

Cricket 122

Chapter 122

With Virat gone, KL Rahul walked in at number 5, a position that the team management was experimenting with, hoping to strengthen India's middle order. This was a trial, a test under pressure, and all eyes were on him.

The Australians, sensing an opportunity, turned up the intensity. They knew they needed another breakthrough, and they tried to unsettle the new partnership with some classic on-field chatter.

From the moment I took strike in the 30th over, Alex Carey and Marnus Labuschagne started their usual antics behind the stumps.

Alex Carey (grinning): "Oh look, the young prodigy's still here! What's it like playing against the big boys, kid?"

Marnus Labuschagne (chuckling): "Yeah, Aarav, must be nerve-wracking, right? First time out in the middle this long? Don't worry, we'll send you back soon."

I ignored them. I had seen enough cricket to know that the best way to respond was with my bat.

Next ball, I stayed composed, focused on my game. KL, however, was taking his time to settle. He played a few dot balls, cautious in his approach, while I ensured the scoreboard kept moving. Strike rotation was key, and I made sure to pick the gaps and keep the pressure off us.

Then, in the 32nd over, I saw my moment. A slightly short delivery from Ashton Agar—I rocked back and pulled it firmly in front of square. The ball raced away to the boundary. No need to run. Just a calm raise of the bat and a glance towards Marnus.

Brett Lee (commentary): "Oh, that's class from Aarav Pathak! Just a little short, and he punishes it. He's showing experience beyond his years."

Sunil Gavaskar: "That's how you respond to sledging! You don't need words—just let the bat do the talking."

The banter didn't stop.

Alex Carey: "Ohhh, look at that! The kid's got some shots! But how long can you keep it up, mate?"

Marnus Labuschagne: "Come on, play a big one! Or are you scared we'll get you out next ball?"

I smirked but didn't engage. Instead, I blocked the next ball, showing them I wasn't falling for the trap.

At the other end, KL slowly got into rhythm. He started rotating the strike, though still cautious. Meanwhile, I kept the pressure on the Aussies, finding a boundary approximately every two overs, ensuring India's run rate didn't dip.

By the end of the 35th over, India had moved to 179/2. The partnership was stabilizing, the scoreboard was healthy, and despite the chatter from behind the stumps, I remained focused.

The moment had started as harmless banter. Sledging was common in cricket, especially when playing against Australia. They were known for their aggressive approach, both with the ball and their words. Marnus and Carey had been poking at me for a while, trying to get under my skin, but I had chosen to let my bat do the talking. Boundaries in regular intervals, strike rotation with KL—it was all going well. The scoreboard was ticking, India was stable, and despite their best efforts, the Australians couldn't break this partnership.

But then, something changed.

KL and I were rotating the strike. The bowlers were trying to keep things tight, and we weren't taking unnecessary risks. The best way to keep the momentum going was simple: find the gaps, run hard, and put pressure on the fielders. That's exactly what we were doing.

And then, in the 37th over, as I pushed a ball towards mid-off and called for a quick single, Kane Richardson got in the way.

It wasn't accidental. It wasn't just a mix-up. It was deliberate.

As I sprinted to the other end, Richardson took a step into my path, almost as if he was trying to cut off my run. His shoulder hit mine—hard. It was enough to break my stride, to slow me down for a fraction of a second. But I still made it to the crease, completing the run.

Then I stopped.

A rush of heat flooded through my body. My mind went blank for a second, and then rage took over.

I turned around instantly, my bat gripped tightly in my right hand, and stormed towards Richardson. He didn't step back. He stood there, looking at me with a smirk, as if he had done nothing wrong.

"What the hell was that?" I growled, my voice louder than I expected.

Richardson shrugged. "Just running between the wickets, mate. What's the big deal?"

I took another step forward. My heartbeat was rapid, adrenaline pumping through my veins. The crowd had caught on to what was happening. A low murmur spread across the stadium.

"What was that?" I repeated, my voice sharper now. "Doing what you're best at, huh? Cheating again? Poor body, can't even bowl, now you need your shoulders?"

Before Richardson could reply, the umpire came running in, stepping between us with his arms raised.

"Alright, alright, calm down, both of you!" the umpire ordered.

But I wasn't calming down. Not yet.

"Is this how you play cricket?" I snapped. "If you can't get me out, you want to run into me instead?"

Richardson laughed—a cocky, irritating laugh. "Relax, kid. Just a bit of body contact. This is international cricket, not some school match."

KL had reached by now, placing a hand on my shoulder. "Let it go, Aarav," he said softly. But his presence beside me wasn't just about calming me down—it was support. He knew what had happened. He had seen it.

By now, Marnus had joined in from behind the stumps, grinning like he had been waiting for this moment. "Ohh, look at this!" he taunted. "The young kid thinks he's a tough guy. You want to fight Richardson, huh? Maybe we should take off the gloves and settle it outside the ground?"

I pointed my bat straight at him. "Shut up, Marnus," I said coldly. "You don't need to jump in every conversation. Stay behind the stumps where you belong."

"Oh, is that a threat?" he laughed. "Big words from a little guy."

The second umpire had arrived now, trying to separate us. "Alright, enough," he said firmly. "Aarav, go back to your crease. Kane, step away."

But I wasn't done.

I turned back to Richardson. "You do that again, and I won't just run into you—I'll run through you," I warned.

Richardson smiled stop but then keeping the act, he said "Would love to see you try, mate."

The umpire's voice was sharp now. "That's it! Enough from both of you! Let's play cricket!"

The match resumed, but the intensity had completely changed. I wasn't just playing anymore—I was attacking.

The very next ball when I was on the strike, I pulled Richardson over mid-wicket for four. The commentators took notice.

Brett Lee: "Oh ho! That's a response if I've ever seen one! Aarav Pathak is fired up! He didn't like that collision one bit, and he's letting Richardson know the best way possible—by sending him to the boundary."

Harsha Bhogle: "This is what happens when you poke a young, fearless player. He won't back down. He's just 19, but look at the fire in him!"

Richardson wasn't smiling anymore.

Next ball—short again. I pulled it again. Four more.

The Australians were rattled.

KL walked up to me and smirked. "I think you've made your point."

I shook my head. "Not yet."

The fight had ignited something in me. I wasn't just looking to play anymore—I was looking to dominate.

And the Australians were about to find out what that meant.

KL had played the last over from Starc as a maiden. He was being cautious, trying to regain momentum. But I wasn't in the mood for patience. I wasn't in the mood for caution. My body was burning with aggression, and Kane was going to feel every bit of it.

Richardson walked back to his mark, adjusting his cap. He was trying to act unfazed, but I could see through him. He was rattled. He was trying to put on a front, pretending that nothing had happened, but he knew what was coming. I wasn't going to let this over go without sending a message.

The crowd was getting louder. They could sense something. The tension was thick in the air. The umpires had already intervened once, and now they were watching closely. But it didn't matter. This was cricket at its rawest.

Richardson turned and began his run-up.

Ball 1:

Short. I knew it. I expected it. I was waiting for it.

The moment it left his hand, I shuffled slightly back and pulled. Not just any pull—this was brutal, violent, aggressive. The kind of shot that Ricky Ponting would be proud of. The ball rocketed off my bat, flying over deep mid-wicket.

Six.

The crowd exploded.

I held my pose for a second longer, staring directly at Richardson. No celebration, no smile. Just a cold, piercing stare. The kind of look that made it clear—I was coming for him.

Richardson turned around, walking back without saying a word. He didn't dare make eye contact.

Harsha Bhogle: "Oh, that is a monster hit! Aarav Pathak has just destroyed that ball! And look at his eyes—pure fire, pure aggression! He's sending a message here!"

Ricky Ponting: "That's the kind of shot you play when you want to show dominance. That's not just a pull shot it's like he is telling Richardson to go and bowl. And I've got to say, he played that exactly the way I used to back in the day."

I smirked. Yeah, I knew.

Richardson wasn't happy. He took a deep breath, rubbing the ball furiously on his trousers, trying to refocus. I knew he would try something different now.

He ran in again.

Ball 2:

Bouncer. Predictable.

This time, I leaned back and went for the upper cut. The ball flew over the slips, racing towards the boundary behind point.

Four.

I didn't react much. Just a slight smirk as I looked at Kane and winked.

His face tightened. He was feeling it now.

Brett Lee: "Oh my god! This kid has no fear! That's an upper cut for four, and did you see that? He just winked at Kane Richardson! This is next-level confidence!"

The Australian fielders were getting restless. Marnus was chirping again from behind the stumps. "Hey, calm down, baby! Too much energy, huh? Try something else!"

I ignored him. I wasn't done yet.

Richardson came steaming in again.

Ball 3:

Short again. I wanted to destroy this one too. I swung hard—too hard. The ball came off the top edge and went straight to Marnus at short cover.

For a second, the stadium gasped. But then—BAM!

The ball smashed straight into Marnus's stomach.

He gasped, his body crumpling as he sprawled onto the ground in pain. The ball slipped out of his fingers. He had dropped the catch.

The entire Australian team rushed towards him as he clutched his stomach. The umpires quickly signaled for the physio. There was a brief stoppage as he lay on the ground, trying to recover from the blow.

I walked towards him and asked, "You Okay? or need any Hospital?"

The crowd was murmuring. The commentators were discussing the intensity of the game now.

Harsha Bhogle: "That was brutal. Aarav played that shot with so much power that even a fielder standing just a few meters away couldn't hold on! This is high-intensity cricket right here!"

Marnus finally got back up. He was still holding his stomach, his face pale. He looked at me, his expression mixed with pain and disbelief.

I gave him a small nod. "Next time, catch properly."

The game resumed.

Ball 4:

Richardson went full this time. But I was ready.

I stepped forward and drove it straight back.

Bullet shot.

The ball raced past Richardson, past the umpire, past the diving mid-off fielder. Straight like an arrow.

Four.

The crowd roared again.

Ball 5:

Short of a length. My favorite.

I swiveled and flicked it over fine leg.

Six.

Richardson looked up at the sky. He was frustrated now. He had tried everything, and I had smashed him all over the park.

The Australians were quiet.

The aggression in my body was at its peak. Every run I scored, every ball I hit—it was personal.

One more ball left.

Ball 6:

Full on the stumps. I nudged it to mid-wicket for a single.

But I wasn't done yet.

As I ran past Richardson, I deliberately bumped my shoulder into him. Not stopping. Not slowing down. Just making my presence felt.

Richardson took two steps back, off balance.

I completed the run and turned around, staring at him. No words. Just a stare full of rage and hunger.

The stadium was alive.

The atmosphere was electric.

The mighty Australians had been challenged—not by an experienced player, but by a 19-year-old.

Commentary Box:

Brett Lee: "That's one of the most intense overs I've seen in a long time! Aarav Pathak has completely dismantled Kane Richardson! The aggression, the confidence—this is why cricket is so special!"

Harsha Bhogle: "This isn't just batting; this is a fight. This is raw, fearless cricket. And Aarav Pathak—remember this name, because this is a moment people will talk about for years!"

I walked towards KL. He shook his head, smiling. "You just destroyed him."

I exhaled, my body still burning. "Not enough."

The battle wasn't over.

Scoreboard Update

India - 215/3 (38 overs)

Aarav Pathak - 87 (63) [8 fours, 4 sixes]*

The battle had been fierce. I was breathing heavily, my arms sore, but my hunger for runs had not faded. The fire inside me had only grown stronger.

I was in the 90s now. The moment was near. The crowd had sensed it too. Every run I took, every shot I played, they were on their feet, waiting for me to cross that magical number—100.

The Australians had tried everything. They had thrown in the bouncers, the yorkers, the mind games, but I had fought back. I had given it back to them with my bat, with my aggression, with my intent.

Now, I was on 99.

KL Rahul walked up to me. "One more run, man. You've already won this battle."

I just nodded. My heart was racing.

Ashton Agar was the bowler.

He tossed it up, a fuller-length delivery outside off.

I knew this was my moment.

I stepped forward and drove it past covers. The ball raced away.

Aarav Pathak – 100 runs!

I removed my helmet and let out a roar. A roar of dominance, a roar of triumph, a roar that sent a message to the entire Australian team.

I removed my helmet, holding it high as I screamed toward the stands. My fists clenched, my chest heaving.

The crowd erupted, the Indian dressing room stood up, clapping and cheering. This was my moment.

I looked toward Kane Richardson. He was silent. No chirping now. No smirks. He just stood there, watching.

Harsha Bhogle: "OH, WHAT A MOMENT! Aarav Pathak has arrived on the world stage! A stunning century against Australia, and look at that celebration! This is raw passion!"

Brett Lee: "That's a hundred filled with fire, aggression, and fearless cricket. This kid is going places!"

I took a deep breath, soaking in the moment.

But cricket is a cruel game.

The very next over, Adam Zampa struck.

I went for the slog sweep. It was flighted, dipping, and I connected well—but not well enough.

The ball went high, swirling in the air.

And then—Steve Smith happened.

Running in from deep midwicket, he covered a massive distance, dived full stretch, and plucked the ball out of nowhere.

Silence.

For a moment, I couldn't believe it. I had middled that. It should've gone for six. But Smith had pulled off something extraordinary.

I stood there, staring. My heart sank.

The Australians were celebrating. Zampa had his arms raised, roaring in triumph.

I took one final look at the pitch, then turned back. As I walked off, the entire stadium rose to their feet.

Even the Australian fielders gave a few claps and Smith and Warner came to give me pats as way to congratulate me for my amazing inning.

KL Rahul walked up to me, patting my back. "Hell of an innings, man."

I nodded, taking off my gloves. My job was done—for now.

As I walked back, I glanced at Steve Smith. He looked at me and nodded. "Great knock."

I nodded back. That's cricket.

With me gone, KL took over.

He played smartly, rotating strike, putting pressure back on the Australians.

In the 48th over, he flicked a full delivery past fine leg for four—his fifty!

He raised his bat, acknowledging the crowd.

But we needed a final push. And that's where Hardik Pandya stepped in.

From ball one, Hardik went into beast mode.

He smashed Cummins over extra cover for six. Pulled Starc for a flat six over midwicket. Drove Richardson down the ground for four.

Within no time, he had 28 off 18 balls.

Final Ball of the Innings:

Hardik went for a big one but was caught at the boundary.

India had posted a massive total!

Aarav Pathak 104 (78)

KL Rahul 63*(72)

India Scored total 322/5.

Extras: 15 (Wides: 7, No Balls: 2, Leg Byes: 6) Total: 322/5 (50 overs)

Harsha Bhogle: "India finishes at 322 for 5, thanks to a fiery century from Aarav Pathak, a steady fifty from KL Rahul, and a power-packed finish from Hardik Pandya!"

Ricky Ponting: "Aarav's innings was one for the ages. The aggression, the control, the fight—it reminded me of some of the great innings we've seen in world cricket."

Brett Lee: "Australia will have to bat out of their skins to chase this down. But one thing is for sure—this game is far from over!"