

## Cricket 101

### Chapter 101

After our record-breaking victory against Punjab, we were full of confidence, but we knew the real challenge was ahead. Our next match was against Mumbai Indians at Wankhede—one of the toughest places to win, especially against a side as strong as MI.

We batted first, and I managed to score a solid 50 off 32 balls. It wasn't as explosive as my previous innings, but it was important in building the innings. Virat bhaiya and AB also chipped in with good knocks, but we couldn't finish strong, and our final total was a decent 174/6 in 20 overs.

We knew it wasn't a bad score, but it wasn't a safe one either.

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With the ball, I was given the responsibility of opening the attack again.

First ball—full inswinging delivery to Rohit Sharma.

He played all around it—BOWLED!

Wankhede fell silent for a moment before erupting into cheers for me.

Next over, de Kock on strike. I went for a short one.

He mistimed it—caught at deep mid-wicket!

RCB was back in the game, and I had struck twice in my first two overs.

We fought hard, picking up wickets at regular intervals, but Hardik Pandya, Surya Kumar Yadav and Kieron Pollard turned the game around.

Despite our efforts, Mumbai chased down the target in 18.5 overs, winning by 5 wickets.

And just like that, our fate in the IPL was no longer in our hands.

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After the loss against Mumbai, I had never felt so drained before. The match was still running in my mind. We had given our best, but it still wasn't enough.

As I walked through the stadium hallway, my head was down. The crowd's cheers for Mumbai's victory still echoed in the distance.

Then, out of nowhere, a familiar, legendary voice called out—

"Aarav."

I stopped. My heart skipped a beat.

I looked up... and there he was—Sachin Tendulkar sir.

The God of Cricket himself.

My eyes widened in disbelief. My exhaustion, my disappointment—everything vanished in an instant.

Sachin sir walked up to me with his usual calm and warm smile.

Sachin: "I saw your innings against Punjab and your play this ipl. And today, I saw your body language after the match."

I nodded, still in shock. I tried to say something, but the words just didn't come out.

Sachin: "Listen, this is cricket. It has its ups and downs. Some days, you feel like you're on top of the world. Other days, you feel like the world is on top of you."

I looked at him, my hands still nervously fidgeting.

Sachin: "But you... you're special. You remind me of the young me—the same fire, the same hunger. But remember this—one match does not define you. Your journey is just beginning."

I swallowed hard. I still couldn't believe this was happening.

Sachin sir reached into his pocket and pulled out a small folded piece of paper.

Sachin: "Here, take this."

I hesitated, slowly taking the paper from his hands. I unfolded it and saw... a phone number.

I looked up at him, my mouth slightly open in shock.

Sachin: "After this IPL is over, let's meet. I want to see you play. And if you're interested, I'd like to train you myself."

My brain stopped working.

The GOD. Sachin Tendulkar. Just offered to train me?!

I blinked rapidly, trying to process his words.

Aarav: "S-sir... I-I... y-you mean... t-train... w-with you?"

Sachin sir chuckled at my reaction.

Sachin: "Yes, Aarav. But only if you want to."

Aarav: "Y-YES! OF COURSE! I-I MEAN... YES, SIR! I WOULD LOVE TO! I-I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS!"

I was stuttering like a fool, and my hands were shaking. My legs felt weak.

Sachin sir patted my shoulder.

Sachin: "Good. Now, keep your head up. The world is watching you. You have a long way to go."

I nodded, still unable to form proper words.

Sachin sir smiled one last time before walking away.

As he disappeared down the hallway, I stood frozen, staring at the piece of paper in my hand.

It had his number.

Sachin Tendulkar's personal number.

A wide grin slowly formed on my face.

From disappointment to pure joy.

Today, I may have lost a match.

But I won something even greater.

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As we walked back to the dugout, there was complete silence.

No one spoke.

No one even looked at each other.

We weren't officially eliminated yet, but the reality was clear. We could only qualify if other teams' net run rate calculations went in our favor. But deep inside, we all knew—it was nearly impossible.

Virat bhaiya sat down, shaking his head. ABD looked at the ground, lost in thought.

Even Chahal, who was usually the most energetic, didn't say a word.

It wasn't anger. It was disappointment.

Disappointment in knowing that we had the potential, but things just didn't go our way.

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Just as the tension in the dugout reached its peak, Gary Kirsten walked in.

He stood in front of us, looking at each of our faces.

Then he spoke.

"Boys, I know this hurts. I know how much effort you've put in. We've fought hard in every match, but sometimes, cricket is cruel."

We all just listened, our eyes still down.

"But I want you all to remember one thing. This is not the end. This is not failure. This is a stepping stone. The way we get up after falling defines us."

"People will write us off. They'll say we're done. But we are RCB. We fight till the end."

"And no matter what happens, hold your heads high. We played with heart. We played with passion. And that's what cricket is about."

His words were powerful.

They hit deep.

But no one had the energy to respond.

One by one, we got up and left the dugout, heading back to the hotel.

Some were lost in thought. Some were frustrated. Some were just exhausted.

As I walked out, I looked back one last time at the empty dugout.

Was this really the end of our IPL dream? Or was there still one last miracle left?

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After the disappointing loss against Mumbai, the entire RCB camp was eager to bounce back. We knew that every match now was a must-win if we wanted to stay in contention.

But there was one problem—AB de Villiers was injured.

Losing a player like AB was a massive blow, but we had to move forward. Colin de Grandhomme stepped in to replace him, bringing his own power-hitting and all-rounder ability to the team.

As we stepped onto the iconic Eden Gardens, the atmosphere was electric. KKR fans were loud, but RCB fans were louder.

**Batting First – Virat Bhaiya's Masterclass**

Winning the toss, KKR chose to bowl first.

Virat bhaiya walked in with the fire in his eyes. I had seen that look before—the look of a man on a mission.

From the very first ball, he dominated.

Cover drives, flicks, pull shots, lofted sixes—Virat was in his zone.

I joined him after Parthiv got out, and together, we built a strong partnership.

I played my natural aggressive game, smashing 66 runs in just 28 balls. The crowd went crazy as I sent the ball flying into the stands multiple times.

Meanwhile, Virat bhaiya continued his masterclass, and by the time our innings ended, he had scored a magnificent century.

RCB finished at 217/3 in 20 overs.

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We knew KKR had firepower. With players like Chris Lynn, Andre Russell, and Dinesh Karthik, and even my friend Gill, they could chase anything.

I bowled a few overs, but today just wasn't my day. I ended wicketless.

However, Chahal was on fire. He took 4 crucial wickets, breaking KKR's momentum again and again.

KKR fought hard, especially Russell, who was hitting sixes like a madman.

But in the final overs, Siraj and Umesh Yadav held their nerve, and we won by 10 runs!

As the final wicket fell, our entire team erupted in celebration. Virat bhaiya led the charge, pumping his fists in the air.

We shook hands with the KKR players, and despite their loss, they showed great sportsmanship.

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Back in the dressing room, the mood was electric.

Virat bhaiya was given a standing ovation for his century.

Gary Kirsten also praised our performance, reminding us that we still had a chance to qualify.

We had won, but the fight wasn't over yet.

There was still more cricket left to play.

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After our win against KKR, our confidence was high, but we knew that facing Chennai Super Kings at Chinnaswamy was going to be a battle. CSK vs RCB is always special—it's a rivalry built on passion, legendary players, and unforgettable moments.

This match turned out to be one of the greatest thrillers of the season.

We lost the toss, and MS Dhoni decided to bowl first.

Parthiv Patel came in with an aggressive mindset and took on the CSK bowlers right from ball one.

He played some stunning shots, smashing boundaries and sixes with ease.

In just 33 balls, he scored 53 runs, providing the perfect start. But after he got out, our middle order struggled to keep the momentum.

I played a short cameo, scoring 18 runs off 8 balls, while Virat bhaiya scored 25 before getting caught at long-on.

Despite some late hitting by Colin de Grandhomme and Moeen Ali, we could only manage 161/7 in 20 overs.

We knew it wasn't a big total, but this was Chinnaswamy. Anything was possible.

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CSK started cautiously, and I got to bowl in the powerplay.

I dismissed Shane Watson early, getting him caught at deep mid-wicket. Later, in my third over, I took another crucial wicket—Suresh Raina, who was looking dangerous.

CSK kept losing wickets, but MS Dhoni was still there. And everyone knows, if Dhoni is there, the match is never over.

Then came the last over.

CSK needed 30 runs.

And Dhoni was on strike.

Virat bhaiya had a tough decision to make. Should he give the final over to Umesh Yadav or Moeen Ali?

Instead, he went with Navdeep Saini.

I could see the pressure on Saini's face. But before he bowled, Virat bhaiya walked up to him and said something.

Virat: "Bhai, bas ball daal, jo hogा dekha jayega. Pressure unpe hai, humpe nahi."

(Just bowl, whatever happens, happens. The pressure is on them, not us.)

First ball—SIX!

Second ball—SIX!

Third ball—SIX!

MSD was destroying everything.

The crowd went silent.

CSK needed 6 runs off 1 ball.

Saini took a deep breath, ran in, and bowled a perfect wide yorker.

This was a Four!

CSK fell short by 1 run.

The entire RCB team exploded in celebration.

Virat bhaiya ran towards Saini, hugged him, and screamed "Come on!!!" The crowd at Chinnaswamy erupted.

MSD, as usual, walked off calmly, but we knew that had been a crazy match.

Post-Match Scenes

After the handshakes, we all gathered in the dressing room, still catching our breath.

Virat bhaiya: "This is why we play cricket. What a game, boys!"

Gary Kirsten praised the team, and even Parthiv got a special mention for his batting.

As for me, I was relieved. Taking 2 wickets against CSK and winning a thriller was a dream come true.

We were still alive in the tournament. RCB was not done yet!

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After that unforgettable win against CSK, our momentum was high. We faced Punjab once again and secured another convincing win. But then came the match against Delhi Capitals, and that's where our dreams of qualification ended. We fought hard, but DC played better that day, and we lost.

The dressing room was silent. No one spoke much. Some of the players sat with their heads down, while others were just staring into nothing. We had given everything, yet we couldn't qualify. The mood was heavy, and you could feel the disappointment in the air. Virat bhaiya tried to keep everyone positive, but even he looked heartbroken.

Gary Kirsten gathered us and spoke. His words were calm but filled with emotion. He reminded us that setbacks are part of cricket and that this was just one season. "You guys fought till the end. But great players are defined by how they bounce back." His words helped a little, but the pain of missing out on playoffs was still there.

Even though we were out of contention, the tournament wasn't over. We had to face DC again, but rain washed out the match. No one seemed to care much—we all knew our IPL was over.

Our final match was against Sunrisers Hyderabad. It was our chance to finish the season on a high note. The game was tough, but we pulled off a 4-wicket win. It wasn't a big achievement, but at least we didn't end the season on a losing note. We finished 6th on the points table—better than expected after our early struggles, but still far from our goal.

With that, IPL 2024 was over for us.

As I packed my bags in the hotel room, I felt a mix of emotions. This tournament had been a rollercoaster—from hitting my first IPL century to the heartbreak of missing playoffs. But deep down, I knew this was just the beginning. A new journey awaited me.

I looked at my phone and saw a message. It was from Sachin Tendulkar.

"When you're back in Mumbai, let's meet. I'll be waiting."

A new chapter was about to begin.