

Cricket 116

Chapter 116

I took a deep breath. The noise in Mohali was deafening—thousands of fans chanting, cheering, waving the tricolor. But in my head, everything was silent. The crowd, the voices, the pressure—it all faded into the background. Right now, there was only me, the pitch, and the batsman standing 22 yards away.

Reeza Hendricks adjusted his gloves, tapping his bat twice on the crease. I could see it in his stance—he was ready, but he wasn't expecting what was coming. My grip on the ball tightened. The system had enhanced my ability to bowl yorkers, and I could feel the difference. My fingers settled into position, my body naturally aligning for the perfect delivery.

I started my run-up—smooth, controlled, accelerating with each step. My heartbeat was steady, my breathing calm. As I reached my final stride, I put all my power into the release. My wrist snapped, the seam positioned precisely, and the ball left my hand like a bullet.

I watched it fly—fast, full, and straight. Hendricks barely had time to react. His bat came down late, but it was too late. The ball dipped at the last second, skidding in at a deadly angle, slamming into the base of middle stump.

THWACK!

The sound of timber rattling filled the stadium. Silence for a fraction of a second, and then—an explosion of noise.

I clenched my fists, let out a roar. My teammates charged towards me. Virat Bhaiya was the first to reach me, his arms open wide. The crowd was going wild.

One ball. One wicket. A dream start of the match.

Harsha Bhogle (English Commentary)

"Here he comes, Aarav steaming in... a smooth run-up, head still, eyes locked on the batsman... and what a ball! Absolute perfection! A rapid yorker, right at the base of middle stump! Hendricks is clean bowled! First ball! This is high-class fast bowling!"

"The way that ball tailed in—no swing, just pure pace and precision! Hendricks had no time to bring his bat down. That's a textbook yorker, something new fast bowlers should watch on repeat!"

"Aarav is pumped! The Mohali crowd is electric! And look at Virat Kohli—running straight to him, arms wide open! What a start for India!"

Navjot Singh Sidhu (Hinglish Commentary)

"Arre guru! Kya teer mara hai! Yeh toh uss patang jaisa tha jo hawa mein udne se pehle hi katega!"

"Ball itni tej aur itni niche lagi ki Hendricks ka bat sirf hawa mein hilta reh gaya! Bhai sahab, agar yeh goli thi toh batsman sirf nishana!"

"Pehli hi gend pe dukh-dard ka safar shuru! Arre yeh toh wohi baat ho gayi ki biryani samne ho, par chamach toot jaye! Khaane ka sapna reh gaya!"

"Aarav ne to aate hi dhamaaka kar diya! South Africa ka score abhi tak laga bhi nahi aur unka player pavillion chala gaya!"

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("Oh, my friend! What a shot! This was like that kite which will get cut even before it flies in the air!")

("The ball was so fast and so low that Hendricks' bat was just shaking in the air! My friend, if this was a bullet, the batsman was just the target!")

("The journey of pain and suffering started on the very first ball! This is like having biryani in front of you but the spoon breaks! The dream of eating remains unfulfilled!")

("Aarav made a blast as soon as he arrived! South Africa's score hadn't even started and their player was already heading to the pavilion!")

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The moment the stumps shattered, I let out a roar, pumping my fists as adrenaline surged through my veins. Virat Bhaiya sprinted towards me, his face lit up with excitement. Before I could even process it, my teammates had surrounded me—claps on my back, high-fives, and cheers of everyone."

Hardik jumped on my back, nearly knocking me over and congratulated me.

Rishabh Pant, meanwhile, was hyped up as ever. "Bhai, agar aise hi daalta raha na, toh main toh gloves utaar ke bas taali bajaane lagunga!"

("Bro, if he keeps delivering like this, I'll just take off my gloves and just start clapping!")

The stadium was shaking with the noise of "India! India!" My name echoed in chants from different stands. I took a deep breath, calming myself. One wicket down. Focus. Next ball.

As Reeza Hendricks walked back, disappointment all over his face, Temba Bavuma made his way to the crease. Short, stocky, but solid—he was known for his tight technique and patience. But today, I wasn't giving him any breathing space.

Virat Bhaiya adjusted the field. "Aarav, ab sab andr waali daal. Mat nikalne de!"

("Aarav, now keep all the ball inside. Don't let it out!")

I nodded. The plan was clear. Full inswingers, attacking the stumps. No room for a comfortable start.

I ran in, this time holding the ball with a slightly different grip—fingers tilted for a sharp inswing. I released it at full speed.

Bavuma planted his front foot forward, bat angled slightly, but the ball swung late—zipping past his edge and landing safely into Rishabh Pant's gloves.

"Oye" Rishabh grinned, throwing the ball back.

Second ball—same plan, but even fuller. Bavuma tried to play it late, but once again—SWISH!—no contact. Straight into Rishabh's gloves.

This continued for the next few deliveries. The crowd was getting involved now. Every time Bavuma missed, there was a collective "OHHH!" from the stands.

Rishabh was having too much fun. After one particular ball, he turned to Bavuma with a cheeky grin. "Bro, are you playing some other game? Are you watching the ball or just feeling the breeze?"

Even Virat Bhaiya couldn't help but laugh. He clapped his hands, shouting, "common-Boys, common-common."

It felt less like a cricket match and more like a catching contest between me and Rishabh. Bavuma had survived so far, but he was completely on the back foot. I could sense it—his confidence was shaking. One more perfect delivery, and he was gone.

Harsha Bhogle: "Oh, this is absolutely top-quality fast bowling! Aarav has the ball talking! Every delivery is angling in sharply, and Bavuma looks completely clueless!"

"Look at the way the ball is zipping past the outside edge! Rishabh Pant has taken more catches in the last two minutes than some wicketkeepers take in an entire match!"

Navjot Singh Sidhu:

"Is Rishabh Pant and Aarav doing catching practice in a match? South Africa is confused now—do they play the ball or just get their names written down?"

The match had only just begun, but we had already turned it into a high-pressure situation for South Africa. Now, it was just a matter of time before the next breakthrough came.

As Deepak Chahar prepared to bowl the second over, Virat Bhaiya adjusted the field, ensuring tight angles for both De Kock and Bavuma. The atmosphere in Mohali was electric, with the crowd buzzing after my wicket in the first over.

Deepak ran in, smooth and composed, delivering the first ball. De Kock, ever the aggressive batter, watched it closely and defended it back to the bowler.

The second ball was on a length outside off. De Kock leaned into it, driving, but found the fielder at cover.

Then came the moment of brilliance. Third ball—full, slightly outside off. De Kock's eyes lit up. He got forward, drove elegantly through the covers, and the timing was pure perfection. The ball raced through the gap like a tracer bullet. The crowd erupted in appreciation.

Harsha Bhogle (Commentary):

"Oh, what a shot! That is absolute class from Quinton de Kock! The balance, the precision—just a mere push, and it sped away through covers! Textbook stuff!"

Deepak shook his head, took a deep breath, and walked back to his mark. Fourth ball—good length, swinging in, and De Kock could only push it to mid-wicket for no run.

Then came the fifth delivery—a perfectly executed yorker! The ball dipped right at De Kock's toes, forcing him to jam his bat down in time. A well-defended shot, but he still managed to squeeze out a single towards square leg.

Bavuma was back on strike for the last ball of the over. Deepak went full and straight. Bavuma, still struggling, could only block it.

End of the over. A solid start by Deepak, except for that one stunning four by De Kock. But the pressure was still on South Africa.

The energy in the Mohali stadium was electrifying as I marked my run-up for my second over and match's third. The crowd was chanting my name, "Aarav! Aarav!" as I got ready to bowl to Quinton de Kock. The field was set, and Virat Bhaiya gave me a nod of encouragement. I took a deep breath, focused on my target, and charged in.

Ball 1: I went for an in-swinging delivery, aiming for the stumps. De Kock was watchful and defended it solidly with a straight bat. The ball rolled back towards me, and I quickly picked it up, walking back to my mark. A dot ball to start the over. The crowd clapped in appreciation, their excitement growing with each delivery.

Ball 2: This time, I switched it up, delivering a beautiful outswinger. De Kock tried to push it towards covers but got a slight nick. The ball trickled past point, and they took a quick single. Not a major breakthrough, but I had him feeling for the ball.

Before the third ball, I jogged towards Virat Bhaiya. "Virat Bhaiya, let's add another slip. The ball is moving well, and Bavuma might edge one soon as he is not looking good. he had played so many dot balls and would be under immense pressure!"

He nodded. "Good thinking. Pandey, move into second slip."

Manish Pandey moved into position. The field was now aggressive, two slips, a gully, and a packed off-side cordon. I got back to my mark. The pressure was mounting on South Africa. I could feel the tension in the air, the anticipation from the crowd, and the determination in my teammates' eyes.

Ball 3: I ran in hard, delivered a sharp, full-length delivery at Bavuma's pads. He tried to flick it but mistimed it horribly. The ball took the inside edge and flew towards second slip. Manish Pandey dived forward, hands safe as ever, and grabbed it cleanly.

OUT!

I let out a loud roar, pumping my fists, sprinting towards Manish, who was already jumping in excitement. Virat Bhaiya ran in and pulled me into a tight hug. The entire team gathered, slapping my back, ruffling my hair, shouting in celebration.

"What a ball, Aarav!" Rohit said, shaking me by the shoulders.

The crowd erupted, chanting " India! India! Aarav! Aarav! " The energy was infectious. This was the dream moment every bowler lives for—getting a key wicket in front of a roaring crowd.

Harsha Bhogle:

"Oh, what a ball! What a setup! This young man, Aarav, showed immense cricketing intelligence. He brought in the second slip, adjusted the field, and delivered an absolute gem of a delivery! Bavuma had no answer to it. The inside edge, the catch taken so cleanly by Manish Pandey, and India strike again! This is high-quality pace bowling!"

Navjot Singh Sidhu:

"Aaj to Mohali ka maidan ek dangal ban gaya hai! (Mohali has turned into a battlefield today!) Yeh ladka aag hai, bilkul aag! Bavuma ko chhoda nahi, bas ek jhatke mein nipta diya! (This boy is fire! He didn't spare Bavuma, finished him off in one stroke!) Arre bhai, gilli chhoti ho ya badi, jab hawa mein ude toh fiza badal jaye! (Whether the balls are small or big, when they fly in the air, the atmosphere changes!)"

As the dust settled, Rassie van der Dussen walked in, adjusting his gloves, looking determined. The game was still wide open, and I wasn't done yet.

Ball 4: Van der Dussen was cautious, but he got off the mark with a quick single towards square leg. The strike was back to De Kock. I took a moment, adjusting my sleeve, keeping my focus sharp. There was no room for complacency.

Ball 5: I went full and straight again. De Kock, ever the experienced batter, defended it with ease. Another dot ball. I stared him down, giving him a subtle message that I wasn't going to make it easy for him. The intensity in my eyes met his, and for a moment, we both knew the battle was just getting started.

Ball 6: I finished the over with another sharp delivery at off-stump. De Kock tapped it towards point and ran for a single. I turned back, looking at my captain, who gave me a satisfied nod.

End of the over. Another success. The pressure was mounting on South Africa. Mohali was alive, the noise deafening, the atmosphere electric, and the night was just beginning.

Deepak Chahar took the next over. He was accurate, keeping things tight. There was two stunning four from De Kock—an exquisite cover drive, threading the gap perfectly and a flick. But Chahar struck back with a well-executed short ball, forcing De Kock to play a pull close to body! but it was one run as there was no fielder in that area due to power play.

The middle overs saw Hardik, Krunal, Sundar, and Jadeja stepping in to take control. The pitch was slowing down, and the spinners were doing their job effectively.

Washington Sundar was particularly economical, conceding only 19 runs in his three overs, keeping the pressure on the South African batters. Krunal and Jadeja also contributed by picking up a wicket each.

However, amidst the tight bowling, Quinton de Kock remained unfazed. He was still standing tall, anchoring South Africa's innings.

In the 12th over, Jadeja came into bowl. He flighted one outside off-stump, inviting de Kock to go after it. De Kock, with his sharp cricketing brain, waited for the ball and executed a late cut.

The ball shot off his bat like a bullet, racing towards the third-man boundary. The problem? There was no fielder there!

I, Aarav, was stationed near point but saw the ball screaming past the inner circle. Instinct took over. Without a second thought, I sprinted towards the ball, covering the ground rapidly.

As I reached the ball's trajectory, I dived full stretch, my fingers brushing against the leather. But the ball slipped past me!

I wasn't done yet. In mid-air, I twisted my body, stretched out my right hand, and—somehow—managed to get a firm grip on the ball, stopping it inches before the boundary rope!

The crowd gasped, then erupted in applause. Two crucial runs were saved for the team.

I lay on the ground for a second, catching my breath. Then, I pushed myself up and threw the ball back into play.

Virat (grinning, patting my back): "Aarav, that was INSANE! You just saved two crucial runs. Brilliant commitment!"

Hardik (shaking his head): Bro, you were flying across the ground at jet speed! Next time, bring wings!

Sundar (grinning): Should we call the fielding coach? We need to get you a promotion!

The team huddled around, giving me high-fives and pats on the back. It felt great to be appreciated. More importantly, it felt incredible to contribute to the team's cause.

The battle was still on, and every small effort counted.