

# **God of Cricket!**

## **#Chapter 11: Trial Day [1] - Read God of Cricket!**

### **Chapter 11: Trial Day [1]**

#### **Chapter 11: Trial Day [1]**

Chapter 11: Trial Day [1]

3 weeks later at School Playground.

Raghav (POV)

Finally the day of trial for the selection in school team came.

I was standing in the ground with others classmates from different class who are here to get selected for the team.

In this hot weather we are waiting for our turn to showcase our talent as we are standing in assembly line at this playground.

In the ground there were three net crease for training in this dusty ground. In the middle of the there were dozens of upperclass boys practicing shots.

Today there were minimum sixty students came for in the participating in this competition to occupy the fifteen desirable slots in the school team.

I was standing on the last of the line Waiting for turn and I was not wasting my time as was doing stretching with legs and some basic exercise.

---

He felt like an imposter standing there because most of the other boys were larger, broader and appeared much sportive.

They joked and laughed with a carefree confidence and they were typically repeatedly the joke one after another behind his back.

The center of one of such groups was Vikram Singh, a well-built and tall boy of the tenth standard.

He was the star batsman of the year before, and the captain unofficially, and he went about with an easy insolence which showed that he had no anxiety about his position.

While others were at stressed but Raghav, was perfectly at ease .However, underneath of his calm expressions, there was confidence of quiet assurance which he had never previously experienced.

He said to himself in mind.'I should believe in myself and in my hard work that I done past 4 weeks even without system quest I have keep doing my physical training regularly...so I even I don't have talent in it but I.... have work harder than other and th... that is my talent..'

Just he was motivating himself to concentrate in his own not in others.

Phhuuwwweeeet-Phheeew~

There was a whistle of sharpness which broke the conversation of the students and immediately grab there attention.

Everyone turn there head to the whistle sound and then we saw....

A man came out of the sports room and carried a clipboard and a whistle around his neck.

He has board shoulders and fit figure, his eyes were shape narrow.

This was the physical education teacher and the cricket coach of the school and his name is Mr. Keshav Sharma.

'If I remember correctly, he never talk lots but when it came to physical education period he quite serious and even in his past life trial he started with very tough training and there is also another aspect where he became strict when it comes to discipline.'

'When it comes to indiscipline he doesn't forgive easily because he even punish the students who came late to training.'

"Listen up! Boys " he called, and his voice was easily audible to each and everyone on the field.

"My name is Keshav and you all may refer to me as Coach Sharma.This is my ground, and I will have my rules, the next two days. I am not searching after superstars. "

He paused for us so we could digest his words and understand the meaning behind it,after few seconds he continued.

"I am not in search of the boy who can get the biggest six. I need cricketers- boys who are disciplined, strong and well-mannered.....Is that clear boys?"

Everyone voice rang out simultaneously as they says "Yes, sir!"

"Well ... "said Mr. Sharma,".... and that was all about my intro.....so now we shall talk about training...shall we boys."

We all said together "Yes sir"

Coach Sarma nod to our response and began to walk between our assembly line and he said.

"First we should start with warm up training."

Now everyone was wondering what this warm up training and I know what task he will be give us as I was mentally ready.

But other students were on there fantasy of warm up training facility of star cricketers. But there imaginary thoughts didn't last long as coach next sentence bring them to reality.

" we will run five laps around the ground....so Let's Goooo....!"

All the students collective groan was heard, but no one dared to disobey.

The boys rushed on in a crowd as they started to run as they circle around the playground.

Raghav, conscious of his training, had made his way deliberately near the rear, and his running posture of a marathon runners as he maintain a steady pace, conserve energy by not starting too fast, and focus on proper running .

His grown-up brain had understood that it was not a race, it was a trial of stamina.

At the second lap, fifty percent of students had substantially been thinned out as they keep stopping to catch your breath while running.

Those boys were who had been started running faster at the beginning but now they were like walking corpse, coughing out.

By the fourth lap, a sizable number of students had fallen out completely holding their sides.

Raghav, however, kept his pace. His breathing was deep and his stamina bar in the system interface stood at almost zero.

He was not particularly quick, but was everlastingly constant. He began to pass the first runners and his jogging stride appeared as breezy as a welcome wind compared with the heaving, coughing of the others.

He completed his five laps and made it into the top 10. He even didn't stop to catch his breath while running .

When he came back walking calmly he notice with his keen eyes that Mr. Sharma stare remain fixed upon him.

'I can see in his eye that he is little surprise, by my performance perhaps or I havefinally catch his interest in me....Otherwise why will the coach stare at me with unemotional gaze. '

As I was trying to find a reasonable answer too his stare upon me and I noticed him moment that he had done with his carrying clipboard.

(To be Continue)

## **Chapter 12: Trial Day [2]**

Chapter 12: Trial Day [2]

-----

(Coach Sarma POV)

The boys were running there last lap but today I spotted a boy around age of 12 to 13 year by his look.

This boy was running like a professional but it also so his experience in training, like he has done it everyday.

I turn my view on other boys who has similar that boy age but what I saw make me more know about that kid..

Because other kid of same age group was laying down of ground as they were gasping for breath but this kid ..

'what was his name again? .... Ahh, I remember its raghav but why didn't I know that there was some of this good physique in the school '

As I was thinking I turn my all attention to him and I keep staring at him, so I can analyse more.

' If he is this good than he can be good seedling to be trained in substitute for the team '

As the run complete but this lad raghav didn't show any tiredness reaction it's like he his full of energy and he can run two or three more laps like this.

' I shouldn't miss this lad but I will decide after looking his batting style.....that should I keep him or not '

So I put a small tick mark on his clip board next to his name for further observation.

---

The net sessions were divided by age group and with the boys broken into groups according to there age. This was the main event. A new rush of nervousness came upon Raghav.

He was little nervous because there is a saying that doing practice is another thing but applying it in a real match is a different matter.

So I take deep breaths to calm my inner nervousness and keep telling myself to do what I have been doing in training much repeat the same thing here.

As I was watching everyone go there one by one and show there batting skill and this keep repeating untill this turn came.

As this was his turn to bat, he walked towards the net with his heart racing against his ribs.

He stand in his crease and a wicket keeper behind his back.

The bowler was a lanky tenth-grader with the ability to get the ball moving rather fast.

The first ball was a miss because it was a fast ball and he was unable to react on time.

The ball tore off a little and smashed between his uncertain thrust and as the ball went behind with 'bang' sound into the wicketkeeper.

It was inconceivably quick, on a different plane with the tennis ball of Abhinav.

The second ball was directed to his ribs. He made an effort to fight it off but it was too fast. He was thrown off by a very sharp thud on the thigh pad, which brought snickers to the boys wasting time out of doors before the net.

Panic began to set in.

His system ratings, Strength13 ,Batting Technique 12, seemed pathetically weak.

The other boys, gifted in nature like Vikram, worked the ball with little trouble and the whack of leather and willow seemed to have confidence.

Raghav was just surviving.

The 42 year old or the past self in him had taken control and he was about to lose his composure to swing wildly in frustration.

Years of experience playing cricket in my youth of college days told me that panic is useless in this situation because only by analysing and adapting is the only way of my survival today.

He sighed deeply and as he made himself relax because he knew that he couldn't compete with these boys in terms of strength or the time of effort and hard work that they put into their practice.

Now he changed his objective to earn more runs for points because he grasps the essence that it is not about how many runs you make but it is about how you defend all the balls .

Because at that time a cricketer's main responsibility was to guard his wicket and earn runs for his team. It's not about individuals, it's about the team.

Then he remembers the famous quotes of The Great Virat Kohli , as he said—

"No cricket team in the world depends on one or two players. The team always plays to win."

He kept repeating his sentence in his mind then suddenly he got an idea .

The bowler looked at me strangely and asked.

" Boy are you alright.. should I continue bowling"

Raghav looked at the eyes of the bowler , as he took a deep breath as he was going to implement his idea in his playing style..

He altered his position and made it more defensive and made his backlift stance with his bat ready for the bowling.

" I am ready" I said to the bowler and the bowler also nodded in response.

The bowler went back from his bowling crease to do the bowling run to build up the momentum for the speed.

He concentrated his gaze in a way that was bordering obsession and his world reduced to the 22 yards between him and the bowler.

The next ball pitched up. .

He was going to swing it, instead of swinging it he smacked it with a dead bat, and the ball fell harmlessly at his feet.

The follow up one deliver was a short ball and he did not attempt to strike it but he stop the ball with his front foot stance.

The following ball that was delivered was a straight and fast ball.

He lowered his bat, and his grip was solid, and offered a good block of defence.

The ball struck in the middle of the bat and was stopped.

The camera work was hideous and monotonous.

He wasn't scoring runs.

Yet he stayed at the crease.

Other flashy batsmen struck Raghav a number of times and bowled or caught, but he merely defended, retreated, and escaped.

He was not aware that Mr. Sharma had been standing behind his net in the past five minutes staring at him.

The first struggle was the fear, which was observed by the coach.

but then he perceived the accommodation.

He encountered a boy who rather than panicking began to think.

The coach noticed him who treasured his wicket and as he displayed grit.

As he stood and observed Vikram and his hard hits off the cover, he saw the skinny little determined boy who was not prepared to surrender his wicket.

Raghav took his twenty balls allotted and walked out of the net without having hit a single run off the bat.

He felt like a failure.

The other boys did not pay him any attention, and were already talking of who had struck the best hits.

The remainder of the day he spent in fielding.

His new body strength allowed him to run after balls inexhaustibly despite the fact that he could wish to make weak throws.

He stayed secluded and believed that he was not a good enough person.

Mr. Sharma assembled people at the close of the day.

In five minutes, I will put up the list of tomorrow, in the notice board, he said.

"Thanks to all of you, coming here and lastly, those whose names are not on the list , don't give up , so work harder for next year."

There was an embarrassed silence and the boys crowded round the notice board.

Raghav was standing awaiting the result.

He saw boys whooped with joy and walked off with their slumped shoulders.

He mentally prepared himself, even if he faced the same result like his previous life he would not give up his goal and with this attitude he approached the board.

There were two lists on the board.He glanced at the first list and he looked through the selected fifteen names in the first list.

But his name was not there on this list.His heart sank and demotivated thoughts came to his mind.

'Of course,why should he have been chosen?....I didn't score a single run.'

Then he turned to search for his name on the second list, but he didn't spot his name till 26 names ,now the little hope on him already given up...but make sure didn't make mistakes,he once more glanced downwards, as he descended to see and at last came to the final name of the list, to be sure and certain of his hope.

And then he saw it, that the last name on the list was his name written there but to him it was like an illusion....so he rubbed his eyes and again stared at .

But the outcome didn't change and his name was there.

### **30.Raghav Roi, Class 7**

He looked at his name and a giddiness of relief overwhelmed him.

He had made it into the school team with his efforts.



It was not a very glorious victory, a mere, marginal, bitter, foothold on the lowest rung of the ladder.

But to Raghav it was the first step that he had taken and proof that his destiny can be changed.

Now he had a chance to make up for all his regrets.

(To be continued)

### **Chapter 13: Trial Day [3]**

#### Chapter 13: Trial Day [3]

The next morning, when Raghav arrived at the grounds, he found a much smaller group, which was more focused.

Everyone one has come today and as today is Sunday and we don't have school, so yesterday coach tell us to come morning sharp o clock at the school ground for final team Selection.

Today everyone looks different as the informal conversations of the former day had disappeared and in their place was an air of tension and competition.

Finally coach came to the field and wasted no time.

"Yesterday was all about basics and today I am applying it practice, that is what I said.

His voice was as sharp as ever.

"We start with fielding.... I want to see your reaction speed and timeing also I would like to see you attack the ball and is there anybody who is scared of a hard ball then you can go home now. "

Nobody said anything and like that Coach evaluation on us started.

One by one all player around the field stand in there fielding potistion and a senior player will do the batting and the bowler will ball only fulltoss ball so the batsman can hit boundary easily and the fielder have to catch it.

Game start >

Many boys catch the ball some even done stund to catch the ball.

Then a ball came one of the boys he struck a high catch which he had in a completely wrong judgment.

"Sloppy!" Mr. Sharma comment on his fielding.

Next ball the batsman tried a cover drive strike and the fielder who their saw the ball and then he threw himself to a ground to catch the ball but he couldn't not and fall to the ground.

"Lazy!" Coach comment on this guys performance.

The drills went relentless for one hour and Raghav, who had a poor fielding stat at 8 indicating that he had poor technique in fielding.

He was not an instinctive catcher, and his throwing arm was more of noodle than of cannon.

But there was at least one strength with him, his stamina so he didn't feel tired by his carzy work out.

As other boys began to grow weary, their stride becoming slow under the constant exercise and the heat of the sun Raghav continued.

Then next second the batsman strike a straight shot that blow against the distance between him and one of the fielders. Its objective was towards a specific boundary.

But Raghav, with his stamina run back all the way to the position where the ball landing potition.

He threw himself off, a plunging, hopeless, and unskilled leap, which was of heart more than skill, and just cleared his fingers off the ball, preventing it from falling outside of the boundary line.

But he couldn't prevent it from happening as he fall down of boundary and the ball went out of the boundary line.

He got himself up, with his elbow scraped and bleeding, but he picked up ball and threw the ball back weakly to the bowler crease.

He went embarrassely towards the coach side where he can put some bandage on his wound.

"Good effort, Roi!" Mr. Sharma called out and give him an advice. " Next time, you should use your body to catch the ball, we should do all so we can catch the ball and create a wicket for the team "

This was the first time that the coach had called him by his name, and it gave Raghav a shock of pride.

Even the little compliment was a strong incentive.

Then after his bandage he went back to the ground with full confidence.

He threw himself with each ball which soon covered him with dirt and grass stains on his uniform.

He was not the most skilled fielder, but he was no doubt one of the hardest working player on the team.

Finally the training exercise stop and we get to take rest for 20 minutes.

All the boys fall to the ground to grasp there breath.

---

25 minutes Later.

Mr. Sharma took the thirty boys remaining after the hard fielding exercise.

"Now this will be your final test " said he, and pointed his bat into the pitch in the middle of the ground.

"Now we are to have a match of twenty overs each side. Team A, headed by...you will know after I selected from the list and Team B, headed by there team captain Anil Kumar. "

Next moment he bring the clipboard forth to his stare and he started reading out the names and who will be in whose team .

" Rajiv Team B"

" Rakesh Team A"

" Suraj Team B"

" Vikram Team A"

He continues to called each person names and the most awaited moment came.

" Raghav Team A"

Raghav had landed up on the side of Team A and his batting would be at number 6 position.

The arrogant senior, Gourav, scoffed on hearing the name of Raghav in his team .

Then Gourav step forward from the line, went front and asked coach.

"Sir, are you sure that this junior need to play, he should be a ball boy position and learn from us by watching from the stand "

Mr. Sharma's eyes narrowed,when someone questioned his decision but he didn't show anger as coach expressions was calm.

" You don't have to worry, student Gourav..that my decision if he should play or be a ball boy" Mr sharma answers clamly .

But Gourav was not satisfied with coach answer so he question by giving a logic.

" But..Coach , yesterday he didn't even scored a single run in net practicing and with his poor performance we are sure to lose "

When Gourav said this, many students who was not effected by Raghav begin in there team but now with this a doubt and fear of by holdback by someone show on there face.

Coach raised his brow by this Manipulative question but Coach stand firm to his decision and he said.

" Don't worry , I will judge everyone individually...so even you lost this match it will not have any impact on your performance"

" So focus on yourself during this match...All of you understood"

Coach answer clear everyone doubts and shut Gourav mouth also.

Everyone respond to coach together.

" Yes Coach"

Coach nodded to there response and next he scan everyone and look at Vikram.

He called Vikram forward and Vikram also went forward , then he said.

"Vikram,you will be captain of Team A for this match."

Vikram was surprised by this revalation he thought that some other than him would be captain.

Coach was waiting for his answer the reply didn't came, so he asked again.

" Have you understood? Vikram"

"Ahh..Yes..I will take the responsibility of the captain" Vikram snap out of his thoughts and answer hurriedly.

Coach Sarma nod to his response, and he placed his hand on the Vikram Shoulder, give him a light pad.

" Good..I like the sprit , now go to your team and prepare your strategy"

"Yes, sir, "mumbled Vikram, and walked off to get his fielders in order.

---

(To be continued)

## **Chapter 14: Trial Day [4]**

### Chapter 14: Trial Day [4]

Both captain went to the field for coin toss and coach in Middle who will toss the coin.

Coach look at both captain,and said.

"Boys tell your side of the coin "

"Head" said by Anil.

Coach toss the coin up , the coin fell on the ground and it surface was' Head'.

Coach looks at Anil asked what he will decide.

"Batting or Bowling".

Anil didn't waste his time and directly tell his decision." Batting".

After that both captain shake there hand and went to field.

Anil and Wasim were the opener batsman of Team B.

Vikram hand over the first over to Raj from Team A. Raj is a left handed spinner bowler.

Anil and his patner defend and strike amazing shots , by the 6 over we get our first wicket, Anil and his partnership got 37 run in 6 Over. Game continues they got a reasonable score of 110 in 20 overs.

[ Run 110/4 ( 20 Over ) [ Last Six balls [2-1-0-6-4-0]

Finally Team A batting turn came.

Vikram, who was the opener the batsman and he appeared as to prove his superiority and his talent.

The bowler deliver his first ball is a short length ball - Vikram strike a straight drive - Six.

Second ball is a yorker - Vikram play a square drive shot and the ball went out of the boundary - a six again.

[ Run: 12 /0 (0.2 Over )] Last six balls : [ 6-6]

Vikram continuous shots of two sixes show his heroic entry as a opener.

On the third ball he attempted to strike another sixer.

But he miss judge the ball as a shot ball and he went out his crease to strike but the ball was a yorker , then ball went behind him , taking a stamp out of his wicket.

[ Run: 12/1 (0.3 Over )] Last six balls : [ 6-6-W]

Vikram walk out of his crease in a frustrated manner when he reach the bench he threw his bat in ground with anger.

The highest-order, which attempted to make a break into the team, executed careless shots and sacrificed their wickets.

Raghav, who was sitting on the sidelines with his pads on who was looking the scoreboard in horror expressions. Because after Vikram wicket our team downfall started.

[ Run: 35/3 (4.1Over )] Last six balls : [ 0-]

Now the batsman who was in the crease was named shubam, he class 8 students. Shubam was ready to strike as the ball came and he strike a cut shot but didn't reach boundary as it was caught by fielder.

Coach Sarma raised his hand pointing his finger, showing his decision Out as a Umpire.

[ Run: 35/4 (4.2Over )] Last six balls : [ 0-W]

Vikram look at his team sides and said.

"Roi! You're in!"

The heart of Raghav jumped in his neck as soon as he heard that it was his turn to play.

He pick up his bat he walked to the crease with his legs wobbly and full of confidence.

The situation was dire in this match now.

His team had merely scored 35 runs with a little less than 4 overs, and only six wickets were left.

In public view it is a 70-30 match outcome situation.

Team B fielders were cheering themselves as feeling like they were winning.

He disregarded them all as he took his position.

He recalled his plumbing on the nets and how he survive.

His other partner at the other end was Rohan, a steady and well behaved boy in his class who was the team's best wicket keeper.

"Play steady, just play steady, keep it down...just take one run and I will take the scoring responsibility,"Rohan said, at the non striker end.

"They're bowling well.....We should simply attempt to form a team. "

His high IQ in Cricket gave Raghav a sea of calculations in his head as he nodded.

He examined the placements in the field. He watched the bowler's grip.

It was a few balls at first which he only defended, and got a feel of the pitch.

He didn't try to score. He simply did his best to save his wicket as though his life was at stake.

Much more gradually he and Rohan began to rebuild.

They had to push the ball into the gap of the fielder and we take singles run.

[ Run: 31/4(3.2Over )] Last six balls : [ 1-1]

They ran away on one side and two-tailed ones.

The score-board started to run over, the pace needed gradually decreased.

[ Run: 36/4(4.3Over )] Last six balls : [ 0-W-1]

Raghav was not smacking boundaries, he was spinning the strike, which provided the more aggressive Rohan with the opportunity to smack the occasional loose ball.

He had gone on to bat about five overs when the captain of the opposing side, Anil, introduced a spinner.

[ Run 67/4 ( 14.0Over ) [ Last six balls [ ]

The boy made a weird move and his first ball to Raghav was an overhanded one and the ball flew into the air.

A majority of 12 year olds would have been tempted to run down the pitch and smash it.

Something was understood by my 42-year-old brain of Raghav with its database of thousands of hours of viewed cricket.

The wrist position. The manner the ball was thrown out of the hand.

"It is a googly ball ," his head shouted as that a delivery by the bowler of a googly ball. "A wrong'un. It would turn the other way."

He adjusted in a split second. Rather than playing on the off-break, he stood and swung a straight bat hoping the ball would turn in.

Indeed the ball struck and turned one way and the other with a sharp stroke of his leg and struck the very middle of his bat. It fell down on the field.

Everyone on the field went silent and they look at Raghav.

[ Run 73/4 ( 14.1Over ) [ Last six balls [6- ]

Rohan, the bowler also stare at Raghav because he was unable to believe what he is seeing because just yesterday, Raghav was unable to strike his normal ball but not not only a shot a flying six...in his googly Ball.

On the other side , Raghav standing in crease with confusion look in eyes, like ' what happened, why stare at me '.

Mr. Sharma had been watching, with a critical eye, on the sidelines, and had started to his feet. He had seen it clearly.

'A boy of twelve that had been technically inept in his handling balls at the nets session yesterday but now he had just read a googly ball delivery by the same hands of the bowler.....but this time he handled it like an expert.'

' It was unheard of because It was not a skill, but something beyond that, instinct, intelligence.'



Those few seconds transformed everything to Raghav. There was a rush of unbuffered, raw faith with him.

He knew he could do this. He began to play with his feet as well, receiving the ball with a new amount of confidence.

He struck a clean drive on the covers to get his first boundary and it was timed. He threw the succeeding ball over the slips to another four.

[ Run 77/4 ( 14.2Over ) [ Last six balls [6-4 ]

He partnered with Rohan who had added more than 12 runs leading their team to the verge of winning when Rohan was run out.

[ Run 92/5 ( 18.5 Over ) [ Last Six balls [ 0-2-1-W]

Raghav was not out but want play over with his patner. He had performed a match winning innings when under extreme pressure.

Last ball of the over deliver and the got single.

[ Run 93/5 ( 18.5 Over ) [ Last Six balls [0-2-1-W-1]

Finally Last over, bowler ball is first ball of the last over with a yorker.

Raghav strike a on drive shot towards the mid- off but the fielder was fast and stop ball from a being a 4.

.

Raghav and his patner Nadim didn't take run on last ball.

[ Run 93/5 ( 18.6 Over ) [ Last Six balls [0-2-1-W-1-0]

(19 Over )

Nadim on strike crease , the ball came but he missed his shot and it is a dot ball.

[ Run 93/5 ( 19.1 Over ) [ Last Six balls [0-]

Second ball — Nadim strike a cover drive shot but the cover fielder stop ball and it is a dot ball.

[ Run 93/5 ( 19.2 Over ) [ Last Six balls [0-0]

Third ball — Nadim strike a square leg shot and the fielder from Deep Square Leg came forward running to stop the ball and he stop it.

So we took a single and I am at striker position.

[ Run 94/5 ( 19.3 Over ) [ Last Six balls [0-0-1]

Fourth Ball – I saw it was a Length ball, so I waited for ball and I shot a powerful On drive, the ball went out the boundary.

Umpire raised his both hand pointing finger upward, as a sign of Six.

[ Run 100/5 ( 19.4 Over ) [ Last Six balls [0-0-1-6]

Fifth ball — It was a yorker , I strike a ball to Third man square side . I start to take run and we manage to take a single.

[ Run 101/5 ( 19.5 Over ) [ Last Six balls [0-0-1-6-1]

Nadim was on striker and the ball came he sweep his bat to strike and he hit the ball it went up but not fly towards the boundary.....it went straight up and the the bowler catch ball and out him.

[ Run 101/6 ( 20 Over ) [ Last Six balls [0-0-1-6-1-W]

Match is over :-

Team B : Run 110/4 ( 20 Over )

Team A: Run 101/6 ( 20 Over )

---

He walked off the field with bat upheld and his team mates gave him an applause on the back. Vikram himself gave him a reluctant respect. He had earned it.

Afterwards, Mr. Sharma nailed the list to the notice board. It contained fifteen names. Raghav now pressed about and his heart now throbs.

He scanned the final list 15 player and his name was there at the very center.

8.Raghav Roi – Batsman

He had done it..... He was a member of the school cricket team. This was followed by a feeling of emotion so strong that make him more happiest.

He remembered the words of doubt of his father, his own promise. This was the first real step.

---

(Raghav House )

By 1 o'clock his practice finish.

He open his house main gate and hurriedly burst through the entrance door and enter with a shout.

"Ma! Papa! I got selected! I'm on the school team!"

A broad proud smile came on the face of his mother. Priya raised her eyes out of her books with real shock.

"Wow. I suppose it was worth having all that old man walking," priya said, which was an uncharacteristic praise.

His father Umesh was sitting at the table reciting household accounts. He checked the list, and looked at the smiling, dirty covered faced with lively expression face of his son.

He did not smile, but the hard lines on his mouth were smoothed out in his face.

"Good," he said and voice sound tell us that he genuinely happy for raghav.

"Just don't forget our pervious our deal that is don't let your studies suffer along with your playing."

I nodded to his advice because he knows that his father still prefer studies more than his cricket career but one thing make him happy and build his confidence once again. That is his father started to acknowledging his hardwork and his efforts.

I knew this is just that start I have to prove it in more convenience way.

(To be Continue)

## **Chapter 15: The First Practice**

### Chapter 15: The First Practice

The cautious approval from his father felt more significant than the victory at the trials. It was a small crack in the wall of practicality Umesh Roi had built around their lives.

Raghav knew he couldn't just maintain his grades; he had to excel, to prove that his dedication to cricket wasn't a distraction but a parallel path.

The Monday after the trials, the atmosphere at the school ground was entirely different.

The crowd of sixty hopefuls was gone, replaced by the focused, somewhat intimidating presence of the final fifteen players.

The air of casual chatter was replaced by the crisp thwack of leather on willow and the sharp calls of fielders.

Raghav, being the youngest and newest member, felt the invisible weight of the team hierarchy.

Seniors like Vikram, the official captain, and Gourav, the lanky fast bowler who had openly scoffed at him, were already running drills. They moved with a practiced ease that made Raghav feel clumsy.

"Alright, listen up!" Coach Sarma's voice cut through the morning air, and everyone immediately gathered.

"Congratulations on making the squad. That was the easy part." His eyes scanned every one of them, lingering for a moment on Raghav. "The work starts now."

The Inter-School Zonal Tournament begins in two weeks. Our first match is against DPS Guwahati. I don't intend to lose. From now until then, practice is every day, 4 PM sharp. Be prepared to work."

As the coach laid out the brutal training schedule, a familiar blue screen flickered to life in Raghav's vision.

Ding~

[New Chain Quest Issued: School Tournament Debut]

[Part 1: Make the Playing XI]

[Objective: You are on the 15-man squad, but not the 11-man playing team. Impress Coach Sarma in the next two weeks and be selected for the 'Playing XI' in the first tournament match.]

[Reward: +2 Batting Technique, +2 Cricket IQ, 15 SP]

Raghav's focus sharpened. The system was right. Making the team was just the first step; now he had to prove he deserved to actually play.

Those two weeks were a new kind of hell, making his 7-day foundation training look like a holiday.

Coach Sarma was a relentless taskmaster. The training was divided into three parts: conditioning, fielding drills, and net practice.

Conditioning was brutal, but Raghav's Stamina (17) and Strength (13) allowed him to keep up, much to the surprise of the seniors who expected the "Class 8 kid" to collapse.

Fielding, however, was his nightmare. With a

'Fielding' stat of just 8, he was clumsy. His throws were weak, and his reaction time to hard-hit balls was slow.

"Roi!" Sarma barked during a catching drill.

"Attack the ball! Don't wait for it to come to you! Run!"

Raghav threw himself desperately at every ball, his body screaming in protest. More than once, he fumbled a routine stop, earning a disgusted sigh from Gourav.

"Told you, coach. He's a ball boy," Gourav muttered to another senior, just loud enough for Raghav to hear.

Raghav's face burned, but he clenched his jaw and ran for the next ball.

The net sessions were his sanctuary. Here, his 'Batting Technique' (12) and 'Cricket IQ' (25) shone. While seniors like Vikram were hitting powerful, aggressive shots, Raghav was a wall.

He faced the fast bowlers, his body instinctively moving into a defensive posture, his bat meeting the ball with a solid thock. He didn't score fast, but he survived. He didn't get out.

Coach Sarma watched him intently. He'd have

Raghav face the team's main spinner for twenty minutes straight, testing his patience, watching his footwork, analyzing how he read the ball.

Raghav, with his 42-year-old mind, played every ball on its merit, defending the good ones and leaving the bad.

At home, he was exhausted, but his routine was unwavering.

5:00 AM: System training (1km run, 20 push-ups, 30 sit-ups).

7:00 AM - 3:00 PM: School (He was now a front-bencher, asking questions, determined to keep his promise to his father).

4:00 PM - 7:00 PM: Team Practice.

8:00 PM - 10:00 PM: Homework.

He barely had time to see Abhinav, who could only look on with a mix of awe and worry at his friend's relentless drive.

---

Finally, the day before the first match, Coach Sarma gathered the team after a grueling practice.

"Alright...Tomorrow is the first match. Here is the playing eleven."

Raghav's heart hammered against his ribs. He expected to be carrying drinks.

"1. Vikram, Captain."

"2. Rohan, Wicketkeeper."

"3. Suraj."

"4. Rakesh."

Raghav held his breath, bracing for the inevitable.

"5. Raghav Roi."

The name hung in the air. Raghav blinked, certain he'd misheard. Gourav's head snapped up, a look of disbelief on his face.

Vikram, the captain, looked surprised but didn't question the coach.

Coach Sarma's eyes locked onto Raghav. "Roi. You're batting at number five."

He walked over until he was standing right in front of him.

"I'm not putting you there to hit sixes. Your job is simple: don't get out. I want you to anchor the middle order. Frustrate their bowlers. Stay at the crease. Do not give your wicket away. Is that clear?"

Raghav, stunned but resolute, snapped to attention. "Yes, Coach!"

As the team was dismissed, the system chimed.

[Part 1: Make the Playing XI - (Completed)]

[Rewards: +2 Batting Technique, +2 Cricket IQ, 15 SP applied.]

[Host Stats Updated: Batting Technique: 14, Cricket IQ: 27, System Points: 15]

A new warmth spread through him, his mind feeling sharper, his hands feeling an even more intuitive connection to the bat he was holding.

Then, a new notification popped up, setting his next challenge.

[New Quest: Part 2: First Match Victory]

[Objective: Score a minimum of 30 runs in your debut match and contribute to a team victory.]

[Reward: +3 Stamina, +3 Strength, 25 SP]

Raghav gripped his bat. He had made the eleven. He was batting at number 5. His first real match, the true beginning of his new life, was tomorrow.

(To be Continued)

## **Chapter 16: SVS v/s DPS[1]**

Chapter 16: SVS v/s DSP [1]

The day of the first match arrived with a buzz of nervous energy.

### **[ Match : Shanti Vidya Mandir School ( SVS) Vs Delhi Public School ( DPS)]**

The team boarded the school bus for the short trip to Delhi Public School (DPS) Guwahati's home ground.

The seniors, like Vikram and Gourav, were loud, full of boasts and bravado. Raghav sat quietly in the back, his small bat bag at his feet, his mind visualizing the bowler's arm, the white ball, his bat meeting it with a straight, defensive block.

He felt a different kind of pressure now. This wasn't a trial. This was a real match, the first entry in what he intended to be a long and legendary career. His father's words echoed in his head, "Don't let your studies suffer," a constant reminder that he was fighting a battle on two fronts.

As they arrived and began their warm-up drills on the unfamiliar field, a series of system notifications chimed in his mind, sharp and sudden.

Ding~

[System Notification: Host has successfully completed the Novice Period.]

[The 'World's Greatest Cricket System' is now operating at standard parameters.]

Raghav paused his stretching, a feeling of unease settling over him. 'Standard parameters?'

[System Store prices have been adjusted to standard rates.]

[New Feature Unlocked: Lottery.]

[New System Rule Implemented: Age-Based Stat Limitation.]

Raghav's heart dropped. He quickly commanded, 'System Store.'

The familiar menu appeared, but the numbers made him go cold.

[SYSTEM STORE]

[Stat Points:]

[Stamina (+1 Point) - 100 SP]

[Strength (+1 Point) - 100 SP]

[Batting Technique (+1 Point) - 200 SP]

[Bowling Skill (+1 Point) - 200 SP]

[Fielding (+1 Point) - 150 SP]

[Lottery:]

[Spin the Wheel: (Spin for a random skill, item, or stat reward) - 50 SP]

The prices had skyrocketed. His 15 available SP, which he had been saving, suddenly felt worthless.

He couldn't afford a single thing, not even the new Lottery. The easy days of buying stats after a single quest were gone.



'This... this changes everything,' he thought, his mind racing. 'The system isn't a cheat code... it's just a guide. The real work... the grind... is even harder than I thought.'

He then focused on the last notification. 'System, explain Age-Based Stat Limitation.'

[Age-Based Stat Limitation: The Host's current physical potential is capped by age to ensure stable, long-term growth and prevent bodily collapse.]

[Current Age: 12. Maximum Stat Cap for all physical attributes (STA, STR, BAT, BOWL, FIELD): 25.]

[Note: 'Cricket IQ' (27) is a mental trait derived from a unique anomaly (rebirth) and has been grandfathered in. It will not increase further until the age cap is raised.]

[Future Stat Caps:

Age 13 (35),

Age 14 (50),

Age 16 (60),

Age 17 (80),

Age 18 (85),

Age 19 (90).]

Raghav did the math, his 42-year-old mind processing the data.

His Batting was 14. His Stamina was 17. He was already more than halfway to his entire limit for the year.

He now understood why future rewards would be in decimals.

Progress from now on wouldn't be in leaps, but in tiny, hard-won fractions and the path to becoming the 'God of Cricket' had just become infinitely longer.

"Roi! Stop daydreaming! On the field!" Coach Sarma's voice shattered his thoughts.

The match was about to begin. The DPS captain, a tall, athletic boy in Class 9, spun the coin.

"Tails!" called Vikram.

The coin landed. Heads.

"We'll bat first," the DPS captain said with a grin.

A wave of groans went through Raghav's team. They were batting last. Chasing a score is always high-pressure.

DPS started strong and their openers were confident, punishing the loose balls from Gourav, who was bowling too fast and too angrily.

They put up a solid 124 runs for 4 wickets in their 20 overs. A very respectable score.

=====

"Alright, 125 to win," Coach Sarma said as the team gathered, wiping sweat from their faces.

"It's a good score, but it's not impossible. Vikram, Rohan, give us a solid start...Don't throw it away."

Vikram, annoyed from his expensive bowling spell, nodded. "We've got this, Coach."

He walked out with Rohan, the wicketkeeper. The DPS team was energetic, their cheering echoing across the field.

Vikram, true to his nature, tried to dominate. The first ball, short and wide, he smashed for four. The second, he tried to repeat the shot... but it wasn't a bad ball.

He mistimed it. The ball flew high, a simple catch for the fielder at cover. Vikram was out.

**[The score: 4/1.]**

A heavy silence fell over Raghav's team.

Suraj, the #3, walked in and was immediately intimidated by the fast bowler. He blocked, he panicked, and after six agonizing balls, he was clean-bowled.

**[The score: 7/2.]**

Rakesh, the #4, came in and, together with Rohan, tried to stabilize. They pushed the score to 28, but a moment of panic, a bad call for a single... Rakesh was run out by a mile.

**[The score: 28/3, after 7 overs.]**

"Roi! You're in!" Coach Sarma yelled.

Raghav felt his heart leap into his throat. He picked up his bat, his new stats feeling insignificant against the mountain they had to climb. 97 runs needed. Eight wickets in hand, but the top order was gone.

He walked past the jeering seniors, his face a mask of calm. As he reached the crease, he took a deep breath

'Quest: 30 runs and a victory.'

'Coach: Don't get out.'

'System: Age cap 25. The grind is the only way.'

The DPS fast bowler, smelling blood, grinned at him. "Ready to go home, kid?"

Raghav didn't reply. He took his stance and he analyzed the field. As with his Batting Technique of 14 settled his hands into the correct defensive grip.

The bowler charged in. The ball was fast, aimed right at the stumps.

Raghav's , old experience mind screamed 'DEFEND!' His 12-year-old body responded. He brought the bat down in a perfectly straight, dead block.

THOCK.

The ball dropped harmlessly at his feet.

The bowler frowned.

The next ball was just outside off. Raghav shouldered his arms and let it pass.

The over ended. Rohan, at the other end, gave him a small, relieved nod.

Raghav was an anchor. He wasn't scoring, but he was surviving.

He frustrated the bowlers. He pushed singles, giving the strike to Rohan, who managed to hit a few boundaries.

The Runs slowly crawled... 35... 42... 50...

They had been batting together for six overs.

Raghav's personal score was a painstaking 11 runs from 29 balls.

"This is boring!" the DPS captain yelled. "Let's get this wall out. Spinner! You're on!"

A new bowler, a short, tricky leg-spinner, was given the ball. Raghav watched him toss the ball in his hand.

His Cricket IQ flared, recognizing the grip, the potential for a googly, just like in the trials.

This was the first true test.

His debut, his quest, and his team's fate all rested on this next over.

(To be Continued)

## **Chapter 17: SVS v/s DPS [2]**

### **Chapter 17: SVS VS DSP [2]**

Raghav stood at the non-striker's end, his score a meager 11 runs for team.

### **[Score: 50/3 ( Over 13)]**

The team total was 50 for 3 which means that they still needed 75 runs to win. The arrival of the leg-spinner signaled a change in strategy from the DPS captain.

He was done trying to blast through the "wall" with pace; now he was going to try and lure him into a mistake.

The DPS captain adjusted his field and brought a fielder in a Silly Point and a Short Leg side, crowding the new batsman.

He also placed an aggressive Slip behind the Wicket keeper. The message was clear: he was hunting for a wicket.

Raghav, now on strike, took his stance and his experience was on high alert for this bowler.

Over 13 (Bowler: Leg-Spinner)

*[Ball 13.1]* The spinner tossed the ball up, giving it air. It was a flighted delivery, landing on a perfect Good Length just outside Raghav's off-stump.

Raghav's 42-year-old mind recognized the classic leg-break. He moved his front foot forward, bat and pad together, and executed a simple Defensive Shot.

The ball met the middle of his bat and dropped harmlessly into the pitch. No run.

*[Ball 13.2]* The spinner, seeing Raghav's solid defense, pushed this one through flatter and faster, on a Full Length, trying to beat him for pace and trap him LBW (Leg Before Wicket).

Raghav's Batting techniques was enough as he adjusted, bringing his bat down in a firm block. No run.

*[Ball 13.3]* The trap. The bowler's wrist snapped over in that familiar, deceptive way. Raghav's mind screamed, 'Googly!' It was the 'wrong'un', delivered on a Good Length and spinning into him, not away.

An ordinary 12-year-old would have played the wrong line and been bowled or trapped. But Raghav, with his advanced IQ, read it.

He waited, letting the ball turn, and played a delicate, wristy Flick Shot through the gap on the Leg Side, past the grasping hands of the Short Leg fielder.

The Mid-Wicket fielder had to move, allowing them to run a comfortable single.

**[Score: 51/3. Raghav: 12\*(Over 13.3)]**

*[Ball 13.4 ]* (Rohan on strike): Rohan, the more aggressive partner, faced a standard, flighted leg-break. He played a safe Defensive Shot to Cover. No run.

*[Ball 13.5]* The spinner made a mistake. He bowled a "loose" ball—a Full Toss on the leg stump.

Rohan's eyes lit up as he got down on one knee and executed a powerful Sweep Shot, hitting the ball hard behind square. It raced past the Backward Square Leg fielder for a much-needed boundary. Four runs!

**[Score: 55/3.( Over 13.5)]**

*[Ball 13.6]* The rattled spinner fired in a flat, Short Length ball. Rohan, pumped from the boundary, played a quick Pull Shot but hit it straight to the Mid-Wicket fielder.

They scrambled a single.

**[Score: 56/3 ( Over 13.6) End of Over.]**

The partnership was working. Raghav was the anchor, frustrating the bowlers and rotating the strike. Rohan was the aggressor, punishing any bad balls.

The DPS captain, seeing the score mount, brought back his main fast bowler.

Over 14 (Bowler: Fast Bowler)

*[Ball 14.1 ]*(Raghav on strike)

The bowler, furious at the growing partnership, charged in and delivered a fast Bouncer, aimed right at Raghav's helmet. Raghav's experience picked up the length instantly. He didn't flinch; he just Ducked under it smoothly. The ball flew over his head to the keeper.

*[Ball 14.2]* The bowler followed up with a classic 1-2 punch: a spearing, in-swinging Yorker, aimed at Raghav's toes. Raghav, expecting it, brought his bat down in a solid block, digging the ball out and stopping it from hitting the stumps. It was a high-pressure, professional defensive play. No run.

*[Ball 14.3]* A Good Length ball on the stumps. Raghav played another simple Defensive Shot. No run.

*[Ball 14.4]* The bowler, desperate, strayed onto Raghav's legs. It was a Full Length ball, perfect for a Flick. Raghav's wrists rolled, and he played a gentle Flick Shot past the Square Leg umpire for an easy single.

**[Score: 57/3. Raghav: 13.\*]**

The partnership slowly, painfully, dragged the score upwards. Raghav was a machine. Defend, defend, leave, flick for one.

Rohan hit a beautiful Cover Drive for four. The score climbed past 70, then 80. Raghav's own score crept up: 19... 24... 27...

They reached 95/3. They needed only 30 more runs from the last 4 overs. Victory was in sight.

The fast bowler returned, his face red with effort.

Over 17 (Bowler: Fast Bowler)

*[Ball 17.1]* (Rohan on strike)

The bowler delivered a Good Length ball, just outside the off-stump. Rohan, seeing the finish line, got greedy. He tried to smash the ball over the Mid-Off fielder. But he hadn't fully connected.

'WICKET!' bowler call came with a shout.

He miscued the shot The ball went high in the air... and straight down the throat of the Mid-Off fielder, who took the simplest catch of his life.

**[Score: 95/4. Rohan 32\*(OUT)]**

Catch out by a Mid off fielder.

=====

A stunned silence. Rohan walked off, hitting his bat on his pads in frustration.

The new batsman, a nervous boy from Class 7, walked in and the pressure was now entirely on Raghav.

He was batting on 27\* and he needed to strike 3 runs for his quest and to guide his terrified new partner to victory.

*[Ball 17.2]* (New batsman on strike)

The fast bowler, energized, delivered a fast Yorker. The new kid barely got his bat down, blocking it. No run.

*[Ball 17.3]* Another fast ball. Another nervous block. No run.

*[Ball 17.4]* The batsman managed to get a single.

Score: 96/4. Raghav on strike.

The DPS captain brought the entire field into the Inner Circle to stop the single.

Ball 17.5 (Raghav on strike)

The bowler, smelling blood, pitched it up. It was a Full Length ball on middle stump.

Raghav could have blocked it but he needed his 30, so he took a small, confident step forward and played a firm On-Drive. He didn't try to hit it for four, just to pierce the field. It went past the bowler, too fast for the Mid-On fielder. The Long-On fielder ran in to cut it off. They ran one... they turned... and they came back for two.

**[Score: 98/4. Raghav: 29.\*(Over 17.5)]**

*[Ball 17.6]* One run needed for his quest. The bowler, seeing him play the drive, pulled his length back. He delivered a Good Length ball on the off-stump. Raghav waited, rocked onto his back foot, and played a delicate, intelligent Cut Shot, guiding the ball into the gap between Point and Gully. It was an easy single.

**[Score: 99/4. Raghav: 30.\*]**

Ding~

[Quest: Part 2: First Match Victory]

[Objective 1: Score a minimum of 30 runs... (Completed)]

[Objective 2: Contribute to a team victory... (In Progress)]

Raghav's mind cleared. His personal goal was met. Now, only the team's remained. 26 runs to win.

The nervous new batsman survived the next over. It was down to the last two overs. 19 runs needed. Raghav had the strike.

Over 19 (Bowler: Leg-Spinner)

[*Ball 19.1*] The spinner, under pressure, delivered a Short Length ball, a major mistake. Raghav rocked back and hit a powerful Cut Shot behind Point for Four!\*

**[Score: 109/4. Raghav: 35.\*** (He'd taken a single earlier).]

[*Ball 19.2* ] The spinner overcorrected, bowling a Full Toss on the legs. Raghav simply played a Flick Shot past Square Leg. Four more!

**[Score: 113/4. Raghav: 39.\*]**

The game had changed in two balls. The "wall" was now a scorer. He took a single on the next ball.

The nervous kid blocked the rest of the over.

Final Over. 11 runs needed.

=====

Raghav was on strike.

The fast bowler was given the ball.

[*Ball 20.1*] The bowler went for a Yorker but missed, delivering a Full Toss on middle stump. Raghav didn't try to smash it.

He played a perfect, textbook Straight Drive. The ball shot past the bowler and the Mid-On fielder, racing to the Long-On boundary. Four!

**[Score: 118/4. Raghav: 43.\*]**

Raghav adjusted his bat and let out a sigh~

' Just seven run more .... This will be my time to shine '



[Ball 20.2

] They needed only 7 runs to win this match. The bowler, in a panic, delivered another Full Length ball.

Raghav hit it hard, this time to Deep Mid-Wicket. They ran hard. Two runs!

**[Score: 120/4. Raghav: 45.\*]**

[Ball 20.3] Five more runs needed.

The bowler delivered a Good Length ball on the stumps. Raghav played a solid Defensive Shot with soft hands into the gap at Cover and ran. Single!

**[Score: 121/4. Raghav: 46.\*]**

[Ball 20.4 ](New batsman on strike)Four runs needed and the entire field was in a tense atmosphere.

The kid was nervous but swung his bat wildly and missed. Dot ball.

[Ball 20.5 ]The kid swung again, making contact! The ball looped over the Mid-Wicket fielder. They ran... one... they ran... two!

**[Score: 123/4]** 2 runs needed from 1 ball.

[Ball 20.6] (New batsman on strike)

The entire field , fielder was set around us as a Defence line.

The bowler ran in... and delivered a Good Length ball. The kid blocked it... and they ran! The Cover fielder charged, picked it up, and threw... but Raghav, with his stamina run and was already reached the crease but the throw was wide!

They run and got two runs.

**[Score: 125/4!]**

Match Won!

Raghav's teammates stormed the field, lifting the nervous kid onto their shoulders. Raghav, unbeaten on 46\*, stood at the other end, leaning on his bat, breathing heavily.

Ding~

[Quest: Part 2: First Match Victory (Completed)]

[Analyzing Host performance: 46 runs (not out), 1 victory. Performance exceeds expectations.]

[Rewards: +0.3 Stamina, +0.2 Strength, 25 SP.]

=====

[Host: Raghav Roi]

[Age: 12]

[Stamina: 17.3]

[Strength: 13.2]

[Batting Technique: 14]

[Bowling Skill: 5]

[Fielding: 8]

[Cricket IQ: 27]

[System Points (SP): 40]

=====

The seniors, including Vikram and a stunned Gourav, walked over. Vikram clapped Raghav on the shoulder, a new, genuine respect in his eyes.

"You... you're not half bad, kid. You're a wall."

Coach Sarma watched from the boundary. He didn't cheer. He just permitted himself a small, satisfied smile and ticked something off on his clipboard.

Raghav had done exactly what he was told: he hadn't gotten out and in doing so, he had won them the match.

(To be Continued)

## **Chapter 18: Day Off**

Chapter 18: Day Off

Raghav woke up before the 5 AM alarm, his body thrumming with a mixture of agony and adrenaline.

Every muscle, from his forearms to his thighs, ached from the 46-run stand. It was a good pain. It was the pain of victory.

He lay in the pre-dawn darkness of his small room in Jalukbari, a victorious smile on his 12-year-old face.

Then, the cold blue light of the system interface filled his vision.

[Quest: Part 2: First Match Victory (Completed)]

[Rewards: +0.3 Stamina, +0.2 Strength, 25 SP.]

[Host Stats Updated:]

[Host: Raghav Roi]

[Age: 12]

[Stamina: 17.3]

[Strength: 13.2]

[Batting Technique: 14]

[Bowling Skill: 5]

[Fielding: 8]

[Cricket IQ: 27]

[System Points (SP): 40]

=====[

The fractional increases were a sober reminder. The system's "Novice Period" was over.

The 40 SP he now possessed felt like a decent haul, until his mind commanded, 'System Store.'

The menu appeared, and the optimism of his victory evaporated, replaced by a cold, harsh reality.

[SYSTEM STORE]

[Stat Points:]

[Stamina (+1 Point) - 100 SP]

[Strength (+1 Point) - 100 SP]

[Batting Technique (+1 Point) - 200 SP]

[Bowling Skill (+1 Point) - 200 SP]

[Fielding (+1 Point) - 150 SP]

[Lottery:]

[Spin the Wheel: (Spin for a random skill, item, or stat reward) - 50 SP]

Raghav felt a metaphorical punch to the gut. His 40 SP were practically worthless.

He couldn't afford a single purchase, not even the 50 SP Lottery, which his mature mind instantly identified as a "sucker's bet." The days of buying a Batting point for 20 SP were gone.

'The system isn't a cheat code,' he thought, sitting up in his bed, the muscle soreness suddenly feeling more profound.

'It's not a shortcut. It's just... a guide. A taskmaster.'

He then reviewed the other notification.

[Age-Based Stat Limitation: 25].

He was already at 17.3 Stamina and 14 Batting. He was over halfway to his entire physical limit for the year.

Progress from now on wouldn't be in leaps; it would be in painful, fractional increments. The path to a 90+ "World Class" stat, to becoming the 'God of Cricket', was a marathon that would take years, not months.

And his greatest weakness was glaring at him: Fielding: 8.

It was pathetic and he knew it that he'd been slow in the Mid-On position, his throws back to the keeper were weak, looping arcs.

The only reason DPS hadn't taken more runs off him was because they were also just a school team. A better team would have exploited him, turning easy singles into twos, and twos into threes.

'Coach Sarma definitely noticed,' Raghav thought, swinging his legs out of bed.

'I can't just be a wall who can't move. I have to fix this.'

---

He entered the living room, the smells of breakfast filling the small house. His mother, Nirmala, was in the kitchen, and the sound of her humming was brighter than usual.

Priya, his sister, was already hunched over her physics textbook.

"Well, if it isn't Mr. Man-of-the-Match," she said, not looking up, her voice laced with its usual teasing.

"Don't let it get to your head. You have a mathematics unit test on Friday. I hope you've been studying, or that 46 not out won't save you from Papa."

"I have," Raghav said, his voice quiet. He knew she was right.

His mother came out, placing a hot aloo paratha on his plate, this one glistening with an extra layer of ghee. Her smile was all the reward he needed.

"Eat," she said, her eyes shining with pride. "You need your strength."

His father, Umesh, sat at the head of the table, sipping his tea and methodically reading the Assam Tribune.

He didn't say anything for several minutes. The only sounds were the scrape of cutlery and the rustle of the newspaper.

Finally, Umesh folded the paper, set it down, and pushed it across the table to Raghav.

"Page 8," he said. "Local sports."

Raghav's heart jumped. He pulled the paper over. There, in a small, two-paragraph column at the bottom, was a brief summary: "...a surprise victory for the local school, who chased down DPS's 124. The win was anchored by a resilient, unbeaten 46 from Class 8 student Raghav Roi, who held his nerve under pressure..."

His name was print in the newspaper.

Raghav looked up. His father was watching him, his expression not of praise, but of his usual, deep-seated caution.

"One match is a good start," Umesh said, his voice level.

"It shows your hard work is paying off. But do not let this distract you from what is important."

He tapped Priya's textbook, then pointed to Raghav. "Your studies. Your exams. Your future. Cricket... it is still just a game."

"I understand, Papa," Raghav said, the knot of pressure tightening in his chest. He had to succeed at both. Failure in one would mean the end of the other.

That afternoon, there was no rest day. The team, still buzzing from the win, was brought crashing back to earth by Coach Sarma's whistle.

"One win means NOTHING!" he roared, pacing in front of them.

"You think you're champions? You were sloppy! You were lazy! Our fielding was a DISGRACE! The DPS batsmen took at least fifteen runs they shouldn't have because you were ambling around like you were at a picnic!"

His eyes scanned the group and landed, with terrifying precision, on Raghav.

"Roi!"

"Yes, Coach!" Raghav snapped to attention.

"Your bat saved us, but your arm cost us!... My grandmother throws harder than you! Your throws from the in-field was pathetic! ....A U-10 girl's team would have run three on you every time! You are a liability on the field! "

"Do you understand me?"

The praise from the morning paper, his mother's smile... it all vanished, replaced by the stinging, public truth.

"Yes, Coach!"

"Good! Because you're all going to pay for it.....EVERYONE..Laps! Twenty laps! Now!"

The team groaned and began to run.

Raghav, with his Stamina: 17.3, settled into an easy rhythm, but his mind was racing. 'He's right. He's absolutely right. I have to fix it. I can't be a liability.'

As he ran, he focused his thoughts. 'System! I need a quest to fix my fielding.'

As he completed his first lap, the familiar Ding chimed in his mind.

Ding~

[Host has recognized a critical weakness and has been externally motivated by a mentor.]

[New quest available: Side Quest: Fielding Foundation]

[Objective: The path to greatness is built on fundamentals. You cannot be a God of Cricket if you are a liability on the field. Complete the following drills:]

[1. Successfully catch 100 high balls (simulating Deep Field catches).]

[2. Successfully catch 100 hard, flat balls (simulating Inner Circle catches).]

[3. Successfully hit the stumps 50 times with a direct throw from 30 yards (the Inner Circle boundary).]

[Time Limit: 1 week.]

[Reward: +0.5 Fielding, +0.2 Strength, 15 SP]

'A week,' Raghav thought, his pace not faltering. 'That's not much time.'

After the laps, as the rest of the team, breathing heavily, went to the nets, Raghav jogging over to Coach Sarma.

"Sir?"

Sarma, clipboard in hand, turned. "What is it, Roi?"

"Sir, you're right. My fielding is weak. My throws are weak. Permission to do extra fielding drills instead of batting practice today?"

Sarma's eyebrows shot up. He stared at Raghav for a long, silent moment. This, he had not expected. The boy who had just won them a match, the only batsman who looked competent, was asking to skip the "fun" part to work on his biggest weakness.

"Permission granted," Sarma said, a rare flicker of approval in his eyes.

"Gourav!"

Gourav, the lanky senior fast bowler, jogged over. "Yes, Coach?"

"Take this bat." Sarma pointed to Raghav. "Hit catches for Roi for the next thirty minutes. High ones. Flat ones. Make his hands sting. I want to see effort."

Gourav, who now looked at Raghav with a grudging respect, broke into a wide grin. He was suddenly very excited by the prospect of peppering the team's new star.

"Yes, Coach!"

For the next half-hour, Raghav was in his own personal hell. His Fielding: 8 stat was on full, painful display.

"High ball!" Gourav would yell, sending a ball soaring into the afternoon sky, a tiny white dot against the blue.

Raghav, his IQ: 27 calculating the trajectory, ran. But his legs were slow. He misjudged the first one completely, the ball landing ten feet behind him with a thud.

"Sloppy, Roi!" Sarma yelled from the nets.

"Again!" Gourav smashed another.

Raghav ran, got under it... but his hands were "hard." The ball hit his palms and popped out.

[Quest Progress: High Catches 1/100]

"Again!"

His hands were already red and stinging. He fumbled. He dropped. But he kept running, his Stamina: 17.3 ensuring he didn't tire.

Then came the flat catches. Gourav stood 20 yards away, hitting hard Drives and Cut Shots straight at him.

THWACK!

The first one was too fast. Raghav barely got a hand on it, deflecting it off his shin. Pain shot up his leg.

THWACK!

The second he managed to get his body behind, blocking it with his chest.

THWACK!

The third one, he finally held. His hands screamed in protest.

[Quest Progress: Flat Catches 6/100]

He was covered in dirt and sweat, his hands bright red and throbbing, when Coach Sarma finally blew his whistle.



"Alright, bring it in! Listen up!"

The team, tired from the nets, gathered around.

"Practice is over. Now, for the bad news." The coach's face was grim.

"The Zonal committee has released the schedule for the quarter-finals. We're playing in four days. Tuesday."

He paused, letting the tension build.

"Our opponent... is St. Louis School."

A collective, audible groan went through the entire team. Even Vikram, the captain, looked pale.

"SLS?" Gourav said, his voice cracking. "Coach, they're the zonal favorites! They won the final last year!"

"Their captain, Ajay Varma, is on the district U-14 team," another senior added, his voice shaking.

"And their fast bowler... Thomas. He's a demon. I heard he's already bowling over 40 km/h."

To a group of 12 and 13-year-olds, that was the stuff of nightmares. A 40 km/h bowler wasn't just fast; he was dangerous.

Coach Sarma let the fear hang in the air for a moment before cutting through it.

"They are good. They are arrogant. And they are expecting to walk all over us. They won't be expecting a fight."

He turned and his eyes locked onto Raghav, who was standing at the back, nursing his stinging hands.

"Roi."

"Yes, Coach."

"Their bowler, Thomas, is fast. Faster than anyone you've ever faced. He's not just going to try and get you out. He's going to try and scare you. He's going to try and hurt you."

The coach walked right up to him, his voice dropping.

"I don't care if you score one run or fifty. Your job is the same as before. You are the wall. You will stand there, you will take the hits, and you will not get out. Do you understand me?"

Raghav, his Batting: 14 feeling hopelessly small against a 40 km/h bowler, just nodded. His mind was clear.

"Yes, Coach. I understand."

As the team dispersed, shaken and quiet, Raghav stayed behind. He picked up the bucket of balls. He walked 30 yards away from a single stump.

[Quest Progress: Direct Hits 0/50].

He took his stance, his arm aching, his hands on fire and he threw.

The ball sailed five feet wide.

He sighed, walking to retrieve it and today practice was real, and the clock was ticking, yet his progress is only little.

(To be Continued)

## **Chapter 19: SVS v/s SLS [1]**

Chapter 19: SVS v/s SLS [1]

Match day.

The bus ride to the St. Louis ground was suffocatingly silent. Even Vikram, the usually boisterous captain, was pale, nervously tapping his pads.

The St. Louis ground was another world. It was a proper cricket ground, with a small pavilion, green grass, and a manicured pitch.

The SLS team, already warming up, looked less like a school team and more like a junior state squad. They were bigger, more athletic, and wore expensive, matching kits.

Their captain, Ajay Varma, had the confident swagger of someone who had never lost. And then there was Thomas.

He was at least six feet tall, with the broad shoulders of a man. He was bowling in the practice nets, and the sound of the ball hitting the keeper's gloves was a series of sharp, painful cracks that echoed across the field.

Gourav, Raghav's own team's fast bowler, swallowed nervously. "He... he's even faster in person."

Coach Sarma gathered his team. "Look at them," he said, his voice low and intense. "They're already celebrating....they don't respect you. They don't think you deserve to be on the same field. Good. Let them be arrogant. We will be disciplined. We will fight for every single run. We will make them earn this."

---

Vikram walked out for the toss with Ajay. Coach Sarma stood with the umpires.

"Heads," Ajay called, spinning the coin himself without waiting.

The coin landed. Heads.

"We'll bowl," Ajay said with a smirk, looking at Vikram. "Let's finish this quickly. I have homework to do."

Vikram returned to the huddle, his face red with anger. "He's disrespecting us, Coach."

"Good," Sarma said. "Use it. Vikram. Rohan. You're up. See off Thomas. Your only job is to survive the first six overs."

Vikram and Rohan, the team's two best batsmen, walked out to the pitch.

The SLS team, led by Thomas, jogged onto the field. Their captain, Ajay, set a ferociously aggressive field. He had two Slips, a Gully, and a Short Leg. He was hunting.

Raghav, padded up as the #5, watched from the boundary. His heart was a cold, hard knot in his chest.

The umpire called "Play." Vikram took his stance. Thomas had the new ball.

Over 1 (Bowler: Thomas. Batsman: Vikram)

*[Ball 1.1]* Thomas began his long, powerful run-up. His action was smooth, powerful, and utterly menacing.

He unleashed his first ball. It was a vicious Bouncer, aimed right at Vikram's helmet. It was faster than anything Vikram had ever seen.

He barely managed to duck, the ball screaming past his face. It rocketed into the keeper's gloves, who was standing almost at the 30-yard circle.

Vikram was visibly terrified.

[Ball 1.2 ] Thomas, seeing the fear, followed up with the classic 1-2 punch. He pitched this one up, a full, in-swinging Yorker at 40 km/h. Vikram, his feet frozen and his mind still on the bouncer, was hopelessly late.

His bat was still in the air when the ball smashed into his stumps.

WICKET!

The Middle Stump was ripped out of the ground, cartwheeling towards the wicketkeeper.

**[Run: 0/1.]**

A dead silence fell over Raghav's team. The SLS players roared. Vikram walked off, his face ashen, not even looking at his teammates.

Suraj, the #3 batsman, looked like he was walking to his execution.

"Come on, Suraj! You can do this!" Rohan yelled from the non-striker's end, but his voice was trembling.

[Ball 1.3](Batsman: Suraj)

Thomas didn't let up. He delivered a fast Good Length ball, just outside the off-stump, that seamed away. Suraj, his feet frozen in place, poked at it nervously with a half-hearted Defensive Shot. It was a fatal mistake.

WICKET!

A thick outside edge and the ball flew fast and low to the Second Slip fielder, who took a sharp, easy catch.

[Score: 0/2.]

Raghav felt sick. Two wickets in three balls. A "King Pair" for Suraj (out first ball).

Rakesh, the #4, walked out, his knees visibly knocking.

[Ball 1.4](Batsman: Rakesh)

Thomas delivered a fast, Short Length ball that jagged back and hit Rakesh high on the thigh pad. A painful, stinging blow that made Rakesh cry out.

[Ball 1.5 ] Another brutal Bouncer. Rakesh didn't even try to duck; he just fell onto his backside, shielding his face.

The SLS team laughed out loud.

[ Ball 1.6 ]A Full Length ball. Rakesh, desperate, just jammed his bat down, blocking it.

End of Over.

**[Score: 0/2. ]**

A double-wicket maiden. It was a catastrophe.

Rohan and Rakesh tried to survive.

The other SLS bowler, a tidy off-spinner, kept the pressure on. Rakesh, knowing he couldn't survive

Thomas's next over, tried to hit the spinner. He charged down the pitch for a wild Slog Sweep.

WICKET!

He missed the ball completely. The wicketkeeper, sharp as a razor, whipped off the bails. Stumped.

Score: 12/3. It was the 4th over.

**[Run 12/3]**

"Roi! You're in!" Coach Sarma yelled.

Raghav picked up his bat. His hands were clammy. He walked past Rakesh, who wouldn't meet his eyes. The entire SLS team closed in.

"Look, it's the baby," Thomas said from his position at Mid-Off.

"This one's going to cry."

Raghav didn't look at him. He walked to the crease, his IQ: 27 assessing the field. The captain, Ajay, brought in a Silly Point and kept his two Slips and Gully. It was a field designed for intimidation.

Rohan, the last recognized batsman, met him in the middle of the pitch.

"Raghav... he's... he's too fast. I'm not kidding. Don't even try to hit him. Just... just try to survive. Please."

Raghav nodded, his mouth dry. He took his stance. He was on strike. Thomas had the ball.

Over 5 (Bowler: Thomas. Batsman: Raghav)

[*Ball 5.1*] Thomas let out a roar as he ran in. He unleashed a blistering Bouncer, aimed straight at Raghav's grille. Raghav read the length instantly but he didn't panic. He just Ducked.

The ball thudded into the keeper's gloves, a sound like a gunshot. "One for your head, baby!" Thomas snarled..

[*Ball 5.2*] The follow-up. An out-swinging Yorker, trying to catch him deep in his crease.

Raghav, with his Batting skill and techniques he just managed to get his bat down. The ball took the outside edge... but Raghav's Batting Technique meant he played with "soft hands."

The ball didn't fly. It died instantly, dropping into the grass, landing just inches short of the diving Gully fielder. A gasp from the SLS team. Raghav's heart was pounding.

[*Ball 5.3*] Thomas was furious. He delivered a fast, Good Length ball, angling into Raghav's ribs. Raghav's body moved, presenting a straight bat. A perfect Defensive Shot.

THWACK!

The impact was brutal. Pain shot up Raghav's arms, vibrating the bat handle so hard it numbed his fingers.

His strength was barely enough to hold on but he held on. The ball dropped dead.

[*Ball 5.4*] Thomas glared, breathing heavily. Another Bouncer, even faster this time. Raghav, expecting it, calmly swayed back, letting it pass over his left shoulder. He didn't flinch.

[*Ball 5.5*] "Hit the stumps, you idiot!" the SLS captain yelled.

Thomas, blinded by rage, went for a Full Length ball, straight and fast, trying to blast him out.

Raghav was ready. He met it with another perfect, straight-bat Defensive Shot. The middle of his bat. The ball stopped.

[Ball 5.6]. Thomas let out a scream of pure frustration. He charged in and bowled his fastest delivery yet, a Short Length ball that didn't bounce as high as he expected.

Raghav rocked onto his back foot and, with his strength punched the ball firmly into the ground.

Maiden Over.

oo

Raghav had survived. The SLS team's taunts died in their throats.

Thomas walked back to his fielding position, glaring daggers at the small 12-year-old who had defied him.

"Good batting, Raghav!" Rohan yelled, his voice full of new-found hope.

Raghav just nodded, his hands stinging so badly he had to secretly shake them.

The innings became a painful crawl. Raghav was the wall, Rohan the occasional scorer and they pushed the score to 35.

But Rohan, trying to farm the strike, pushed for a risky single.

WICKET!

A direct hit from the Point fielder. Rohan was out for 9.

Score: 35/4.

The rest of the batting order collapsed. It was a procession. The tail-enders were terrified of Thomas and incompetent against the spinner.

40/5... 42/6... 51/7.

Raghav, meanwhile, was in his own world. He blocked Thomas. He blocked the spinner. He took the rare single when it was offered. He was a barnacle, refusing to be removed.

Finally, in the 19th over, with the score at a pathetic 89/9, Raghav was on strike. He knew this was the last over. He had to score.

The bowler was the off-spinner.

[Ball 19.1 ] A flighted ball. Raghav charged down the pitch and hit a clean On-Drive over the Mid-On fielder's head. One bounce, Four.

**[Score: 93/9. Raghav: 26.\*]**

*[Ball 19.2 ]* The spinner, nervous, dropped it Short. Raghav rocked back and played a Cut Shot for two.

**[Score: 95/9. Raghav: 28.\* ]**

**[Ball 19.3 ]** He took a single.

Score: 96/9. Raghav: 29.\*

The #11 batsman, terrified, somehow survived the remaining three balls.

End of Innings. **Score: 96/9.**

Raghav was left 29 Not Out. He was the only batsman to reach double figures.

As he walked off, the SLS team gave him a scattered, reluctant applause.

Thomas just glared. Raghav's own team was silent. 96 runs. They had to defend 97.

"We're going to lose," a senior muttered.

Coach Sarma met them at the boundary.

"96. It's not a big score but it's a score and we are still in the game. Thomas and their captain are arrogant. They'll be overconfident."

He looked at his team, his eyes burning.

"This means we have one chance. No misfields. No dropped catches. You give them nothing. Gourav, I want you to bowl faster than you have ever bowled in your life. Attack."

He then looked at Raghav, who was nursing his throbbing hands.

"Roi. You're fielding in the long off side. That's where the edges from Thomas's friends shots will go. I want you to be ready."

Raghav nodded but his fielding stats felt tiny, but his quest progress was fresh in his mind. He was more prepared than he was a week ago..

The Juggernaut's openers, Ajay (the captain) and another confident-looking boy, walked out, laughing and joking.



They needed 97 and they expected to get it in 10 overs. The fight for survival was about to begin.

(To be Continued)

## **Chapter 20: SVS v/s SLS [2]**

### Chapter 20: SVS v/s SLS [2]

The ten-minute change-over was the quietest the The ten minutes change-over was the silence Raghav had never known. His team walked out of the field, the paltry 96 runs weighing upon them like death penalty.

They were sitting in the dusty grass, and did not make eye-contact, and the silence of their own dugout was a sharp contrast to the loud and confident laughter of the St. Louis School Cricket club.

His still-pale face still flushed with his dismissal on his first ball, Vikram threw his gloves on his kit bag.

"It's over. That Thomas... he's not a boy. He's a machine."

"He's right," muttered Suraj, the #3 batsman, who had also been dismissed by Thomas. "We scored 96. They'll get that in ten overs. What's the point?"

Raghav sat quietly, his hands throbbing and the pain from facing Thomas's 50 km/h bowling was a deep, bone-rattling ache. His 29 not-out felt hollow. It wasn't a score; it was just the number of times he'd survived.

"So that's it?"

Coach Sarma's voice cut through the despair. It wasn't loud, but it was sharp as glass. The team looked up.

"You're giving up? Because a rich kid in a fancy uniform can bowl fast?"

He paced in front of them, his eyes scanning each boy.

"I'll be honest with you. 96 is a terrible score. On paper, we have a ten percent chance. Maybe five. We cannot win this match if they play proper, disciplined cricket."

He stopped and crouched, grabbing a handful of dust..

"But they won't."

He let the dust sift through his fingers. "Look at them."

He nodded towards the SLS openers, who were laughing with their teammates, not even properly padded up. "They are arrogant. They think this match is already over. They think you are a joke. An arrogant batsman hates to be told 'no.' He will try to hit his way out. He will be reckless. He will give you one chance. Maybe two."

Sarma's gaze became iron.

"Our only path to victory is to take that chance. No dropped catches. No misfields. Not a single one. Every ball, you field as if your life depends on it. You will dive for everything. You will back up every throw. You will make them bleed for every single one of these 97 runs."

He stood up and began assigning positions.

"Gourav. You're our fastest. You saw Thomas. You saw what real pace looks like. I want you to bowl faster than you have ever bowled in your life. Forget about line, forget about length. I want you to hurt them. I want you to scare them....Attack."

Gourav, who had been staring at the ground, looked up, a flicker of competitive fire in his eyes.

"Vikram, Cover. Rohan, Mid-Off. I want my best fielders to save the singles."

Then, he looked at Raghav. "Roi."

Raghav stood up.

"You're in the Gully position."

A few of the seniors looked up, surprised. The Gully was a specialist's position. It was for catches that came off the edge, catches that were fast, hard, and often unexpected. It was a position for the quick and the brave.

It was not a position for a 12-year-old with famously weak fielding.

Raghav's heart hammered. His Fielding: 8 was a joke. He was being put in the line of fire.

'He's sacrificing me,' a part of his mind thought.

But his 42-year-old self knew better. 'No. He knows my knowledge. I know my reaction time is my only asset. He's not putting me there to stop runs. He's putting me there to take that one chance.'

Raghav thought of his incomplete fielding quest.

The hundreds of catches he'd taken in practice over the last week. His hands, still raw and aching, suddenly felt a little more ready.

"Yes, Coach," Raghav said, his voice steady.

The SLS openers, Captain Ajay and another confident-looking boy, walked out, laughing and joking with each other. They needed 97. They looked like they were out for a light jog.

Raghav's team took the field. The atmosphere was grim. They were going through the motions, a team marching to its execution.

Gourav stood at the top of his run-up, the new ball in his hand. He looked at Ajay, who was casually taking his stance, smirking. Gourav was nervous. His hands were sweating.

The umpire called "Play."

=====

Over 1 (Bowler: Gourav. Batsman: Ajay)

[ Ball 1.1 ]Gourav, full of nervous energy, ran in too fast. He tried to bowl like Thomas and lost his line. It was a fast Full Length ball, but way down the leg side. A Wide. The match began with an extra.

Score: 1/0.

[Ball 1.1 ](Redelivered): Gourav, rattled, bowled again. A simple Good Length ball. Ajay, with disdain, just blocked it.

[Ball 1.2 ]Gourav, angry at himself, dug this one in Short. Ajay saw it early, rocked back, and smashed a Pull Shot in front of square. The ball rocketed to the boundary. Four.

Score: 5/0.

[Ball 1.3 ] Another Good Length ball. Ajay, his arrogance now through the roof, played a booming, flashy Cover Drive. He didn't time it perfectly. The ball went in the air, but safely over Vikram's head at Cover. They ran two.

**Score: 7/0.**

It was exactly what Coach Sarma had predicted. Reckless. Arrogant.

[Ball 1.4 ] Gourav was breathing heavily, his confidence shattering. He bowled another Full Length ball. Ajay defended it.

[Ball 1.5] Gourav, trying to find his rhythm, bowled a faster ball, angling in. It hit Ajay's pad.

"How's that!" Gourav screamed, more in desperation than hope. The umpire shook his head.

[Ball 1.6 ] A simple defensive block.

End of Over. [**Score: 7/0**].

Seven runs from the first over. The SLS team was already clapping. It felt like the match was slipping away.

"It's okay, Gourav! Good pace!" Raghav yelled from the Gully, but his voice was thin.

Coach Sarma made a decision. He signaled to the umpire.

He was changing the bowling. He was bringing on Prakash, the team's off-spinner.

It was a brilliant tactical move. After facing Gourav's pace, the batsman would have to adjust.

Over 2 (Bowler: Prakash. Batsman: Opener #2)

The other opener, just as arrogant, was on strike. He saw the spinner and his eyes lit up. He clearly intended to end this match himself.

[Ball 2.1 ] Prakash tossed up a lovely, flighted Off-Break. It looped in the air, inviting the big shot.

The batsman's eyes went wide. He charged down the pitch, his feet a clumsy mess, aiming a wild Slog over Long-On. This was the arrogance Sarma had talked about.

He swung for the fences... and completely mis-timed it.

The ball hit the bottom of the bat, skying high into the air. It was a simple, towering catch.

Rohan, at Mid-Off, settled under it. The entire team held its breath. The ball came down... down...

**WICKET!**

Rohan caught it!.

**Score: 7/1!**

A stunned silence fell over the SLS dugout. A wild, desperate roar erupted from Raghav's team. It was a chance. It was a spark. The third batsman walked in, his face suddenly not so confident. He had seen his teammate throw his wicket away.

The #3 batsman safely played out the rest of the over.

Over 3 (Bowler: Gourav. Batsman: Ajay)

Gourav got the ball back. He was no longer nervous. He was furious. It had been a wicket that shocked him. He had now bowling pace, which adrenaline had given him. Ajay was back on strike.

[Ball 3.1] Gourav steamed in. A fast Good Length ball, just outside off-stump. Ajay, more cautious, played and missed.

[Ball 3.2] Gourav ran in again, his action powerful. He delivered another fast ball, same line, same length. It was a classic fast bowler's setup. The batsman, forced to play, had to poke at it.

SNICK!

A thick, fast outside edge.

Time stopped for Raghav.

It was coming to him. At Gully. And it was coming fast. Not a gentle lob. A rocket.

This wasn't a practice drill. This was real. His Fielding: 8 stat screamed impossible but he try to calculated the trajectory of the ball .

The hundreds of catches he'd taken in practice, his mind still fresh with the memory of his incomplete quest, had built a microsecond of pure muscle memory.

He didn't think so. He reacted.

He threw himself into a full-length, horizontal dive to his right. His body was parallel to the ground, his arm stretched out.

His right hand, still raw and aching from days of thankless practice, was his only hope.

SMACK!

The hard leather ball slammed into his palm with a sickening, painful thud. The impact was so hard it nearly ripped his hand from his wrist.

He crashed to the ground, his elbow and shoulder scraping hard against the unforgiving pitch. Pain, white-hot and blinding, shot up his arm.

But he held on.

He landed, rolling once, and instinctively brought his hand up, the ball held triumphantly in his grip.

For a second, the world was silent.

Then, an explosion.

**WICKET!**

His entire team, the coach on the boundary, the spectators, were in stunned disbelief before erupting.

"HE CAUGHT IT!" Vikram screamed from Cover, his own failure forgotten.

Gourav, his eyes wide with pure adoration, ran over and pulled Raghav up, hugging him so hard he lifted him off his feet.

"WHAT A CATCH, KID! WHAT A CATCH!"

**Score: 10/2!**

Raghav, his hand throbbing so badly he was sure it was broken, just smiled, his heart pounding with adrenaline.

In the SLS dugout, Thomas, who was padded up to come in at #4, slowly stood up, a look of pure shock on his face.

Raghav got back into his position, the pain in his hand a dull, roaring fire.

'97 runs,' he thought, the number no longer seeming so small. 'Maybe... just maybe...'

The momentum had shifted because those so called Juggernaut were in tensed situation.

(To be Continued)