

Cricket 117

Chapter 117

The floodlights at the Mohali stadium burned brightly as the match entered its final phase. South Africa was struggling at 132/5, and the weight of their innings rested heavily on the shoulders of Quinton de Kock and David Miller. The crowd was still electric, voices ringing through the air, a mixture of anticipation and excitement. I could feel the pulse of the game, the pressure mounting with every passing second.

Before the match, during our team meeting, I was assigned the role of a depth bowler. It was a responsibility I had embraced wholeheartedly. Now, in the 17th over, it was time to deliver. As I took my mark, the ball felt firm in my grip, the sweat on my palms making it slightly sticky. De Kock was on strike. He had been playing a measured innings, stabilizing South Africa's sinking ship with 47 runs off 43 balls. A steady batter, no doubt, but I was ready.

I took a deep breath, adjusted my field, and ran in for the first delivery.

The moment I released the ball, I knew it wasn't my best. It was a bit outside off, short of a good length. De Kock went for a tentative poke, and the ball found the edge of his bat. My heart leaped for a second. But to my dismay, there was no fielder stationed at third man. The ball sped past, racing to the boundary ropes. Four runs. De Kock simply raised his bat, acknowledging the applause from his teammates.

I clenched my jaw, determined to make a comeback on the next ball. The field was adjusted, bringing in a finer third man just in case. I wiped my brow, took another deep breath, and ran in again.

This time, I targeted his pads with a full, swinging delivery. De Kock missed his flick, and the ball struck him flush on the front pad. A massive appeal erupted from the entire Indian team.

"HOWZAAAAAAT?!"

The umpire took a moment but then raised his finger. OUT!

The stadium roared. I pumped my fists and let out a triumphant yell. De Kock, however, was not convinced. He immediately signaled for a review. The crowd hushed as the big screen displayed the replay. The ball tracking loaded, the red line showed impact in line with the stumps, and... it was hitting! The decision stood. De Kock was OUT!

Our team exploded in celebration. Virat ran towards me, slapping my back with enthusiasm. Hardik lifted me slightly off the ground in excitement. Jadeja joined in, ruffling my hair playfully.

"Brilliant delivery, Aarav!" Virat grinned.

"Exactly what we needed right now!" Rohit chimed in.

I could hear the crowd chanting again, their energy surging through my veins. De Kock, disappointed, shook his head as he walked back to the pavilion. His wicket was a massive breakthrough. South Africa was now 136/6.

The new batsman, Dwaine Pretorius, walked in, his face calm but focused. I knew I had to keep the pressure on.

I ran in for the third ball, maintaining my rhythm. This time, I pitched it slightly back of a length. Pretorius played it cautiously, nudging it towards mid-wicket for a single. The ball was back in my hands. Now, David Miller was on strike.

Miller had been relatively quiet, but he was known for his explosive batting when needed, as a only clutch player of South Africa. I needed to be precise. I took a deep breath and let it rip. The ball was full, angling towards off-stump. Miller read it well and slammed it through the leg side. The ball raced towards deep mid-wicket, and they ran hard, squeezing two runs out of it.

"Stay sharp, boys!" Virat called out, urging everyone to keep up the intensity.

I nodded, ready for my next move. The fifth ball was on its way. This time, I bowled it slightly slower, angling in towards middle stump. Miller played it gently towards covers and jogged for a single.

One ball remained in the over. Pretorius was back on strike. I decided to go for a well-disguised slower ball. I gripped the ball differently, keeping my wrist relaxed as I ran in. The ball dipped in towards off-stump, and Pretorius, expecting a faster delivery, was caught off guard. He mistimed his shot completely. The ball rolled harmlessly towards the off-side, and it was a dot ball.

End of the over.

I exhaled, feeling the satisfaction of a job well done. One big wicket, only eight runs conceded. I walked back to my position, feeling the energy of my teammates around me.

Jadeja jogged over, grinning. "Aarav, that LBW was a beauty!"

Hardik chuckled. "Yeah, man. You're making a habit of taking big wickets at the right time."

I smiled, adjusting my cap and Just laugh.

I nodded. The match wasn't over yet, but we had taken a crucial step. The pressure was all on South Africa now. The Mohali crowd continued to roar, and I could feel the momentum shifting in our favor.

The atmosphere was electric, and my heart was pounding with excitement. As the next bowler prepared to take over, I watched closely, analyzing every move. Every single delivery from here on out would matter. We were in the final stretch, and South Africa had to fight for every run. I clenched my fists, determined to give my best until the very last ball.

With the game hanging in the balance, the pressure was mounting on the Proteas. Miller and Pretorius exchanged a few words in the middle, strategizing their next moves. I could see the determination in their eyes, but we had the upper hand. One more breakthrough, and we could wrap this innings up quickly.

The 18th over was handed to Deepak. The ball was in his hand, and Miller was on strike. Everyone knew that Miller could be deadly in the final overs, and we needed to contain him.

Deepak ran in for the first ball. Miller read it early and smashed it past cover for a four. The crowd cheered, but we stayed focused.

The second ball—pitched slightly short—Miller pulled it away for a quick two runs. He was looking confident now.

The third ball was the most dangerous of all. Deepak delivered a short-pitched delivery, and Miller swung hard. The ball took off and sailed high over the third man boundary. Six runs! The South African dugout erupted in applause, and Miller raised his bat, acknowledging his teammates.

Deepak took a moment, adjusting his line. He came in again for the fourth ball. This time, he kept it full and straight. Miller tapped it down to long-off for a single.

Pretorius was now on strike. Deepak adjusted his field, knowing Pretorius was not as aggressive as Miller. The fifth ball was a length delivery, and Pretorius played it defensively. Dot ball.

On the final delivery of the over, Pretorius attempted to sneak a single, but Miller quickly rejected the run, wanting to keep the strike for the next over. Pretorius hesitated but returned to his crease just in time.

End of the 18th over. South Africa had gained momentum, but we still had a chance to fight back in the last two overs.

South Africa is Currently 153/6

The stadium buzzed with energy as I prepared to bowl the second-last over of the match—my final over. South Africa was struggling at 153/6, and Miller, their last hope for a competitive total, was on strike. He had refused singles in the previous over, making it clear that he wanted to keep the strike and finish the innings with a flourish. Knowing this, Virat bhaiya and I carefully set up the field. We placed five fielders inside the circle while ensuring coverage in the deep—long-on, long-off, third man, and deep point. It was a field that left some gaps but encouraged an attacking approach.

I took a deep breath, adjusted my grip, and ran in to deliver the first ball.

The first delivery was a short-length, fast-paced ball. Miller anticipated it, moved slightly across, and executed a powerful pull shot. The ball rocketed to the boundary for four. The South African dugout cheered, and Miller seemed confident, but I remained focused. I couldn't afford to be fazed by one boundary.

For the second delivery, I decided to go for a yorker. I put all my strength into the delivery, ensuring it was fast and right on target. The ball skidded through, crashing into the base of the stumps. The bails flew, and Miller was bowled! A wave of euphoria surged through me as the team erupted in celebration. Virat ran up to me, clapping my back, while Hardik pumped his fists in the air. The crowd roared, their voices blending into a deafening cheer.

Miller walked back in disappointment, dragging his bat behind him. Andile Phehlukwayo strode in to take his place. I knew he would take a moment to settle, so I opted for a wide yorker on my third delivery. It landed perfectly outside off, and he failed to connect. A dot ball. The pressure was mounting on South Africa.

For the fourth delivery, I aimed outside off, around the fifth stump. Phehlukwayo swung hard, sending the ball high into the night sky. The entire stadium watched as Jadeja positioned himself under it, eyes locked on the ball. At the last second, he dived forward and clasped the ball in his hands. Another wicket! The team rushed toward Jadeja, celebrating his brilliance. I let out a relieved breath, my confidence soaring. We were executing our plans perfectly.

Bjorn Fortuin was the next batsman. He took guard, trying to settle his nerves. I maintained my focus. My fifth ball was a back-of-length delivery that he defended cautiously. Another dot ball. I turned back towards my mark, knowing I had one more chance to close this over strongly.

For the final ball of my spell, I delivered another sharp, well-directed ball. Fortuin tried to play it but missed, and the over ended with no runs conceded on the last two balls. I clenched my fist in satisfaction as I walked back to my fielding position.

The big screen flashed the updated score—South Africa was now in deep trouble. The scoreboard displayed my final bowling figures: 4 overs, 24 runs, 3 wickets. I felt immense pride. The final over would decide everything. I wiped the sweat off my forehead and looked around at my teammates. Everyone looked pumped up, feeding off the energy of the crowd.

The commentary team took over, their voices echoing through the stadium speakers.

"What a spell from young Aarav! He's turned the game in India's favor with a sensational final over. Three wickets, just 24 runs given. This is the kind of performance captains dream of in pressure situations."

The players huddled together. Virat bhaiya patted my back.

"Brilliant, Aarav! You nailed it exactly when we needed it."

Hardik added, "That yorker to Miller was world-class, man! Pure fire!"

Jadeja grinned, "And thanks for that ball, made me look good with that catch!"

I laughed, adjusting my cap. "We still have one over to go. Let's finish strong."

Rohit walked up, nodding. "Deepak will bowl the final over. Let's keep our heads in the game."

I turned my gaze toward Deepak, who was stretching his shoulders, readying himself for the responsibility of closing the match. The equation was clear—South Africa needed quick runs, and we needed one tight over to seal the victory. The tension was thick, but we thrived under pressure.

As we took our positions, the Mohali crowd erupted once again. The energy was electric, and we could feel the momentum firmly in our grasp. The final over was about to begin, and all eyes were on Deepak as he marked his run-up, ready to bring the game home.

South Africa was 159/8 currently.

Deepak bowled an excellent final over, keeping things tight and conceding only 7 runs. With that, South Africa's innings came to an end at a competitive total of 165/8 in 20 overs. The Indian team gathered in the center, discussing their strategy for the chase while the crowd buzzed with excitement for the upcoming innings.

As the players walked off the field, the stadium's big screen displayed the match analysis. The focus was on India's disciplined bowling, with special mention of Aarav's spectacular spell: 4 overs, 24 runs, and 3 crucial wickets. The commentators couldn't stop praising his performance, setting the perfect stage for the mid-match discussion on 'Cricket Live.'

Cricket Live – Mid-Innings Show

The studio lit up as 'Cricket Live' began. Seated at the expert panel were legendary cricketers Sunil Gavaskar, Navjot Singh Sidhu, and some commentators Harsha Bhogle, with Jatin Sapru as the host. The screen behind them displayed match statistics and highlights from the first innings.

Jatin Sapru: "Welcome back, folks! We have an exciting run chase ahead of us, but before that, let's talk about what just transpired in the first innings. South Africa, after a shaky start, managed to post 165 runs. A decent total, but do you think it's enough, Sunny sir?"

Sunil Gavaskar: "Well, Jatin, given the pitch conditions and the fact that dew might play a role later, 165 is a competitive score, but I wouldn't say it's a winning total. The Indian bowlers did a fantastic job, especially Aarav. He showed tremendous composure and executed his plans brilliantly."

Harsha Bhogle: "Absolutely, Sunny bhai. We keep talking about India finding a solid all-rounder, and Aarav is proving that he can be the one. His control, his ability to read the batsmen, and his variations—everything was spot on. That yorker to dismiss Miller was just world-class!"

Navjot Singh Sidhu: "Oh ho ho! That delivery was a dream for any fast bowler. Aarav bowled like a seasoned pro, despite his young age. He showed aggression, control, and intelligence. The way he saved runs in the field as well—diving stops, quick throws—it all added to India's effort. This young man is a rising star!"

Jatin Sapru: "Aarav's bowling figures speak for themselves—4 overs, 24 runs, and 3 crucial wickets. Let's take a look at those dismissals once again."

(Replay of Aarav's three wickets plays on the screen, with commentary from the first innings.)

Harsha Bhogle: "That yorker to Miller, inch-perfect. Then the pressure delivery to Phehlukwayo that forced the aerial shot—Jadeja made no mistake. And finishing off with two dot balls to Fortuin. This was the spell that kept South Africa in check."

Jatin Sapru: "Sidhu Paaji, there's a lot of buzz about Aarav being India's next big all-rounder. Some even say he might surpass Hardik Pandya in the future. Your take?"

Navjot Singh Sidhu: "Look, comparisons will always be there, but greatness isn't achieved overnight. Aarav is talented, no doubt, but he still has a long way to go before he reaches Hardik's level. Hardik has proved himself in crunch situations time and again, both with the bat and ball. Aarav is on the right path, but patience is key. He will get there, but not just yet."

Sunil Gavaskar: "I agree. The way Aarav is performing, he is making a strong case for himself. If he keeps delivering match-winning performances like this, it won't be long before he cements his place as one of India's premier all-rounders."

Harsha Bhogle: "That being said, the chase won't be easy. The South African bowling attack is strong, and early wickets can put India under pressure. But with the kind of form our batsmen are in, we should back them to chase this down."

Jatin Sapru: "Indeed, Harsha. We are in for a thrilling second half! Stay tuned as the players return to the field. India's chase coming up next!"

The match concluded in a dominant fashion for India, with a remarkable batting performance that left South Africa with no chance of a comeback. Shikhar Dhawan played a steady innings, scoring 52 runs, while Rohit Sharma contributed 38 runs. However, the highlight of the chase was Virat Kohli's commanding 69 runs, leading India to a comprehensive victory by 9 wickets.

As the post-match ceremony commenced, Virat Kohli was named the Man of the Match for his outstanding performance. During his interview, Kohli took a moment to praise Aarav, acknowledging his exceptional bowling display and calling him "a young talent for India." The recognition from the captain further solidified Aarav's growing reputation in the cricketing world.

Following Kohli's interview, South African skipper Quinton de Kock shared his thoughts on facing Aarav. He compared the young bowler to legendary pacer Dale Steyn, saying, "When facing him, it feels like facing Dale again in the nets. He has the same intensity, rhythm, and aggression that Dale had." Such high praise from an international star added to the excitement surrounding Aarav's future in cricket.

With this commanding win, India not only secured the series lead but also unearthed a promising talent in Aarav. His impactful bowling performance and the recognition from stalwarts of the game marked the beginning of an exciting journey ahead.