

Cricket 114

Chapter 114

As I walked through the university, Mr. John guided me around, showing me the key areas—classrooms, labs, business study rooms, the toppers' room, the grand auditorium, and other important spots. The campus was impressive, blending modern facilities with an academic atmosphere that made me eager for this new journey.

Finally, he led me to the cafeteria. "This is where students spend a lot of time," he said with a chuckle. "And with that, my tour ends here, Mr. Aarav. I wish you the best for your future."

"Thank you, Mr. John. I appreciate the help," I said, shaking his hand.

He nodded and walked off, leaving me to explore on my own. Feeling a bit hungry, I used my student ID card to grab a green salad from the cafeteria counter and found a quiet spot to sit.

As I started eating, a group of boys approached my table. One of them hesitated for a moment before speaking up.

"Hey... are you Aarav Pathak?"

I looked up and nodded. "Yeah, that's me."

Their faces lit up. "We know you! We saw your match against West Indies! And even in the IPL—we're huge RCB fans!" one of them said excitedly.

"Man, you were amazing," another added.

I smiled, appreciating their enthusiasm. "Thanks, that means a lot."

Then one of them hesitated before asking, "So... we run a cricket YouTube channel, and we were wondering... would you play a small match with us? We'd love to record it for our channel!"

Before I could even respond, they all started pleading, "Please, please, don't say no!"

I chuckled at their excitement. "Alright, fine. Let's do it."

Their cheers echoed through the cafeteria as they eagerly led me toward the ground.

As we reached the ground, I took a moment to look around. It was a decent-sized open field—not a professional stadium, but big enough for a proper game. A few players were already practicing, their bats cracking against the ball, while some students were setting up cameras around the field.

Alex noticed my curiosity and explained, "We use these cameras to record matches and upload them on YouTube. It helps us analyze the game and makes for some good content."

As we walked closer, I saw a small crowd gathering near the boundary—some were players, others just students eager to watch. It seemed like word had already spread about the match.

The moment we stepped onto the field, a group of boys rushed toward Alex. "Man, why are you late?" one of them asked impatiently.

Alex grinned and gestured toward me. "Because I met someone special. Check this out!"

Most of them looked at me with confusion, but two among the 15-16 people immediately recognized me. "Wait... is that—?" one of them whispered before his friend nudged him excitedly.

"Guys," Alex said with a dramatic pause, "meet Aarav Pathak—Team India's International player, a new upcoming Batting Allrounder for Team India!"

A wave of murmurs spread through the group, and I could see the excitement in their eyes. Some were surprised, while others looked at me with admiration.

One of them smirked. "Well, if he's here, we might as well make this interesting."

"Yeah," another chimed in, "let's see if we can take down a Team India player for our YouTube video!"

I chuckled, shaking my head. "Alright then, let's see what you've got."

And with that, the challenge was set.

I took the stance and played with this group of students. I played for around 13 overs, hitting some massive shots that sent the ball flying out of the field multiple times. Seven balls were lost in the process, as I effortlessly lofted them beyond the boundary. Throughout the game, I took moments to explain my shots, offering tips and insights on technique, shot selection, and footwork as they asked me on some tips. The students were eager to listen, soaking up every piece of advice like sponges.

Despite their best efforts, they couldn't get me out. Each delivery they bowled was met with precision—whether it was a stylish cover drive, a powerful pull shot, or a cheeky late cut. As the game went on, the excitement around the field grew.

The spectators, who had gathered near the ground, were thoroughly entertained. Some girls among the audience gasped and cheered whenever I hit a six, while others recorded the game on their phones. A group of male students clapped and shouted, hyping up the match with chants and cheers. "What a shot, Aarav! Insane timing!" one of them exclaimed.

Alex and his team were both amazed and frustrated. "Dude, we threw everything at him—pace, spin, even some tricky deliveries—and he's still standing like a rock!" one of them said, shaking his head in disbelief.

Another player, panting from all the running, laughed, "I don't think we're getting him out today. We should've just asked for an autograph instead of a match!"

The energy on the field was electrifying, and even the students who were just passing by stopped to watch. Some were whispering among themselves, pointing at me and discussing my recent performances in international cricket. and some who don't know me were asking others about me!

After the 13 overs, Alex finally called a break. "Alright, guys, I think that's enough for today. We've just witnessed a masterclass! This video is going to blow up on YouTube!"

I smiled, shaking hands with the players. "You all played well. Keep practicing, and who knows? Maybe one of you will be playing for your nation someday."

The group erupted into cheers, thrilled by the experience. As I walked off the field, I could still hear their excited chatter, and I knew this friendly game had left a lasting impression on them.

After the game, I went to a business meeting with a company. Although the company is Indian, its operations are based in London. They specialize in premium bags and are a startup founded just a year ago. Recently, they won the Best Design Award in London. Despite their excellent designs, they lacked

an effective marketing team, which hindered their ability to generate profits or even significant sales. The company is currently valued at 5 crore rupees, and all discussions had already taken place. My team, Astra, and I were there to finalize the acquisition. My team of lawyers was present to oversee and facilitate the signing of the deal.

The company is called Nadhi, founded by Naman and Nidhi. We had a structured meeting, and since all terms had been agreed upon beforehand, I proceeded with purchasing the entire company, including its staff, assets, designs, and intellectual property, for 7 crore rupees.

As I stepped into the conference room, the atmosphere was charged with anticipation. Naman and Nidhi sat across the table, their expressions a mix of excitement and nervousness. They had built this company from the ground up, and now, they were about to hand over control. The room was lined with legal documents, and my team of lawyers meticulously reviewed each clause to ensure a seamless transition.

"It's an emotional moment for us," Naman admitted. "We put our heart and soul into Nadhi, but we believe this is the right step for its future."

Nidhi nodded in agreement. "With Astra's resources, Nadhi can reach heights we never imagined."

I offered a reassuring smile. "I understand how much this means to you both. My goal isn't just to acquire Nadhi but to ensure it grows properly integrated into Astra."

After final confirmations, I signed the acquisition papers. With that final stroke of ink, Nadhi was now officially a part of Astra. A round of handshakes followed, and we stood up to toast to new beginnings. The legal formalities had been settled, and now, the real work of integrating Nadhi into Astra's ecosystem would begin.

The next day, I visited Nadhi's headquarters in London. Their office, though small, exuded creativity. The walls were lined with sketches of new bag designs, and prototypes sat neatly arranged on shelves. The design team was bustling with energy, unaware of how drastically things were about to change.

I gathered the employees in the main hall and introduced myself. "I know change can be daunting," I began. "But let me assure you, our vision is aligned. We want to take Nadhi global, and every single one of you is essential to making that happen."

The staff exchanged glances, some appearing relieved, others skeptical. A young designer named Riya raised her hand. "What changes can we expect?" she asked.

"For starters," I replied, "we're expanding. Our focus will be on Premium experience in packaging. We're also streamlining production. But most importantly, everyone here will have a role in shaping Nadhi's future as a part of Astra now."

By the end of the meeting, the initial apprehension had transformed into enthusiasm. The team was now looking forward to the new opportunities ahead.

The following weeks were intense. My team at Astra devised a comprehensive strategy to do proper R&D. We rebranded the company and made it completely integrated to Astra. New work culture was devised, and proper tools were provided to the staff for proper R&D and other requirements.

After finalizing the acquisition, it took me a week to complete all the necessary paperwork, legal formalities, and transitional processes. My team ensured that everything was smoothly integrated, and with that, my work in London was officially done.

Without any delay, I boarded plane back to India. The flight was long, but I spent most of the time either catching up on pending emails or simply resting. As the plane touched down at the airport, I chose to avoid the media and exited discreetly through a private terminal. My car was already waiting for me, and without any fuss, I drove straight home.

The moment I stepped into my house, a familiar sense of comfort washed over me. The exhaustion from the past few weeks finally caught up, and I allowed myself to unwind. I took a long shower, had a quiet meal, and collapsed into bed, sleeping soundly for the first time in what felt like ages.

For the next two days, I lived in complete relaxation mode—no meetings, no calls, no travel. My routine was simple: wake up, hit the gym, do some exercise, and then take the rest of the morning easy. Afternoons were spent lounging at home, enjoying time with family, catching up on their stories, and just being present. In the evenings, I indulged in some light snacks, had dinner with my loved ones, and then called it a night early.

These days of rest were much needed. They allowed me to reset, recharge, and prepare for what was coming next.

After taking a well-deserved break for a day, I shifted my focus back to work. The first thing on my schedule was an ad shoot. I had two major brand endorsements lined up—one for MRF and another for SnackUp.

MRF was a brand I had been associated with for some time, a name synonymous with high-performance tires and sports sponsorships. The other, SnackUp, held a special place in my heart. It wasn't just another endorsement deal; it was a company owned by my family—a project spearheaded by my father, built with a vision of providing healthy, nutritious snacks to the Indian market.

Unlike most snacks loaded with artificial preservatives, excessive salt, and unhealthy fats, SnackUp specialized in baked, wholesome alternatives. The brand's philosophy was simple: to make snacking guilt-free while retaining the delicious taste people love. Every product was carefully crafted to provide the perfect balance of nutrition and flavor, ensuring that people could enjoy a tasty snack without compromising their health.

The best part about this shoot? I was doing it alongside Deepika Padukone.

The moment I heard she would be part of the campaign, I knew this was going to be an exciting project. Deepika was not just a Bollywood superstar but also an icon of grace, fitness, and elegance. Her involvement in SnackUp's campaign would add a layer of credibility, as she was known for her disciplined lifestyle and fitness routine.

The shoot was scheduled for early morning at one of Mumbai's film studios owned by my family production houses. As I arrived on set, the place was already bustling with activity. Directors and assistants were running through scripts, makeup artists were preparing, and camera crews were setting up lighting and angles. The energy was infectious.

Deepika arrived shortly after, dressed casually but effortlessly stunning. She greeted everyone with her signature warm smile, and we exchanged pleasantries before heading into our respective makeup and wardrobe sessions.

The first shoot was for MRF. The concept was dynamic and action-packed—something that resonated with my personality. They wanted to capture my energy, speed, and precision, much like the brand itself. I had to perform a few cricket shots, striking the ball hard while cameras recorded in slow motion, making sure to highlight both my form and the brand logo on the bat.

"Alright, Aarav, we need one more perfect shot of you driving the ball straight down the ground," the director called out.

I nodded, adjusted my stance, and took my shot. The ball hit clean and true, whizzing past the cameras. The crew cheered, knowing we had gotten the perfect take.

After wrapping up the MRF shoot, I quickly changed into a more casual, lifestyle-focused outfit for the SnackUp commercial. This one was different—more fun, more relatable. The script was centered around healthy snacking, showcasing how even top athletes and celebrities like me and Deepika chose nutritious options in our daily lives.

The setup was a modern kitchen, designed to look like a stylish home. The director walked us through the scene.

"Aarav, you'll be standing here, casually enjoying a pack of SnackUp chips. Deepika, you enter, look at him, and playfully ask, 'Healthy snacking, huh?' Aarav, you'll flash a confident smile and say, 'Of course. Baked, healthy, and absolutely delicious. Want to try?' Then, you hand her a chip, and we capture a close-up of both of you enjoying it."

We ran through a few rehearsals before shooting began. Deepika was incredibly professional, and working with her was effortless. Between takes, we chatted about fitness, cricket, and films. She even

shared how her strict diet included occasional cheat days, where she allowed herself some indulgence—though she admitted she was looking forward to trying SnackUp's guilt-free treats.

As the cameras rolled, everything flowed naturally. The chemistry was great, and we managed to nail the shot within just a few takes. The final cut was smooth, engaging, and carried the right mix of authenticity and marketing appeal.

Once the shoot wrapped up, Deepika and I sat down for a casual chat while the crew packed up.

We took a few pictures for promotional content, and before leaving, I grabbed a few extra packs of SnackUp for myself. The shoot had been a great success, and I couldn't wait to see the final campaign go live.

As I left the studio and got into my car, I reflected on the day. From cricket to business to commercials, life was moving fast, and I was loving every second of it.