before the players came out to warm up on the field. Unluckily for Michael and Latrell, the UF team was on this side of the field, going through their drills.

Michael recognized Leo among the players. Even in the orange uniform, the guy looked like a model. His cool and calm expression never faltering as he went through the warm up drills.

"There he is." Latrell got Michael's attention, pointing him to the opposite side of the field. Ken was stretching, his tall frame towering over most of his teammates.

Michael felt his heart thump in response, wanting nothing more than to call out to the person he had traveled all this way to see. But he knew that it would be too far for him to hear, especially with the chattering of the crowd.

So he settled on watching from a distance. There would be plenty of time to try and get his attention since it was a three game series.

Just as he thought this, Ken turned in their direction, causing his heart to soar. He waved emphatically, as did Latrell beside him.

Instead of waving back, Ken turned away and spoke to one of his teammates, filling Michael with some disappointment.

"Maybe he didn't recognize us." He said, turning to Latrell.

But Latrell was grinning, "Then why is he coming over here?"

"Huh?" Michael turned and saw Ken jogging over, wearing a carefree smile upon his face. Now his heart was thumping wildly in his chest as thoughts bounced around in his mind.

'Will he remember me?' Michael asked in his heart.

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

Chapter 805 - 805: Anticipation (1)

When the team arrived at Condron Ballpark the sun hung proudly in the sky, the summer heat humid and bringing on sweat easily. The atmosphere was buzzing as the guys made their way into the locker rooms.

Ever since the announcement of their opponent, Ken had been training like a man possessed, an action that did not go unnoticed by his team. As the Captain, he was leading by example, though it was not his intention.

Facing Leo again was something he had not expected so soon. Originally he had thought the guy would have chosen to enter the draft last year, however it looked like he had stayed in order to graduate.

This suited Ken just fine. In fact, he was far more excited about these games than the prospect of winning the College World Series, though Ken decided to keep this much to himself.

While Japan had won the U18 World cup back then, Ken couldn't help but feel like he had not beaten Leo. The guy had fouled off his pitches over 10 times and no matter what he threw, he could not get the final strike.

If it wasn't for Kuro, Ken had no doubt that the guy would have sent one of his pitches into the stands. This was even more the case after using Identify on Leo and seeing his monstrous stats.

As Ken was getting ready, Steve and Brian were chatting away beside him. For once, they were not fighting. It seemed that even they realized just how important this game was.

"Attention everyone." Coach announced, standing in the middle of the locker room. He seemed more solemn than usual.

"First off, I want to reiterate how proud of you all I am that we are here today. We have worked hard this season and the fruits of our labor are paying off."

He studied his clipboard for a moment before continuing, "This will be a tough series, I won't lie. Not only are their batters top notch, but they have a deep pitching lineup. This paired with Leo Cameron's meticulous leads will prove a difficult obstacle."

"Isn't this meant to be a pep talk coach?" Kaden called out, eliciting a wave of laughter in the locker room.

The Coach grinned in response, "Let me get to the point. With all this against us, I still believe that we have what it takes to come out on top. It is a best of 3 series, so keep that in mind."

"We will be adopting a different approach with our pitching for this series." The coach said, his eyes falling onto Ken briefly.

"Byton, Julio, DeShaun. You guys will be starting the pitching during the series. As long as we're ahead by the end of the 7th, Ken will come in to close out. Are there any objections?"

Ken felt his heart sink for a moment, but he soon nodded. The coach wanted to make sure that he could pitch throughout the series, it made sense if they were in a good position before he took the mound.

Of course, this would mean nothing if they were behind by the time he came into the game. However, Ken didn't object. If he were to start the pitching today, he wouldn't be able to pitch tomorrow because of the regulations.

Seeing that nobody objected, Coach Brown clapped his hands together and went on to announce the starting line up. There were no changes to the team and they were soon ushered onto the field.

Ken saw the field and nodded in appreciation. The natural grass was beautifully maintained and the facilities looked top notch. He began to go through some dynamic warm ups as he made his way out to left field.

A few minutes later, he felt a nudge, grabbing his attention.

"Here they come." Steve said, gesturing to the dugout on the right side.

Ken watched as the Florida Crocs came out to the field, dressed in their orange uniform. He scanned them, waiting for a single person to appear, when finally he spotted him.

Even from a distance, Ken could feel his ice cold, almost machine-like demeanor. This paired with his completely symmetrical body and handsome features made him seem otherworldly.

'Leo...!' Ken felt a surge of fighting spirit erupt from him.

In that moment, Leo turned, as if he had felt the change in the atmosphere. The two locked eyes from across the field, like two adversaries who were about to meet in battle, causing sparks to fly.

With his enhanced vision, Ken could see a small smile creep onto the corner of the handsome man's lips, though there was no hint of mockery. He raised his hand, acknowledging Ken like one would an old acquaintance.

Ken was a little taken aback, but he smiled in turn, waving back. This did little to quell the raging fire inside of him though and he looked forward to the start of the game.

As he turned, he noticed two figures waving at him, causing his eyes to widen briefly. He turned back to Steve and told him that he would be back soon.

He jogged over to the crowd with a grin plastered on his face, he had not expected to see an old friend in these parts.

"Latrell, what are you doing here man?" Ken asked, holding out his hand to shake it. He had not seen the guy since his final year of high school almost 2 years ago.

"Heh, I play for Florida State now. I came to watch you crush the Crocs." He replied, grabbing the hand with a smile.

Ken laughed in response. Judging by the grip and his physique, the guy had been continuing his training which made Ken glad.

He could feel the gaze of the blond youth next to Latrell and raised his eyebrow. Ken took a look at the kid and realized that he looked familiar. Judging by the guy's expression it was clear that he knew him.

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

Chapter 806 - 806: Anticipation (2)

"Michael is that you?" Ken wasn't sure, but this was the name that came to the forefront of his mind. The kid who had asked him for an autograph many years ago.

The teen's eyes lit up as if he had just heard the best thing in the world. "You remembered me!" he said, tears misting his eyes.

Ken reached over the barricade and ruffled his hair, feeling a sense of warmth after seeing the kid once again. "Of course I would remember my number 1 fan." He said. "Are you still playing baseball?"

He nodded, much like a child.

"Good. I'm glad you never gave up." Ken added, taking his hand back. "Wait, aren't you from LA? What are you doing here?"

"He's here to see you obviously." Latrell said with a laugh.

"You're right, that was a silly question. You've picked some good seats, I'm playing in the right outfield today until the later innings." Ken said with a grin. "Let's all catch up after the game, my treat."

Hearing this, Michael got excited and nodded like a pecking chicken. He was too nervous to speak, so this was all he could do.

"Alright, see you guys a bit later, I need to go finish my warm up." Ken added, waving goodbye before jogging back to his teammates.

Michael and Latrell watched in silence as he left.

"See, I told you he would remember us." Latrell said, nudging Michael.

"Mmm... I was worried that he might have been different from what I remembered. But he's even kinder than back then." Michael said in a small voice.

"Was that Latrell?" Steve asked Ken, squinting his eyes.

"Yeah, he plays for Florida State now apparently. We'll catch up with him after the game, for now stay focused." Ken replied.

"Yes sir!"

After warm ups were done, both of the teams gathered on the field and the announcer called for everyone to stand for the National Anthem. It played over the speakers and without Tristan's terrible singing, it wasn't so bad.

And then came time for the Captain's to meet with the umpire.

Ken made his way forward and stood across from Leo, feeling his body heat up with excitement under the summer sun. The umpire went through a few things, the usual warnings and directions.

"Good luck." Ken said, holding out his hand towards Leo.

Leo's usually expressionless face produced a smile and he grabbed the outstretched hand. "May the best team win."

Just like that, the gauntlet was thrown and it was time to begin the match. Columbia would be batting first in this game, so all the players returned to their dugouts.

The announcer began to list off the home team as they took to the field, eliciting cheers from the crowd.

"Number 7, Catcher and Captain of the Florida Crocs.... LEO CAMERON!"

The crowd erupted with a loud cheer, hyping up the atmosphere as Leo walked onto the field. As usual, he was calm, almost cold and did not acknowledge the crowd.

Meanwhile, Ken watched on from the dugout, almost shaking with anticipation. The match he'd been waiting for was finally here and he couldn't wait to step onto the field.

"Are you nervous?" Brian asked, getting ready to bat.

"Hmm? No." Ken replied, raising his eyebrow.

"You're shaking... I've never seen you do that before." He said, pointing to Ken's arm.

"Oh, he's just excited. I bet he can't wait to head onto the field." Steve answered with a laugh, patting Ken on the shoulder.

Ken scoffed, "Don't worry about me, you'll need all your focus to get onto base." He replied to Brian, turning his attention back onto the field.

"Heh, I'll get there eventually." He said, "Wish me luck."

"Godspeed my friend." Steve answered.

"Batting first for the Bobcats, Ayden Carney." The announcer's muffled voice rang out over the PA system with little enthusiasm. It was clear that they were currently playing an away game.

Ayden secured his helmet and walked into the batters box, sending a glance to his old teammate behind the plate. "Thought you'd already be in the league by now." He said with a grin.

Leo shrugged, "Better late than never." He said calmly.

"You're right. I'll do you a favor and knock you out of the post season so you can start preparing for the draft." Ayden replied, turning his attention to the pitcher while getting into position.

Leo did not answer, giving the first lead.

The pitcher nodded and began his wind up, sending a blizzing fastball to the outside.

WHOOOOSH

DING

"Foul."

Ayden clicked his tongue in annoyance. He had thought that he got enough on the ball to at least get a single, but it was wider than he expected.

Unfazed, Leo called for the next ball and crouched down, placing his glove out.

This time, the ball was a two seam to the inside, almost grazing Ayden's arm since his body was hovering over the plate. Thankfully he had moved back in time to avoid being hit, but it left him feeling a little rattled.

'I forgot how calculated this guy is...' Ayden thought, glancing at Leo briefly.

The count was now at 0-2 and he was not in a good position as the lead off batter. He gripped his bat tightly and faced the pitcher once more, this time with a sense of urgency.

Leo's eyes shined behind the plate and he called for the next pitch.

The pitcher strode forward, sending his arm whipping out. When the ball left his fingertips, Ayden had already decided to chase the ball.

It was a slider thrown a little inside. Ayden's eyes flashed and a small grin formed on his face. Even after the ball broke it would still be in the strike zone, so he had to swing no matter what.

Planting his foot, Ayden swung hard.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

He held his follow through and a confused expression crept onto his face.

'I missed that?'

"Strikeout!"

Even as he collected himself and walked back to the dugout, Ayden had no idea how he could have missed such a pitch.

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

Chapter 807 - 807: Wake up Call (1)

"Batting second for the Bobcats, Brian Sweeney."

As the announcer called up Brian to the batters box, Ken spoke to Ayden who was on his way back to the dugout. "That was a nasty slider, haven't seen one that breaks that hard before."

"Yeah, I thought I was going to hit it but I swung too late." Ayden admitted, letting out a small sigh. "That guy is still the same as ever. Sometimes it feels like he knows what I'm thinking."

Ken pat him on the shoulder, "Just keep trying to get on base. Every pitcher throws a bad ball every now and then." He consoled.

"Even you?" He asked with a grin.

DING

Just before Ken was about to reply, the sound of the ball being struck entered his ears. The two snapped their heads to the field, only to see Brian running towards first base with speed.

Ken couldn't see the ball at first, but he saw the right outfielder bend down to scoop up the ball before throwing back to the infield.

"Nice Brian!"

"See, just keep your head in the game." Ken said with a smile.

"Did you even warm up?" Ayden asked, pointing to his bat.

"Ah crap..."

Ken had to settle for a couple of practice swings while walking out to the batters box. This was not the first time that he'd done something like this, nor did it seem that it would be the last.

"Batting 3rd, Ken Takagi."

A few cheers rang out from the crowd, but they were sparse compared to the reception that the home team got. Ken was used to such things, so he paid it no mind and went through his usual ritual and got into position.

He gave a brief nod to Leo and turned to the pitcher waiting for the first pitch, trying to keep his mind clear and sharp.

Back in the U18 World Cup, Ken had been able to predict Leo's leads since the guy was so systematic. It had been 5 years since then, so there was no doubt that the guy had fixed his predictability issues.

Not to mention he'd probably studied Ken's tapes over and over. The guy was like a literal supercomputer. This paired with his otherworldly good looks made Ken suspicious that he might not even be human.

Gripping his bat tightly, he waited for the first pitch.

It came out like a rocket, heading for the top of the strike zone. The ball seemed to be rising.

PAH

"Strike."

'Eh? No way right?' Ken turned, giving the umpire a brief look of disbelief.

'I know I'm tall... But there's no way that's in the strike zone.' He thought, swallowing down his complaints. He turned to Leo and saw the calm expression on his face.

'This guy truly is great at framing... It feels like the strike zone is almost double the usual size.'

Ken shook his head and turned back to the pitcher. He would need to be careful with pitches just outside the strike zone, swinging at anything that looked to be close enough.

With this in mind he let out a slow breath and focused.

The next ball came, this time a curveball. His eyes lit up and he pounced on the ball.

WHOOOSH

WHACK

The ball kicked up some dirt as it was hit along the ground towards the gap between 2nd and 3rd. For a moment it seemed like it would beat the short stop, but the guy dove along the ground, securing it into his glove.

Instead of collecting it with his other hand, the guy made a scooping motion with his glove and sent it to the guy on second base. He stepped on the bag and threw the ball straight to first.

'Damn it!'

Pah

"Out."

"Double play~ Let's go Crocs!" The announcer called, hyping up the crowd.

Ken slowed his run and felt a twinge of annoyance. He had misjudged the drop of the curveball and hit a grounder because he was too hasty, putting an end to the inning before it had even really started.

"Don't mind." Brian said, patting him on the shoulder on their way back.

"My bad. I got a little impatient." Ken replied.

The two returned to the dugout to remove their helmets and don their gloves before heading back out onto the field. The coach gave him a few words of encouragement on his way past to which he smiled in response.

It was still early in the game and there was plenty of time to turn things around.

"First up for the Crocs... It's Justin Michaels!"

The home crowd cheered and the short stop who had made the athletic play earlier stepped up to the batters box. He was average height and had an angular face which was currently wearing a confident smile.

Bryton was on the mound to start things off and currently going through his warm up throws. He had been pitching well this season and Ken felt confident in his abilities against any team.

Of course he would prefer to be the one pitching, but as the captain he would do whatever he could to support the team. His eyes move to Steve behind the plate, this guy would make sure that there wouldn't be any easy hits.

Once Bryton was done warming up, the first pitch came, a slider.

DOONG

The ball was hit sky high straight towards right field. Ken only had to move a few meters forward to get under it and secure the easy catch in the outfield.

"1 out!" Ken called out, sending the ball back to the mound.

The quick first out brought the spirits up of the Bobcats and the team felt some level of confidence by the time the next batter came up.

"Batting second, Theo Vinn~"

The next guy had an interesting hairstyle which could be seen out the back of his helmet. Ken had heard someone call it a mullet, which made him wonder why someone would name a haircut after a fish.

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

Chapter 808 - 808: Wake up Call (2)

He stepped into the batters box and faced Bryton. Like the last guy, he also had an air of confidence.

PAH

"Strike."

PAH

"Strike."

Two strikes in quick succession and the batter had yet to swing. However, he was still wearing a confident expression, as if he was the one ahead in the count.

PAH

"Ball."

"Ball."

Steve attempted to bait the guy into swinging, but to no avail. The guy was cool as a cucumber, not even giving the pitches a second look. Ken frowned, he had a bad premonition.

WHOOOSH

DOOOOONG

The next ball was struck deep into left field, bouncing off the back wall and dropping to the ground. DJ scrambled and managed to scoop the ball up and send it back to the infield, but Theo had already made it to second base.

Like that, the Crocs had their first hit of the match.

"Batting 3rd, Treyshaun Thomas!"

A dark skinned player stepped up to the batters box, his braids hanging from his helmet. The guy looked both strong and athletic and wielded a wooden bat. He was also a lefty.

Ken could see that Steve was a little annoyed behind the plate after wasting so many pitches on the previous batter and not being able to strike him out in the end. He couldn't blame the guy, but now was not the time to get caught up in the past.

Thankfully, Steve moved on and called for the next pitch.

WHOOOOSH

WHACK

The fastball was struck over the head of the shortstop, flying out into center left field. Ayden hunted down the ball with speed, barely slowing down as he scooped the ball and launched it towards Steve at home plate.

Theo who had rounded third and was on his way to home suddenly stopped in his tracks before returning to the bag. If it wasn't for the heads up play from Ayden, the Bobcats would have given up a run.

Now it was a runner on first and third with only one out. They were in a pinch, especially with who was coming up to bat next.

"Batting 4th, Captain Leo Cameron!"

The calm and confident Leo made his way over to the batters box, seemingly in no rush. His eyes scanned the field briefly before getting into position.

Leo pointed his bat towards the pitcher, placing his right hand upon his left shoulder. If one were to ask him why he did this, Leo would answer that he was simply predicting the possible angles of the pitcher's throws.

Each field was different, and each pitcher threw a certain way. By measuring at each at-bat, he was able to hone his focus, eliminating any variables.

Once satisfied, Leo dropped his arm and got into position. Just his presence on the mound was something else. Even Ken who was all the way out in right field could feel it.

Ken's right hand balled into a fist and he felt a fire ignite inside of him. He wanted to pitch right now, with every fiber of his being.

'You'll get your chance...' He told himself, trying to calm down.

Steve made his lead and Bryton nodded before winding up and sending out a fastball on the outside. It was just outside the strike zone, but this is what he wanted.

Steve held out his glove and got into position to frame it correctly. It was close enough that the umpire should give them the strike. However...

WHOOOOOSH

The sound of displaced wind assaulted him as Leo threw an almighty swing at the ball. The hairs on Steve's neck stood up and he almost flinched from the shock of seeing the bat flying so close to his face.

THWACKK!

The ball was struck cleanly, propelling itself deep into right field. The sound echoed in the stadium before it was drowned out by the cheers of the home crowd.

Ken ran towards the back fence, but it did not take long to realize that he would have no chance of getting to it. It easily cleared the fence and fell into the crowd some 50 feet from the field.

Leo casually placed his wooden bat on the ground and jogged around the bases as if he had done nothing special. The guy would rarely celebrate, in fact Ken had only seen him smile a couple of times.

A sense of helplessness assaulted Ken as he watched the guy. Part of him still couldn't believe that they had beaten Leo and the US team way back then, especially after seeing what kind of player the guy was now.

With the home run, the Bobcats were now down by 3 runs in the first inning, casting a gloomy atmosphere on the field. Ken did his best to keep his team in the game and said some encouraging words, but things went from bad to worse.

The next batter was Trent Waters, the guy Ken had met at the WWBA tournament back when he was a Junior in High School. His shoulders had gotten even wider and his batting was even better.

WHOOOSH

THWACK!

Another ball was sent into the stands, this time in the left field. The game continued to spiral out of hand until the score was 5-0 in favor of the home team Florida Crocs.

What made it even worse was that even when they had the opportunity to bat, the Bobcats were unable to capitalize at all. The wily leads of Leo and the consistent pitching of Elliot on the mound them feel stifled.

By the time the game ended, the score was 9-1. Ken had managed to cross home plate after he and Steve had hit a double in the 7th inning, but that was the only time they had scored.

The mood in the locker room after the game was solemn and barely anyone spoke. Even the coach seemed to be shocked at what had taken place on the field, only adding to their woes.

This game had been a big wake up call.

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

Chapter 809 - 809: After the Loss (1)

At some point, Coach Brown had given up on the game. Instead of bringing in Ken for the closing innings, he had decided to save him for the following match where they would have to fight tooth and nail to succeed.

As the game progressed, he could truly see the difference between the two teams. He had originally thought that Steve would be able to match Leo behind the plate, but the latter had been far better than he had expected.

While Steve seemed to have an instinctive feel for the zone, Leo was methodical. Every pitch he called for served a purpose, slowly coiling around the batter until they suffocated under the pressure.

The game also showed the difference between their pitchers. The Crocs were truly blessed with an abundance of great pitchers, all conditioned to throw accurately following Leo's leads.

Across the 3 pitchers who took part in today's game, the Bobcats were only able to secure 5 hits over the 9 innings. This was a record low for them, something that the coach had not seen ever since taking the position of head coach 2 years ago.

So he walked into the meeting room feeling at a loss. The players had showered and gathered after the match, ready to hear him speak. There were many things that Coach Brown could pinpoint as the reason for their loss, but the ultimate reason was because of a single player, Leo.

Coach Brown stood in front of the group silently for a while, his gaze moving over the team slowly. He could see their downcast expressions and feel the depressed atmosphere. This was probably the worst loss they'd experienced at this school.

It was one of those losses where a player would question if their team was actually decent or not.

Brett Brown let out a deep sigh before bringing both his hands up and slapping the sides of his face loudly.

SLAP!

The act got the attention of everyone in the room and they stared at the man with shock, not expecting such an action. However, it was effective in shifting the mood.

"Alright! Enough of this moping around." He said, his cheeks stinging from the loud slap. "I want us to not dwell on that last game, we need to look towards the future. Think of tomorrow's game as a single elimination, it is a must win. We have the right players and the skills necessary to succeed, we just need to believe and execute."

"Ken, you'll be starting the pitching tomorrow. You'll be in for 7 innings, so I need you to pace yourself. No wasted pitches and no risks, we need to keep their batting line up at bay." He said, pointing to Ken and Steve who were sitting next to each other.

"Yes sir." The two echoed back in response.

"As for scoring our own runs, we need to go back to the basics. We only had 5 hits last match, we are much better than this. Your top priority should be getting onto base in whatever way you can. Trust your teammates to send you home." He said, his voice getting louder and more passionate.

Slowly the atmosphere began to turn from gloomy into something more positive.

"I'm talking bunts, walks, hit by pitch, steals, whatever we can do to get onto base and get into a scoring position. We have worked hard all season to get here, I don't want to look back on this moment and regret that we did not try our best."

"Are you with me!?" His voice boomed.

"Yes sir!"

"I SAID, ARE YOU WITH ME?"

There was a tingle in the air, stoking their camaraderie.

"YES SIR!"

"Good! I want us all to rest for the remainder of the day. I need you in top shape tomorrow's game." Coach Brown finished, turning on his heel on his way to the door.

"Coach, aren't we watching film today?" Ken called out in question. Usually they would review their game and talk over points of improvement for the team.

Coach Brown stopped on the spot and turned. "I have no desire to watch a game where we lost so badly. I've already told you what we need to do tomorrow, if you want to study the film you can do it in your own time."

With that he walked out of the room, leaving the team in a state of incredulity.

Steve laughed loudly, breaking the silence, "He's right. Why would I want to watch a game where we got crushed?"

A few chuckles rang out in response. Somehow, the coach's odd actions had made them far less depressed than before. He had not minced words, nor had he fed them lies about their bad game.

While it might not have been conventional, it seemed to work.

"Well, you heard the coach. Get plenty of rest today." Ken stood up and said, addressing the team. "If I see any of you awake after 9pm tonight I'll be banging on your door at 5am for a morning run."

A few groans rang out in response but Ken ignored them, letting out a small chuckle. The mood had improved so he felt good enough to leave everyone to their own devices.

Once he left the meeting room, he pulled out his phone and saw a message from Latrell, wanting to meet up for some dinner tonight.

"You gonna come out tonight and meet up with Latrell?" Ken asked Steve in the lobby.

"You paying?" He asked with a cheeky smile.

Ken rolled his eyes, "Dude, I hope you know that you'll need to pay me back in the future. I already have an itemized account of everything that you owe me."

"Eh?" Steve was taken aback, "How much do I owe so far?"

Ken told him to wait a moment before opening his phone and finding a document. "At the moment its \$5,138.52"

"EHHHH!?! That much?" Steve's jaw dropped, almost not believing the words.

"Surely there must be a mistake..." he said, a cold sweat forming on his back.

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

Chapter 810 - 810: After the Loss (2)

Ken shook his head, "I have photos of all the receipts, if you want an accountant to look over it you're more than welcome."

"N—No... I believe you." He said with a pale face. "I think I'll sit this one out and eat at the hotel."

Ken shrugged, "Suit yourself." With that, he replied to Latrell and asked for a place to meet with him. In reality, Ken was not going to press Steve to pay him back, he just wanted the guy to understand how much money he was spending, in hopes that when he started getting pay checks he would think twice about splurging.

Of course he wouldn't say this out loud since it might have the opposite effect.

Soon enough Ken got an address and caught a taxi out the front of the hotel to meet up with his friend. He was taken into town and he was dropped off at a nice Italian restaurant.

The place was pretty packed, but he found his friend on one of the outside tables, seated next to the young Michael. He could tell that the two seemed to be a little uneasy, probably because of the bad loss he had experienced in today's game.

Ken let out a laugh, "Why do you guys look like you're at a funeral. It's just a loss, it happens all the time." He said, waving it off.

"Haha, you're right. I thought you might have been pissed about it though." Latrell answered with a smile.

Michael on the other hand let out a sigh of relief. He had been worried that Ken might have been in a bad mood, but looking at his smiling face, it seemed he was still optimistic.

"Look, losing sucks but it's not like we're out of the tournament yet anyway. I'll be pitching from the start tomorrow, so I'm hoping we can at least win this next game." Ken admitted.

Michael's eyes lit up upon hearing this. He had always loved to watch Ken pitch. The guy seemed like a giant whenever he stepped on the mound.

"It's good to see you again Michael." Ken said, turning to the boy. "I wanted to thank you for the letter you sent to me back then. You helped remind me never to give up."

"Huh?" Michael was gobsmacked. He had indeed sent a letter, but it was only to thank Ken for helping him out. "I—I... You're welcome." He said softly, feeling a little embarrassed, but there was a big smile that crept onto his face.

He suddenly felt a lot closer to Ken than he had before.

"So are you still playing baseball? You should be in your senior year of high school by now right?" Ken asked, changing the subject.

Michael nodded shyly, "I got offered a scholarship at California State."

"Whoa, that's awesome man. Congratulations." Ken said genuinely. Of course he knew that Michael had great potential since he had used Identify on him when the kid was in the crowd, but to hear that he had come so far was heartwarming.

"Yeah, the kid's got a PG rating of 10. He's one of the top 5 recruits in the country man." Latrell said with a grin. He seemed to be enjoying the embarrassed expression on Michael's face a little too much.

Ken whistled, "I better be careful in the future. We might even play each other in next years College World Series." He said with a hearty laugh.

The trio talked about baseball for a while, bonding over the sport they loved. The waitress came by and asked for their order.

"You guys get what you want, I'll pay for the meal." Ken said succinctly.

Michael was about to refuse, but Ken sent him a look which cowed him. "Don't take away my right as your big bro alright?" he said, sending him a wink.

'Big bro?' Michael heard these words and suddenly felt his eyes tearing up. Ever since he had seen Ken standing atop the mound back then at the U18 World Cup he had begun to idolize the guy.

He wanted to be as cool as Ken. To one day stand on the same stage, to play alongside or against him. This was why he had worked so hard up to now.

To hear this validation from Ken who occupied such a large part of his heart truly made him feel like the luckiest person in the world. It took some effort, but he managed to nod, wiping the tears from the corner of his eyes quickly so that he wouldn't embarrass himself.

"Big bro?" Latrell scoffed, "You're more like a boring uncle." He said, sending Ken a wink.

"Sounds like you want a salad for dinner." Ken replied with amusement.

The three ended up ordering some pizza to share. This restaurant had the authentic woodfire oven, and they were recommended it by the server. As someone who was Japanese, Italian food was his second favorite cuisine.

The food came out and he was not disappointed. Finding great Italian food in Florida was not something that he had expected, but this place seemed to be quite popular amongst the locals.

By the end of the meal, Michael had come out of his shell more and was actively contributing to the conversations. He was no longer the 13 year old kid from back then.

"That Leo has gotten a lot better since the U18 World Cup." He said, munching away at a slice of pizza.

Ken nodded, "Tell me about it. Sometimes I feel like that guy isn't even human, but a machine built in a baseball lab."

"Don't remind me..." Latrell complained, "That Trent Waters guy is also a pain. He was 3rd this season in Home runs. Between the two, we keep getting smashed in the opening 3 innings."

The trio ate and chatted for quite a while before Ken paid the bill. The conversations were light and everyone was in a great mood by the time everything was over.

"Well, I'll see you guys tomorrow. We should do this again before we all go our separate ways. I'll bring Steve next time." Ken said with a smile.

With that, they parted ways.

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

Chapter 811 - 811: Leo (1)

After the game Leo made his way out of the ballpark and headed towards the campus. His cold expression showed no pride or arrogance after destroying Columbia with an overwhelming victory.

"That was the easiest game of my life, I don't know what you were so worried about." Justin, the Crocs short stop said, lazily stretching as he walked beside his captain.

"Don't get complacent." Leo replied calmly, not even turning his head to acknowledge the guy.

Justin shrugged. "Whatever you say man, I still think you're overreacting."

"It's not the team he's worried about Justin." Trent appeared in that moment, alongside the two. "Once Ken gets on the mound you'll understand what we're talking about."

Justin rolled his eyes feeling slightly annoyed. "You keep talking about this Ken guy like he's going to make a big difference. If he was as good as you say, then why did he go to a dump like Columbia?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. He could have gone to any college, even here if he wanted to." Trent replied, himself confused at Ken's decision.

"He wouldn't have come here." Leo spoke up confidently. "Ken isn't that kind of player."

"Isn't that kind of player? What do you mean?" Justin asked, mystified.

Leo was silent for a while as they walked along. Just as the two thought he wasn't going to answer, he spoke up. "Ken thrives under pressure. The more of a disadvantage he's under, the better he plays, it is truly confusing."

Trent and Justin looked at each other, feeling as if their Captain was being a little weird. Instead of the cold and confident expression he usually donned, the guy seemed nostalgic.

"I am thankful for Ken. If we did not lose back then, I would have remained conceited for far too long. Perhaps I wouldn't have improved at all over these past 5 years." Leo said, deep in thought.

"Ah, I'm sure that's not true..." Trent replied, feeling a little awkward. He had never seen the Captain like this before, which made him feel a little uneasy.

Leo turned to him wearing his usual expression, "I am stating a fact Trent. Are you saying that you know more about me than I do?" He asked coolly.

"Ah... N—No. Not at all." He replied lamely.

Leo then continued walking, leaving both Justin and Trent behind. The two looked at each other oddly, it seemed neither had expected this sort of reaction.

"Wait for us Captain."

They caught back up and made their way into the campus, heading towards the facilities. As usual, the coach had organized a film study session following the game. This was something that he did regardless of winning or losing.

Coach Ivor Rodgers had been the coach for the University of Florida for over 15 years and had led them to glory on multiple occasions. The man was strict, but had an undying love for the sport and his players.

There was word that he'd been offered Head Coaching contracts from the Majors but he turned them all down. He wanted to find the diamonds in the rough and polish them as best he could.

This was why UF had many walk on's compared to the other colleges. Just the coach's name alone was enough to draw in prospects from across the country.

However, Coach Rodgers could not control every aspect of recruitment. He had been alarmed to find out that his scouts were using certain tactics that were on the borderline of coercion.

As such, he had decided that this would be his last year as the UF Head Coach, though only he knew at this moment.

The man walked into the room where he'd spent a good chunk of his 45 years and felt a sense of melancholy. He saw the faces of his players watching him expectantly and couldn't help but let out a sigh.

He suddenly felt every bit of his 45 years, if not even more. This was one of his best teams in recent years, mainly because of a single player. Leo Cameron.

When he had first met the boy, it was back when he had been a part of the U13 US National Team. Back then, Leo's eyes showed a certain contempt for others, barely hidden.

He was brilliant, but conceited. No one was worthy of facing him, at least at his own age and he had never been humbled before. Even as Coach Rodgers tried to get the kid to open up, he was met with a polite, yet cool indifference.

Therefore when the Coach had seen the boy again when he was about to graduate High School, he was shocked to see just how different he was. While he still held himself the same way, the arrogance and conceit had been relinquished, replaced by a calm and calculating demeanor.

Leo had sought him out on his own volition, he could still remember the scene like it was yesterday.

"Can you help me improve?" The teen asked, a rare vulnerability laced in his tone.

"Only you can improve yourself Leo." Coach Rodgers replied, "But I can provide the facilities and give you the tools to do so. The rest will be up to you."

Leo was silent for a while before he nodded. "Then I will come to UF. Thank you."

Coach Rodgers was at a loss. How had he secured the number 1 High School recruit with merely a few words? He would never know. It was only a few weeks later that he found out the reason for the changes.

Sitting at home he watched the replay of the U18 World Cup finals. He sat on the edge of his seat watching the masterful duel taking place in front of him.

The tall figure on the mound was relentless despite his obvious exhaustion. Ivor could hardly believe that the kid was 15. If he was the same age as Leo, the game might already be over.

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

Chapter 812 - 812: Leo (2)

Yet as it stood, Leo was fouling off every single pitch. It was not on purpose though, he could see as much. The speed of each pitch was at least 100mph and it was all that Leo could do to not get struck out.

Finally, an inside pitch was sent high into the air past the foul line on the left side of the field. Leo had already returned to the plate to get ready for the next pitch, but he would never get to face the next ball.

Ivor saw the Japanese player dive into the stands, putting his body on the line to catch the ball. It wasn't until the umpire called an end to the ball game that the players on the field finally reacted.

As they rushed to celebrate, Leo stood in the batters box in shock.

"So this is why..." Ivor mumbled to himself. While he should feel bad for the kid, it was quite the opposite. "He will get much better now... He might even become the best."

So once Leo officially enrolled at UF, Coach Rodgers focused all of his attention on the genius. After his defeat, he was far more receptive to being trained and guided, becoming a sponge for knowledge.

He was by far the best player on the team by midway through his freshman year and had replaced the senior catcher after the first few games. Once his abilities were shown, no one second guessed the guy and he soon took over the reins as Captain in his sophomore year.

From then on he only got better, both physically and mentally. They won the College World series in the 2nd year since Leo arrived, but fell short the year after.

In his Junior year, Coach Rodgers asked if he was going to leave school to enter the Major League to which Leo surprisingly declined.

"I will be remaining for my final year of college so I can graduate." Leo replied, though it felt like he wasn't telling the whole truth.

Ivor sighed, "You have learned everything I could have taught you Leo. Do not hold yourself back because of me." He said, feeling a sense of warmth.

Leo shook his head, "My mind is made up. I will remain for my Senior year and get you another trophy before I move onto the big league."

Even now, Coach Rodgers looked back at the interaction fondly. Kids like Leo was the real reason he turned down the opportunities to coach Major League teams, but it seemed that even he had reached his limit.

'This will be my final year as UF coach. I have enough money to retire if I want to.' He thought to himself.

"Coach? Is everything alright?" Justin who was at the front of the meeting room asked, bringing the man back to the present.

"Ahem, sorry about that." He said, clearing his throat. "You all played well this game. Our offense did well to capitalize on the poor pitching, and our defense was superb. Overall, I'd give us an A minus."

"Coach isn't that a little harsh..." Trayshaun replied, eliciting a chuckle from the team.

"I'm saying this so you don't get complacent." Ivor replied seriously. "Don't go thinking that this series is over because we won the first game. The Bobcats have yet to use their best pitcher." He stated.

"And before you argue with me that it won't make much of a difference, allow me to prove you wrong." He said, pointing to one of his staff members.

The man nodded and turned on the projector, bringing up a data set.

Coach Rodgers moved to the side allowing the team to see the projection. "These are a list of games in which Ken Takagi has pitched 5 or more innings. The one's in green are the games they've won, the red are games they've lost."

There was a few moments silence before Trayshaun replied, "Coach, there aren't any red."

"Exactly!" Ivor said, slamming the table in front of him emphatically. "Every single game that Ken Takagi pitches in, the Bobcats are nigh unstoppable."

He pointed to his assistant once again and the slide changed.

"Here are a list of games that he has pitched 3 or more innings."

Everyone turned their attention to the slide and felt a wave of discomfort. There was only a single game on the list that was colored red, the rest were green. Just based on the data alone, it was clear that when Ken pitched, the Bobcats were at their best.

"Now you know why I warned you not to be complacent. While I often say that baseball is a team sport, it is players like Ken Takagi that can sway the Goddess of Victory in his

favor. Whenever he is on the mound, his team gets much better." Coach Rodgers stated, his eyes scanning his players.

"I am not saying that we need to fear this guy, but I will not allow anyone to underestimate our opponent, not when we have all this data. As long as we play our game, I believe that we can win." He said, his eyes moving to Leo.

Leo nodded, his expression serious. Without prompting, he stood up and addressed the team. "I have said this before but I will say it again. Ken is the best pitcher I have played against. When you step into the batters box against him, it's like walking into a coliseum. You must do everything you can to survive against the onslaught, otherwise you will be swiftly defeated."

His words washed over the players, creating a serious atmosphere. Hearing their best player and Captain utter such words was cause enough for concern. Whatever complacency that had been lingering after such a dominant game earlier had vanished, replaced by a wariness and determination.

Ivor nodded at Leo, happy with his words. "Leo is right. But as long as you come armed and prepared, we will win the war."

"Now, let's go over today's film and then you'll be free the rest of the night." He said, pointing to the assistant once more.

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

Chapter 813 - 813: Must win (1)

The next day, both the Bobcats and Crocs arrived at the stadium the same time. Ken happened to see Leo first, and he subconsciously clenched his fist. There would be a desperate battle today, one that they needed to win.

Leo turned and locked gazes with him. Electricity seemed to shoot between the two, a clashing of wills. On one side the cold genius and on the other, Ken.

Ken had expected some level of complacency from the other team after securing such a damning victory the day before, but this was not the case. They looked focused and determined to battle.

Leo sent Ken a brief smile before turning his head and leading his team into the ballpark first.

"It's going to be a tough game today..." Ken muttered.

"We knew that already right? Why do you sound surprised." Steve popped his head around Ken's shoulder and asked.

"I was hoping they might underestimate us after what happened yesterday." Ken said with a wry smile, "But if anything, they look even more fired up."

"Won't it feel better if we beat them at their best?" Brian said, nudging Ken with his elbow. "That way we can demoralize them."

Ken let out a small chuckle, "Let's focus on winning first, otherwise we'll be knocked out of the post season."

"Roger~"

They arrived at the locker rooms not long later and got changed. The coach didn't say much, he didn't have to after seeing how fired up his team was. Anything he said might have had an opposite effect.

"Alright, let's go win this game!"

"YEAH!"

As the team walked onto the field, they saw the spectators moving towards their seats in preparation for the match. It looked to be packed once more with majority of the crowd flouting their Florida Crocs colors in show of support.

Ken went through some warm ups around the field and spotted Latrell and Michael in the same position as the previous day and gave them a wave. If anything, he was glad that he got to see these two during the trip, especially Michael who he had a vested interest in.

Once the warm ups were done, the teams were gathered and the National Anthem played over the speakers. After this, the Bobcats took the field and Ken made his way to the top of the mound.

He took a moment for himself and looked around the field.

'As always, the view from here is the best.' Ken thought, a small smile creeping onto his face. He could feel his teammates supporting him from behind, filling him with confidence.

His eyes moved to Steve who was fixing his chest protector behind the plate and having a casual conversation with the umpire. The guy was just as reliable as those behind him, at least when it came to baseball.

The guy got into position and waited, ready for Ken's warm up pitches.

Ken took a deep breath and centered himself. This game was their best shot at winning, but the coach had only given him 7 innings. He hoped that they would be far enough ahead by that point.

Throwing it to the back of his mind, Ken threw his warm up throws and rolled his shoulder a few times, nodding in satisfaction.

'My arm feels light.' He thought.

"Batting first for our Crocs, Justin Michaels!"

Ken saw the lead off batter for the Crocs walk up to the mound with a serious expression. The guy had played well in the previous match, hitting basically everything that was thrown at him. Yet he lacked the same carefree mood as yesterday.

'It seems like they're taking me seriously. I don't know whether to be happy or upset.' Ken thought, feeling a smile creeping onto his lips.

He saw Steve crouch down behind the plate and give the sign for a fastball. Ken would never wave off a fastball, not without a good reason.

He nodded and took a deep breath. Lifting his leg, Ken went through the action he'd performed thousands of times, but something felt a little different. He was too engrossed in his movements to understand.

As the ball left his fingertips, he saw a stunned expression on Justin's face.

PAH!

"S-Strike."

"Nice pitch!"

Ken felt that the first pitch was good and caught the throw back from Steve. For some reason he felt that his pitching had improved since the last time, but he didn't have the luxury to give it any more thought.

"Let's keep this momentum going." Ken muttered, getting into position once more.

PAH

"Strike."

Walking back to the mound, Ken was almost jumping for joy. His pitches felt sharp and the ball was moving well. He was on form today.

Justin on the other hand was feeling dreadful. For some reason, he felt sluggish in the batters box. He could barely see the course of the pitches let alone swing in time. He turned to his coach as if looking for some reassurance.

The man made some signs at him, telling him to swing at the ball. He could only nod in response. The last two balls he had not even been able to move, yet he was being told to swing?

Suddenly, Leo's words yesterday made perfect sense, he knew it now. Ken could have gone to any college he wanted to and they would have accepted him with open arms. Yet he still couldn't understand why the guy went to Columbia.

Justin shook his head, trying to clear his mind. He needed to swing at the next ball at the very least, otherwise he might be too embarrassed to call himself a lead off hitter. He usually prided himself on the ability to make contact, but with the way things were going he would be sent back to the dugout without a single swing at the ball.

As Ken entered his wind up, a feeling of dread filled him, causing his body to freeze for an instant.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout."

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

Chapter 814 - 814: Must win (2)

Justin held his follow through for a few moments, the feeling of failure sinking in. Slightly embarrassed, he straightened up and turned towards the dugout before making his way back.

'I don't understand...' His mind was preoccupied as he made the walk back.

"Pretty rare for you not to swing on the first two pitches." Theo said, snapping him out of his reverie.

Justin nodded, "It's hard to explain... You'll understand when you face him."

"Alright, I'll keep an eye out."

"Batting 2nd, our very own... Theo Vinn!"

The man walked up to the plate, the end of his long mullet peeping out the back of his helmet. He took a few casual swings and loosened up his body before getting into position, facing Ken upon the mound.

Ken waited for the first lead from Steve and nodded, entering his wind up before whipping his arm out and sending out his slider. Once again, the batter was frozen, allowing the ball through to Steve's glove without a swing.

PAH

"Strike."

This time, Ken knew something was up. He collected the throw back from Steve and began to think deeply. His stats had not been upgraded recently, so it did not make sense for his pitching to improve this much.

It wasn't until he threw his next pitch that he suddenly remembered something.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

'It's my new skill!' Ken exclaimed inwardly. He had spent 150,000 Major Points to upgrade the wind up skill to Domineering Wind up, but with everything that had happened he had completely forgotten.

What was most shocking about the skill was that it not only increased his pitching ability, but it also seemed to make batters hesitate. A small amount of hesitation was all it took to mess up a batters rhythm.

All of a sudden, Ken's confidence level skyrocketed. He had always been confident in his pitching, but having this edge made it even more so. At no point did he believe that anyone could get a hit on him, not anymore.

PAH

"Strikeout!"

Like this, he struck out 2 players in a row with only 3 consecutive pitches each. Unfortunately for UF, this trend continued and Trayshaun was soon sent back to the dugout after a brief spell.

The Bobcats were pumped. After being smashed around the park all last game, they felt a sense of vindication after Ken put them in their place emphatically. Going into the dugout, they were all smiles.

"Nice pitching as always Ken." Coach Brown said, wearing a smile.

"Thanks coach. I'll keep them scoreless, we just need runs on the board." Ken replied confidently.

"That's easier said than done." He replied with a hollow chuckle. The two turned to Leo who was making his way out of the dugout with his catchers gear on. Ken locked eyes with the guy for a brief moment and sparks flew once more.

"He looks fired up." Ken said with a smile.

"Really? He's always wearing the same expression so I can't tell." The coach said shrugging his shoulders. "But I guess you'd be right."

"Batting first for the Bobcats, Ayden Carney."

As the unenthusiastic announcer called out their first batter, Ken retreated back into the dugout and prepared for his turn at bat. He didn't want to miss out on the opportunity for some warm up swings like last game.

If they could get a run on the board early, he would feel much better. Of course that would be difficult with Leo behind the plate, but even a single run would make the difference.

Unfortunately for Ayden, he was quickly put into a corner, receiving 2 strikes in quick succession. The first was a slider that he let go and the next was a fastball to the inside that he missed.

Ken could see that the guy was frustrated with himself.

WHOOOSH

DING

"Ah damn it." Steve said, watching the ball skid along the ground towards the short stop.

The player collected the ball and sent an easy throw back to first, beating Ayden easily.

"Out."

Ken was already walking onto the field at that time and could see Ayden once again frustrated as he made his way back to the dugout.

"Hey man, you need to calm down a little. Don't get so irritated over things you can't control." Ken said, stopping the guy.

Ayden shook his head with annoyance, "It just feels like I can never hit the ball properly against that guy."

"Be calm and patient. As long as you're focused, you'll get a hit this game don't worry." Ken reassured him, patting Ayden on the shoulder. It was pretty rare for the guy to get so worked up, but he appreciated the passion.

"Batting 2nd for Columbia, Brian Sweeney."

He watched Brian head into the batters box before beginning his practice swings. Last match had been a struggle, he did not want to repeat his mistakes.

Even though he had the Legendary Zone Mastery skill, Leo's leads seemed to counteract it somehow in a way that he could not put into words. His ability to frame balls as strikes and increase the size of the strike zone was probably one of the factors, but it felt like something more.

When thinking about the guys stats, he wasn't all that surprised. Leo was already probably better than many of the Major League players right now. Of course this was from a purely stats point of view.

The system did not have a grade for experience, but it was a definite factor when it came to how a person performed on the field. This was why some players were still able to play at the age of 40.

One such example was Ichiro, the legendary Japanese player and another one of Ken's idols.

Removing the thought from his mind, Ken watched the pitcher and got into position with his bat. He wanted to try and get the timing down before it was his turn to step up to the plate.

WHOOOOOSH

DOONG

Ken's eyes lit up as Brian hit the ball out into center field.

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

Chapter 815 - 815: Showdown (1)

Brian sped around around first base and slid his way onto second with great speed before the throw made it back into the infield. He rose to his feet and dusted himself off before sending a thumbs up to Ken with a grin.

"Nice Brian!" The dugout yelled and celebrated the good hit.

"Batting 3rd, Ken Takagi."

Ken stepped up to the batters box with a small smile on his face and went through his ritual of tapping home plate and the end of his cleats. This time he ignored Leo. He needed to focus on the pitcher and stop worrying about what kind of leads would come his way.

He turned to the coach to see if he had any instructions for him, but there was nothing.

'We need to secure a run no matter what.' Ken thought, his eyes moving to Brian on 2nd. He made a small gesture with his left hand below his waist, pointing to 3rd. This was something they'd come up with beforehand.

Brian nodded and casually took a lead from 2nd base, his eyes focused on the pitcher.

Leo had one of the fastest arms behind the plate, so stealing a base, particularly 3rd was quite risky. However, Ken had a plan in mind.

The pitcher entered his wind up and a fastball came towards the outside. At the same time, Brian took off running without hesitation. His head was down and he sprinted with all his might.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

Ken swung the bat, purposefully missing the ball and positioning his body in the path between home and 3rd base in an attempt to block Leo's view. Yet what he didn't expect was for the guy to move forward towards the pitcher while catching the ball.

With an athletic move, Leo easily avoided Ken and performed a throw in motion towards 3rd base.

'Crap!'

Ken watched on nervously as Brian raced against the oncoming ball with all of his might. It was neck and neck the entire time, and even when Brian slid along the ground and touched the bag, the glove came down at the same time.

Everyone looked towards the umpire in question, waiting for his verdict.

"Safe!"

"What!?" Trent on 3rd base called out in disbelief.

Ken breathed a sigh of relief after hearing the call. He heard the dugout whoop and holler out with glee and couldn't help but smile. The call could have gone either way, but he was glad that it ended well.

He saw Leo wordlessly return to his spot behind the plate, seemingly unaffected by the outcome. It was this kind of attitude that allowed him to perform consistently during games.

Ken glanced towards the pitcher who looked to be a little annoyed still. 'I guess not everyone can be as unfeeling as Leo.' He thought with some amusement.

However, he changed gears in the next moment. Usually he might consider going for a bunt in this situation, but it would make more sense to go for a big hit. If he hit it short, it should be a fly-ball and allow Brian to tag up for an easy run.

If it carried enough and he hit a home run, they'd find themselves up 2 runs in the first inning.

'Go big or go home...!' Ken thought, adjusting the grip on his bat slightly. .

The pitcher nodded his head and got into position, lifting his leg and taking a long stride from the mound. His arm whipped past his head and sent the ball from his fingertips.

Ken's eyes narrowed and he calculated the trajectory of the ball as well as he could.

WHOOOOOSH

THWACK

Ken smacked the ball hard, hearing the sweet sound of the pitch striking the barrel of his bat. It flew out into right field and did not look like it would ever stop.

With his eyes locked onto the ball, Ken willed with all his heart that it would go over the fence. He tossed his bat gently onto the ground and made his way to first base. By the time he arrived it was already set in stone.

PAH

Cheers rang out from the dugout, but many of the crowd did not applaud. Michael held up the home run ball securely in his glove and shouted with glee.

"YEAHHH!!!"

He and Latrell were one of the only one's who rooted for Ken in the audience, but they didn't let that stop them. Ken pointed towards them as he rounded first base unable to hide the grin on his face.

Ken continued around all the bases and arrived to see a smiling Brian at home plate, waiting for him. He made sure to stand on the plate before the guy jumped and latched on to him like a monkey.

Suddenly Steve's reference about Brian being an Orangutan came into his mind, causing him to let out a peel of laughter. In good spirits, he headed back towards the dugout only to see the coach waiting for him with sparkling eyes.

"Nice hit! I never doubted you for a second." Coach Brown said slapping him on the back.

"Thanks coach." Ken replied lamely.

Once he went down the stairs to the dugout, he received even more congratulations from his teammates. Besides Steve, Ayden was the most pumped.

"Haha! You should have seen Leo's face when you hit that bomb." He said with enthusiasm.

"What? I doubt that guy would ever react to such a thing." Ken said in disbelief. The Leo he knew would not even dwell on such a thing, especially so early in the game.

"Nah, I swear. His eyebrow twitched when it happened." Ayden assured him.

Kaden slapped his brother on the back, "How could you even see it from here? The guy had his face mask on as well. I think you're just talking out your ass."

Ken ignored the brothers and pat Steve on the shoulder who was about to head on deck. "Be patient and pick your shot. You got this."

Steve nodded, his expression showing that he was locked in. "You know it."

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

- Chapter 816 - 816: Showdown (2)

Chapter 816 - 816: Showdown (2)

Unfortunately, after Ken's home run, the Bobcats were not able to score again this inning. DJ was struck out and Steve managed to get a single, but Zeke was jammed on an inside ball for an easy catch.

However, getting an early lead was not something they would complain about, especially against the Crocs who had beaten them so soundly the previous game.

Ken and the Bobcats returned to the field for the top of the 2nd. Atop the mound, Ken rolled the rosin bag in his hand, his eyes focused on the Crocs dugout. The biggest test of the match would be against the next batter.

His body shivered in anticipation as he saw the perfect figure of Leo emerge from the stairs, donning his helmet. It had been almost 5 years since he last pitched against this man, and Ken felt like they had unfinished business.

"Batting 4th for our Crocs, the captain~ Leo Cameron!"

The announcers voice blared over the speakers, riling the crowd up. They cheered for their captain and star player Leo, who did not even acknowledge their cries. In another time or place Ken might find it amusing, but right now he was laser focused.

He could feel his heart beating in his chest, thumping against his rib cage rhythmically. This was the moment he'd been waiting for for so long. A moment that might not have even happened.

If there were baseball god's, he would be thanking them profusely for such an opportunity. The odds of these two teams meeting in the post season was rather low, yet it felt like fate that he was given this chance.

'Mika, use showdown on Leo Cameron.'

[Affirmative.]

As Mika's monotonous voice entered his mind, Ken felt the familiar euphoria as power filled his muscles. No matter how many times he experienced it, Ken would never tire of it.

'There it is...' Leo's eyes never left Ken after entering the batters box. But even if he had his eyes closed he would never forget this feeling. Ken's aura was like that of a colossal and ancient tree, towering into the sky above as it stared down at his insignificant form.

Back then at the U18 World Cup it had taken him by surprise. Since then he had never felt another feeling like this. It was to the point where Leo was doubting himself. Was it just a trick of the mind? Did he remember it wrong?

But now as he stood against the best pitcher he had ever faced, he once again felt the crushing pressure from the Japanese kid. Perhaps kid might not be the best description of him anymore, since he had grown to almost 6'6 in that time.

Taking a deep breath, Leo squared up to the plate and pointed his bat towards Ken with his left arm, placing his right hand upon his shoulder. This was one of Leo's trademark rituals. Many said that it was a direct challenge to the pitcher, but this was incorrect.

Though today's ritual felt far more personal than others. Instead of getting into position, he held it for a bit longer, his eyes trained on Ken throughout the entire time.

'I will show you how much I've improved since that loss.' Leo said in his heart, lowering his bat and getting into striking position.

On the mound, Ken's body was shaking. He looked at his hand holding the ball and he gripped it tightly. He was not afraid, no, this was pure excitement and adrenaline.

He stared at Leo and licked his dry lips, not realizing that he was wearing a smile. But as Steve called for a fastball, Ken felt his intuition flicker for a brief moment, warning him of the danger.

Now wearing a slight frown, Ken shook his head, prompting Steve to call for another ball.

Once again his intuition pricked him. This situation repeated as Steve went through every one of his pitches, filling Ken with a realization.

'Every pitch I throw has the potential to be hit into the stands...' The revelation shocked him, but also tugged at his competitiveness.

'I'll just throw it so hard and fast that you won't be able to hit it.' He thought, his grin now taking over his expression.

He let out a breath and lifted his left leg slowly before pushing off the pitchers plate and striding forward with force. His muscles groaned from the sheer power flowing through his body.

The cocked arm whipped past his face, the wind displacement causing his hat to fly off in the process, but it did not impede him.

Ken's fingers raked down on the ball, putting ridiculous spin on the ball, causing it to soar through the air almost recklessly. If it wasn't for his zone mastery and amazing control, the ball could have ended up anywhere.

Instead, it soared through the air like a dragon riding upon the clouds, its destination the open catchers glove behind the plate.

Leo sprang into action, his eyes locked onto the seemingly impossible course of the fastball. It almost felt like he was striking at a wiffle ball with the amount of movement, yet he did not falter.

Planting his foot, Leo's body surged with power, sending the wooden bat past Steve and directly into the path of the ball. It was as if the bat and ball were magnetic as they drew closer together.

Time seemed to slow down as they approached for the shocking collision about to come. Ken's eyes widened. He knew that there was no stopping their meeting.

WHOOOOOOOSH

CRUNCHHHH

The wooden bat crumpled, sending shards of maple everywhere. The end of the bat splintered off, heading straight towards the mound where Ken was standing.

The stadium held their breath as the piece of the bat hurtled towards him. Just when it seemed like he had no chance of dodging, Ken lifted his left foot, kicking it out with the bottom of his cleats.

The bat's momentum was stopped, but a small grimace formed on Ken's face as he winced from the impact.

'Where is the ball!?!'

He turned, only to see Steve holding out his glove as the ball descended slowly into it.

"O-Out!"

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

Chapter 817 - 817: Discovered (1)

"Holy crap!"

Everyone in the ballpark was silent after witnessing the scene. The sound of the bat breaking seemed to echo within the stadium, it was only when the umpire called out that people began to react.

"Out."

Steve felt elation, but it was quickly thrown to the back of his mind. He rushed towards the mound with a concerned expression on his face to check on Ken. He had seen the end of the bat fly towards him and later ricochet off.

"Dude are you okay? Where did it hit you?" He asked, inspecting him from head to toe.

"Bro, stop that. Coach is going to think I'm injured." Ken said back in a harsh whisper, placing his arm around the guys shoulder, "That was a nice catch." He added with a grin.

However, Steve would not let the subject be changed so quickly. "Tell me now where you were hit, otherwise I'll tell the coach you really are injured."

Ken's eyes widened slowly, he had never thought Steve would be this touchy, but he felt a warmth from within in response, "Relax, I managed to kick it away with the bottom of my cleats." .

As if to convince his friend, he began jogging on the spot to show that he was fine. Steve gave him a suspicious look but seemed satisfied in the end. "Just be careful man, we can't have you injured if we want to win the world series." He said eventually, nudging him with his elbow.

"Yeah yeah, now go catch my pitches." Ken replied with a grin.

He watched his friend make his way back to home plate and felt a mix of emotions. Ken looked down at his left foot and let out a sigh, feeling it throb painfully. The end of the bat had hit the ball of his foot with force, now whenever he put weight on it he could feel the bruising.

'It shouldn't affect my pitching.' He said in his heart, returning back to his spot on the mound. With Leo now out, he had full confidence to strike out the remaining batters.

Ken saw the coach studying him intently from the sidelines, but he quickly activated his poker face skill. He could tell that if he showed any signs that he was hurt, he'd be taken off the field immediately.

Leo had already left the field and returned to the dugout, his eyes never leaving Ken upon the mound. He had seen everything and knew that Ken had to be hurting. However, he would not say anything.

Ken was an adult and could make his own decisions. If he wanted to play injured and risk everything for this game, then he must live with the consequences.

His eyes moved to the screen at the back of the stadium and stared at the 3 numbers.

"103... It felt even faster." Leo mumbled to himself before taking a seat on the bench.

"Batting 5th, Trent Waters!"

As the announcer called out, Trent made his way up to the batters box and got into position. He glanced to Ken on the mound and felt a mixture of emotions.

After meeting the guy and seeing him play at the WWBA Tournament, Trent knew that he was special. Yet finding out that he'd decided to play for Columbia, a team not even in the top 25 in the country, he could not understand it.

Why would someone choose such a lackluster school if their goal was to make it to the Majors? At some point he had written off the guy.

Yet seeing him here, now on the mound in the Super Regionals with his supposedly lackluster team, Trent realized that he had been wrong. The guy had continued to get better and dragged his team alongside him to this point.

The data that Coach Rodgers had given them was indication enough of Ken's impact on the field. In two seasons, they'd only lost a single game where Ken had pitched more than 3 innings. It was simply unbelievable.

But Trent believed it. Just the fact that Leo who usually seemed so indifferent when facing other players had seemed so serious should have been enough reason to keep his guard up.

And now that he was standing against him on the field, he could feel a suffocating pressure. It was not because this was a post season game, but because of the man standing on the mound.

Ken was wearing an unreadable expression, but Trent could feel his fighting spirit. He gripped his bat tightly and got into position, trying to calm down his beating heart.

As soon as the guy went into his wind up, Trent felt something grip his heart tightly, almost freezing him on the spot.

PAH

"Strike."

His eyes widened in shock. 'What the hell was that?'

This was the first time that he had not been able to swing at a ball, but he still didn't understand why. He tried to replay the scene in his head, but Ken was already getting ready to pitch the next ball.

Trent grit his teeth and poured all his focus into the next ball. Once again, when Ken stepped forward, he felt his body seize up for a brief moment before the pitch came screaming through the strike zone and into the outstretched glove of the catcher.

PAH

"Strike."

'Damn it!' Trent cursed inwardly. This didn't make sense.

It almost felt like he didn't have control over his own body. He did not understand what was going on. Feeling desperate, he decided that he needed to swing no matter what.

This time when Ken was winding up, Trent committed.

WHOOOOOSH

PAH

The changeup sailed into the catchers glove, causing him to grossly mistime the swing. Trent was already in his follow through by the time the ball entered the strike zone.

"Strikeout!"

He let out a small sigh, filled with frustration. He took another glance at Ken who was wearing the same expression before making his way back to the dugout.

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

Chapter 818 - 818: Discovered (2)

"Nice pitching!"

In the crowd near the right outfield, Michael was cheering loudly, getting into the spirit of the game. Seeing Ken pitch truly was the best, even if it was from so far away.

Latrell on the other hand, was wearing a serious expression.

"What's wrong? Why are you so quiet?" Michael asked him, feeling a little confused. The guy was cheering alongside him moments before, but now something seemed wrong.

"Do you think Ken's pitching form is a little off?" Latrell said, his tone serious.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Just watch."

Michael nodded, waiting for the next batter to get into the box. He kept his eyes on Ken the entire time as the guy wound up and took a step forward, sending the ball towards the strike zone.

As his lead foot planted, he saw that Ken's usually smooth and fluid follow through looked a little awkward. It was almost as if there was something preventing him from performing his usual action.

"I can see it... His follow through is weird." Michael said, no longer wearing a cheerful expression. "But why? I don't understand."

Latrell nodded, "I'm not sure, but I think he might have hurt his lead foot."

"What!? Ken is injured?" Michael jumped out of his seat in shock.

"Shh man, keep it down." Latrell motioned, pulling him back into his chair.

"Ah... Sorry. How did he get injured though?"

"It had to be the end of the bat that he stopped with his foot. Even though he's wearing cleats, there's a chance that he could have gotten a bruise from the impact, or even worse." Latrell replied.

"No way right... Then why is he still pitching? It can't be as bad as you say." Michael said, not wanting it to be true.

This time Latrell shook his head, "I hope you're right Michael. But if I know anything about Ken, there is no way he would call it quits, not in a game as important as this one."

Michael didn't have to think long to agree with Latrell. Ken had this kind of mentality, he would not be surprised if the guy decided to endure an injury like this to give his team the best chance at winning.

Suddenly he felt sour. 'Why... Why did this happen?'

It felt unfair that such a hardworking and overall great person would have to suffer like this. It was bad enough that they were behind a game against one of the best teams in the nation right now, but now Ken was likely injured.

His fists clenched and he stared out on the field with a worried expression.

On the mound, Ken was donning his poker face. He had told Mika not to deactivate the skill under any circumstances, lest he give away his current situation.

Every time he planted his foot for a pitch, he felt a wave of pain shoot up his leg, causing him to almost buckle during his follow through. It seemed to be getting worse and he didn't know what to do.

His thoughts drifted to the Recovery Elixir in his inventory, but then he remembered that it could only be used on someone once. Since he had used it back at Koshien over 5 years ago, it would not be effective on him anymore.

'One pitch at a time...'

There was two strikes, he just needed one more before the end of the 2nd inning.

He stepped forward and felt his body cry out, but he pushed onward.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout!"

Ken let out an audible sigh of relief and glanced at his left foot briefly before moving towards the dugout. Steve intercepted him, nudging him gently.

"If I can see you're struggling so can the coach." He said in a hushed voice, causing Ken to freeze.

He lifted his head and saw the coach evaluating him silently, his eyes moving to Ken's foot. A wave of panic settled over him, almost canceling out his poker face skill.

'Damn it, what am I going to do? I can't have him take me out of the game.' Ken thought, his mind whirring.

"How's that foot of yours?" Coach Brown asked, his eyes sharp.

"Ha—Haha, it's fine coach." Ken replied, trying to sound sincere.

However, the guy was having none of it. "Go get it checked out, I'm taking you out of the game from the next inning."

Ken's eyes widened, "No way! My pitches are effective against them. Please let me stay on the mound." He exclaimed.

Coach Brown shook his head. "I can't in good conscience let you keep pitching Ken, even if we're destined to lose if I take you out. Every time you pitch, you place all your weight on that injured foot, all you're doing is making it worse."

Ken was crestfallen. He had waited so many years to pitch against Leo, but this was how it was going to end? He felt bitterness and regret bubble up from within, threatening to overwhelm him.

But then he froze as his mind stumbled on something.

"Coach... what if I didn't have to put all my weight on my sore foot?" He asked, his eyes shining.

Coach Brown raised his eyebrow, "What are you talking about? You need to place weight on your front foot when you follow through, otherwise you risk injuring yourself in other ways. Unless you can pitch left handed, then I'll be taking you off."

However, after seeing Ken's expression remaining the same, Coach Brown felt incredulous. "Wait... You can pitch left as well?" He asked, almost not believing he was asking such a thing.

"Yes coach, though it's not as fast as my right." Ken admitted, nodding like a pecking chicken.

"HUH!? Since when?" Steve asked in complete and utter shock. Ken had never told him this the entire time they'd known each other.

"How fast are we talking?" Coach Brown asked suspiciously.

"The last I checked it was around 95mph." Ken answered with a little white lie.

"WHAT!?" Both Steve and Coach Brown shouted.

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

Chapter 819 - 819: Lefty? (1)

"Ken is hurt." Leo said, strapping on his chest protector.

"What do you mean hurt? He's still pitching above 100mph, how can he be hurt?" Coach Rodgers asked.

"The broken bat that he stopped with his foot, it probably created a stress fracture. I've studied his form for hours, I can tell that he's injured." Leo replied without emotion.

The coach glanced at the opposition dugout and saw them talking amongst each other. He felt a touch of sadness for both Leo and Ken. He had never seen Leo get so fired up to play against someone before, yet it seemed that it would be cut short.

Ivor let out a sigh. "I guess that's the end of the game then. Once Ken gets replaced, they won't be able to hold back our line up."

Leo merely nodded, yet inwardly he felt pity. "How regrettable."

In the bottom of the 2nd, the Bobcats were quickly taken care of in quick succession, unable to find the same success they had in the 1st. At the changeover, both Leo and Coach Rodgers were surprised to see Ken walking onto the field.

"They're still letting him play?" Ivor said with a frown. "I thought the coach would have been smart enough to take him out. There is no point in getting your star player hurt even more."

Leo too felt indignant. Sure he wanted to face Ken, but only at his best. Even now he could detect a faint hobble while the guy was walking to the field.

Ken walked over to the umpire and said something, to which the man looked a little surprised. But he later nodded and gestured for him to go to the mound.

"Batting 7th for the Crocs, Myles Landon."

Myles was about to walk up to the batters box but was stopped by the umpire.

"Huh?" He stood in place, not knowing what to do.

On the mound, Ken began to roll his left shoulder and get it warm. He took his first warm up throw and saw it almost rise above Steve's head. Thankfully the guy had quick reflexes or he might have hit Myles with his first throw.

'Ah crap, I'm a little rusty.'

He turned to the coach who was looking at him suspiciously. It was clear that if he proved to be terrible that the guy wouldn't hesitate to take him off the mound.

Ken cleared his throat and tried again. He had not thrown properly with his left since the last year of middle school, though he was truly ambidextrous thanks to his fine motor control skill.

The next throw was much better, though it lacked a bit of speed. Every throw that he took it got better. After 8 balls the umpire called a stop to it and allowed Myles to come up to the batters box.

Meanwhile in the Crocs dugout, all of the players had their jaws dropped. Even the usually calm and unfathomable Leo could hardly believe what was happening in front of him.

"He's pitching lefty!?"

"Is that legal?"

"W—Wait, if he was a switch pitcher we would have known by now right? None of our scouting reports show this info."

"We will just have to wait and see if he's any good with his left..." Coach Rodgers said, swallowing his saliva.

"EHHHH!?" Latrell almost fell off his chair, his eyes staring at the field. "Since when could this guy throw with his left?"

"He never showed you?" Michael asked, equally as confused.

"No... Never."

Back on the field, Ken took a deep breath and adjusted his mind. Things still felt a little sketchy after switching, but his foot was no longer suffering as much. With the switch in arms, he now only needed to push off the mound with his left. While it was still a little raw, it wasn't nearly as bad as when he used it as the lead leg.

Steve called for a fastball on the outside to which Ken nodded in agreement. It was better if he tried to mitigate risk of either hitting the batter or giving up a meatball on the first pitch.

There was also the fact that he had never really practiced throwing breaking balls with his left, something that he had forgotten to tell Steve earlier.

'Let's just get through this inning first.' Ken thought, breathing out slowly.

He got into his position, taking a brief glance at first base before lifting his right leg and kicking off the mound. His foot planted on the ground before his arm came whipping past like lightning.

The ball spun in the air and shot towards the outside of the strike zone.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

"What in the actual f—"

"Oi, language."

"Sorry coach... but seriously. How can he do that?"

Seemingly everyone in the ballpark including Ken looked over to the big screen, waiting to see the speed of the pitch. It took a little time, but when it appeared, the place seemed to burst into chatter.

"93mph!? How can he pitch that fast with his left?"

Ken let out a small sigh of relief. He had purely guessed how fast his left pitches were since the last time he actually pitched lefty, the speed was closer to 84mph. Since he'd gotten a lot stronger, his gamble had paid off.

"Is this guy another Venditte?" Coach Rodgers said with awe.

Leo shook his head, "Venditte only pitched in the mid 80's with both arms... Ken is a lot faster."

"Y—Yeah, you're right."

Ken collected the throw from Steve, almost catching it with his bare left hand out of habit. Thankfully he realized halfway through and brought his right glove up.

He let out a chuckle, "This still feels weird..."

Once he got into position again, Steve called for a slider. For a moment, Ken considered shaking his head, but he suddenly felt confident.

'I should be able to do it, I think.'

With that he began his wind up and sent out the pitch.

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

Chapter 820 - 820: Lefty? (2)

The ball flew through the air, its spin exactly what he was hoping for. However, for some reason, it broke a lot farther than he had expected. It missed the plate and rocketed straight into the leg of Myles.

"Ah sorry!" Ken called out, his hands on his head. He had truly not expected his pitch to break that far. Either his aim was off, or he held the ball wrong, either way, it was not a good look.

"Hit by pitch, take your base." The umpire said, making the call. Since he did not issue a warning to Ken, it meant that he felt like it was accidental.

Myles sent a glare to Ken before huffing as he made his way to first base.

Coach Brown on the other hand was frowning deeply on the side of the field. At first he had been surprised that Ken was able to throw so fast with his left, but now he was doubting his decision.

'If I take him off the mound now, I probably won't hear the end of it.' He thought, but then he turned to the team and saw their shining eyes staring at their captain on the mound.

He let out a sigh, 'Those guys probably won't forgive me either.'

"Oi, Captain. You're meant to aim for the glove, not the batter." Brian called out, eliciting a laugh from the field.

Ken laughed in response, feeling the tension ease from him. He shot Brian a cheeky middle finger before getting back into position and waiting for the next batter to come up to the plate.

"Batting 8th, Quentin Ellis." The announcer called.

Quentin stepped up to the batters box and stared at Ken with fire in his eyes. It wasn't hard to tell that he was annoyed by Ken hitting his teammate with a pitch, even though it had been a complete accident.

Ken ignored the guy and waited for the next lead from Steve. Once again it was a slider, but this time Ken shook his head. He didn't trust his breaking balls, not right now. Perhaps if he trained in the future he could rely on them.

They settled on another fastball to the outside.

Ken entered his wind up and strode forward, sending his arm whipping past his face. His fingers raked down on the ball, producing a slightly slower version of his lively fastball.

WHOOOOSH

DONG

The very first pitch was struck, heading straight for Thomas in the right outfield. It bounced once before he was able to collect it, but the runners had already advanced to the next base.

Just like that it was no outs and runners on 1st and 2nd. This was not a great position for Ken and the Bobcats, especially when they were only up 2 runs, but he was determined to get them out of it.

"Batting 9th, Brayden White."

By the time the next batter came up, Ken felt that he had begun to get the hang of his left handed pitches. He threw 2 balls and 2 strikes and Brayden fouled 2 more pitches. The more he pitched, the more confident Ken grew.

He threw the next ball, this time to the inside.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout."

Ken pumped his fist, the most emotion he'd shown for a strikeout in many years. It seemed rather comical since they were still in a tough spot, but Ken didn't care. This was his first strikeout with his left arm in college, he would take those kinds of victories any day.

With the 9th batter out, they would return to the start of the batting line up. Justin walked up to the batters box wearing an odd expression. This cause Ken to almost let out a laugh in response.

He too thought that the situation was ridiculous. If it was him on the other end, he might just have to pinch himself to believe what he was seeing.

Ken was beginning to run out of time. Besides the slider that had hit Myles, he had only thrown fastballs. It was only a matter of time before they realized this.

This might not have been an issue if he was able to fire off the 100+ mph pitches like he could with his right, but unfortunately that seemed impossible.

'I might just have to start pitching to contact. I'll tell Steve after this.' He thought. But for now, he needed to get them out of this situation.

Letting out a deep breath, Ken adjusted himself and waited for the next lead. Steve was motionless for a moment before calling for a fastball inside and low.

Ken nodded and quickly got into his windup, sending the ball expertly towards the glove. Out of all his pitches, this was probably the best so far in both speed and control.

WHOOOSH

DING

Ken watched as the ball skipped along the ground straight to 3rd base. The big Levi was standing off the bag but with surprising speed, he dashed forward and collected the ball with his left hand, launching himself off the base with his right foot and turning his body in mid air.

In one smooth action, he threw the ball towards Kaden on 2nd base. The throw was like a laser, accurately landing into the guys glove.

"Out."

"Out!"

"3 outs, Changeover."

Ken breathed a sigh of relief, a big grin creeping onto his face. The double play had brought an end to the inning. It had been a bit worrying there for a little while, especially since he was limited to only fastballs, but they had gotten through it as a team.

"Good job taking my advice." Brian said jumping up and tapping Ken on the head.

"Oi, why didn't you ever tell us that you could pitch lefty?" Kaden asked, his face full of suspicion. "Better yet, why did you switch in the first place?"

"He hurt his foot." Steve said, ratting him out completely.

"Huh? Why are you still on the mound then?"

"You know Ken, the guy would sleep on the mound if he could." Brian replied with a grin.

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