

Cricket 124

Chapter 124

The dressing room was a scene of absolute chaos and joy. The moment I stepped in, the entire team erupted into cheers. The sound of clapping, whistling, and my name being chanted filled the air. Water bottles were popped open like champagne, and I found myself being hoisted up on shoulders before I even had time to process everything.

"Aarav! Aarav! Aarav!" The chants were deafening. Virat Kohli, the first to reach me, gave me a tight hug. "Brilliant, mate! Absolute class! That was one hell of a performance!"

Rohit Sharma, grinning ear to ear, ruffled my hair. "Kid, that wasn't just a match-winning knock; that was a career-defining performance. We are so proud of you!"

Coach Ravi Shastri stepped forward, clapping his hands. "Boys, what we witnessed today was sheer brilliance. Aarav played like a champion! A century under pressure, three crucial wickets, and that catch—my god, that catch! I've been around cricket for decades, and that was one of the best fielding efforts I've ever seen! Take a bow, son!"

The room erupted into applause again, and I couldn't stop smiling. It felt surreal. Just a few hours ago, I was out there in the middle, battling Australia's best, and now I was being celebrated by my own team like a hero.

Shardul Thakur added, "The way you handled those Aussies! Sledging right back at them, fearless cricket, and shutting them up with your bat and ball! This is what champions are made of."

Hardik Pandya came forward, patting me on the back. "Listen, we all have big nights in our careers. This was your night, Aarav. And trust me, there are going to be many more to come. But for now, let's celebrate!"

And celebrate we did! The music was turned up, and everyone danced, laughed, and cheered. Food was brought in, but before I could even grab a bite, my teammates grabbed me and tossed me into an ice bath. "For the Man of the Match!" they shouted, and all I could do was laugh as the cold water sent shivers down my spine.

Ravi Shastri, always one for big words, lifted a glass of juice in my honor. "Here's to a star in the making! To Aarav, the future of Indian cricket!"

The team echoed his words, and I felt a lump in my throat. This was a night I would never forget. The love, the camaraderie, the pure joy of victory—this is what cricket was all about.

And as I looked around at my teammates, I knew one thing for sure.

This was just the beginning.

After all the celebrations, we finally boarded the team bus to head back to the hotel. The ride lasted about 20-25 minutes, and the energy inside the bus was still high. Players were chatting, cracking jokes, and replaying clips of the match on their phones.

When we reached the hotel, I went straight to my room, feeling the exhaustion of the long but fulfilling day. The first thing I did was take a long, refreshing shower, letting the cool water wash away the sweat and fatigue. As I stepped out, I grabbed my phone and opened social media.

I decided to upload a few pictures from the match—one of me raising my bat after my century, another of the moment I took the stunning catch, and one with the team celebrating in the dressing room. Within minutes, my notifications started blowing up.

I scrolled through Twitter and Instagram, and to my surprise, everyone was talking about my catch! Cricketers, analysts, and fans from around the world were in awe. Many legendary players had posted about it.

Sachin Tendulkar tweeted: "Unbelievable! Aarav's catch today was straight out of a dream. A moment that will be remembered for years. Well played, champ!"

AB de Villiers wrote: "That was something special! Incredible athleticism and game awareness from Aarav. The future of cricket is bright!"

Even Australian legends like Ricky Ponting and Adam Gilchrist had commented on it. I couldn't believe it. This was surreal.

I quickly replied to as many messages as I could, thanking them for their support. "Thank you! It was an unforgettable moment for me."

After a while, I decided to call my parents. I knew they had watched the entire match and were probably just as excited as I was.

The phone rang, and my mom picked up immediately. "Aarav! My superstar!" she said, her voice full of joy.

I chuckled. "Hi, Mom! Hi, Dad! Did you guys enjoy the match?"

My dad's voice came through the speaker. "Enjoy? We were on the edge of our seats the whole time! What a knock, son! And that catch... unbelievable! You made us so proud today."

Hearing their happiness made everything feel even more special. We talked for a while, reliving the game from their perspective. Then, I made another important call—to my childhood coach.

"Coach, did you watch the match?" I asked excitedly.

His voice was filled with pride. "Of course, Aarav! I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I always knew you had something special, but today... today you proved to the world what you're capable of!"

I smiled, remembering all the years of training and hard work. "Thank you for everything, coach. This wouldn't have been possible without your guidance."

He laughed. "No, no, this is all you! Just keep working hard, and the sky is the limit for you."

As I ended the call, I glanced at the clock. It was 11:56 PM in Australia, and 6:26 PM in India. I lay back on my bed, staring at the ceiling, feeling the weight of everything that had happened sink in.

Today had been a dream come true. But I knew this was just the beginning.

As I kept my phone on the table and brewed a coffee, I stepped onto the balcony of my hotel room, soaking in the cool night air of Australia. The sky was a deep canvas of stars, the city below buzzing with life even at this late hour. The floodlights from the stadium in the distance had finally dimmed, signaling the end of an unforgettable day. Just as I took my first sip of coffee, my phone rang. Seeing the caller ID, a smile automatically stretched across my face. It was none other than my friend, Shradha.

"Hey, Aarav!" she exclaimed the moment I picked up.

I chuckled. "Yeah! What's up?"

"What's up? Are you serious? I should be asking you that! Congratulations! What an innings! I loved the way you fought with the Aussies today. And that final moment with Kane? That shoulder pat—legendary!" she said, her excitement spilling through the phone.

I leaned against the railing, looking at the distant skyline. "Haha, thanks! It was a crazy match, to be honest. The Aussies were tough, especially Starc and Cummins. They kept bowling bouncers, trying to get under my skin. But I knew I had to stay focused."

"And that six off Starc! Oh my god, I nearly screamed! The way you stepped out and sent it into the stands!" she continued.

I laughed. "That shot was instinctive. He had been pitching it short, so I expected another one. The moment I saw it at the right height, I just went for it."

"And let's talk about that catch! Seriously, I have seen it at least ten times already. The way you leaped—it was almost like you were flying! Twitter is going crazy over it, you know?" she teased.

I smiled, recalling the moment. "Yeah, I saw. Even some legends of the game posted about it. Feels unreal."

We talked cricket for a while—analyzing the match, discussing key moments, and laughing about the on-field banter. Shradha, being a cricket enthusiast, loved discussing the sport in detail, and our conversations always had that perfect balance of friendly teasing and insightful talk.

After a while, our chat shifted to more casual topics. "So, how are you otherwise? Eating well? Sleeping enough? Or just running on adrenaline?" she asked, her tone more caring now.

I chuckled. "Honestly? Barely had time to process everything. It's been a whirlwind—press conferences, celebrations, social media buzz. And now, just trying to steal a quiet moment with my coffee."

"Well, take care of yourself, champ! You've got a long road ahead. Don't burn out too soon," she advised.

I nodded. "I will, don't worry. Hey, do you want me to bring you anything from Australia?"

She gasped dramatically. "OMG, yes! Chocolates! The fancy ones. And maybe an Australian women cricket jersey if you can?"

I laughed. "Done! Anything else? A kangaroo, maybe?"

"Haha, no, chocolates will do. But don't forget!" she said firmly.

"I won't. Scout's honor!" I promised.

The conversation flowed effortlessly, just like it always did with her. We talked about everything—memories from our school days, inside jokes, and even random things like how she recently binge-watched a crime thriller series and was now paranoid about every shadow outside her window. We laughed, teased, and caught up on all the little things that got lost in the chaos of our busy lives.

We continued talking for a while, sharing more stories, joking about silly things, and just enjoying the conversation. It was moments like these that kept me grounded, reminding me of the people who had been there for me long before the fame, long before the stadiums chanted my name.

As the clock ticked past midnight, we finally decided to call it a night. "Alright, champ, get some rest. You deserve it!" she said warmly.

"You too. Thanks for calling. It means a lot," I replied sincerely.

"Always! Bye, Aarav!" she said before hanging up.

I placed my phone back on the table, took another sip of my now lukewarm coffee, and looked up at the night sky again. The stars seemed brighter somehow, or maybe it was just the glow of a day well spent.

After this, I decided to ask the system for my reward, but it asked me to wait as it would accumulate all the rewards at the end of the entire ODI series. Well, that was disappointing, but I knew there was no point in arguing with the system. I sighed, feeling a bit let down, but then reminded myself that this was just the first match. There were still more to go, and bigger rewards awaited. That thought refreshed me, and soon, fatigue took over. I slipped into bed, staring at the ceiling for a while before drifting off to sleep.

The next morning, I woke up at 8 AM, feeling a mix of excitement and soreness from yesterday's match. Before heading for training, I decided to go for a short morning walk. The hotel grounds were peaceful, and the crisp morning air felt refreshing. I popped in my earbuds, letting a soft playlist run as I walked through the quiet streets. It was a rare moment of solitude, something I truly cherished after the chaos of the previous day.

However, that peaceful moment didn't last long. Out of nowhere, a group of fans spotted me. Before I knew it, 15-20 people had gathered around, some holding out their phones for selfies, others extending notebooks for autographs. I was taken aback for a second but quickly composed myself. I greeted them with a smile, took pictures, signed a few autographs, and even had a brief chat with some of them. Their enthusiasm was infectious, and despite my initial surprise, I enjoyed the interaction.

After the unexpected fan encounter, I headed back to the hotel, took a long, relaxing shower, and got ready for the day. Lunch with the team was lively, as everyone discussed yesterday's match, laughing about the sledging incidents and rewatching the highlights. It felt good to be surrounded by teammates who had now become more like family.

Post lunch, we had our training session. The focus was on recovery and strategy for the next match. The bowling coach worked with us on handling Australian pitches, while the batting coach emphasized shot selection. Even though we had just played a match, the hunger to improve was evident in everyone's eyes.

As the sun began to set, I knew that another intense match awaited us soon. But for now, I was content with where I was, how far I had come, and the journey that lay ahead.