

Cricket 125

Chapter 125

The next day arrived with a sense of anticipation in the air. It was match day once again, and the energy in the Indian dressing room was electric. The same playing eleven had been retained for this crucial encounter, and despite feeling a slight sense of fatigue from the previous game, I was determined to give my best. As a batsman in form, nothing excited me more than the chance to wield my bat once again on the grand stage.

India won the toss and decided to bat first. The pitch looked like a batting paradise, and our openers, Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan, were in excellent touch. The duo had been in great spirits before the match, discussing strategies and working on their shots in the nets. It was evident that they were ready to take on the Australian bowling attack with full force.

As soon as the match began, Rohit and Shikhar set the tone with aggressive strokes. They treated Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins with utter disdain, dispatching their deliveries to the boundary with ease. The Australians tried to break their momentum by bringing in Adam Zampa and Kane Richardson, but even the spinners and medium pacers found no respite. Rohit's pull shots were a treat to watch, and Shikhar's elegant drives pierced the field beautifully.

By the time the 13th over arrived, India was cruising at a comfortable pace. The scoreboard read 81/0, and it seemed like a perfect start.

13.3 Overs: A moment of shock rippled through the stands. Rohit Sharma, who had looked solid for the past hour, suddenly lost his balance while attempting a sweep shot. The ball from Zampa skidded through, missed his bat, and struck him directly on the shin. The umpire wasted no time in raising his finger. Given out LBW.

Rohit, convinced that he had edged the ball, immediately went for a review. However, the replay showed that he had completely misjudged the delivery. The ball had pitched in line, missed the bat, and was crashing into the middle and off stumps three-fourths of the way up. The decision stood, and India lost a crucial review.

Rohit, visibly frustrated, walked back to the pavilion. His review decision was met with a few glances from Shikhar Dhawan, who perhaps could have advised him better from the non-striker's end. Nevertheless, the score was still strong at 81/1, and there was no need to panic.

Rohit scored 42 runs in 44 balls with 6 fours and 0 sixes.

As Rohit exited, the atmosphere in the stadium changed. The crowd, though momentarily subdued, erupted in cheers as the next batsman walked in. It was none other than Virat Kohli.

The King, the Run Machine, the man who thrived under pressure.

Virat walked in with his signature intensity. He took his time adjusting his gloves, tapped the pitch twice with his bat, and looked around the field with sharp eyes. From the moment he took guard, it was clear that he had a plan in mind. His calm demeanor exuded confidence, and the Australians knew they had a new challenge on their hands.

Meanwhile, the Australian bowlers, buoyed by their recent success, sensed an opportunity to put India on the back foot. Pat Cummins, who had been slightly expensive in his opening spell, was reintroduced into the attack. He charged in with fire, determined to break India's momentum further.

The battle between Kohli and Cummins was an intense one. The pacer delivered a sharp bouncer first up, but Kohli was unfazed. He swayed away with ease, letting the ball pass through to the wicketkeeper. The next delivery was a fuller one, aimed at the off-stump. Kohli leaned into it and drove it elegantly through the covers. The ball raced to the boundary, drawing a roar of approval from the Indian fans.

Shikhar Dhawan, at the other end, continued his aggression. He took on Zampa's spin, dancing down the track and lofting him over mid-wicket for a stunning six. The left-hander was enjoying himself, but he knew he had to be cautious. With Kohli now in, it was time to build a strong partnership.

The game continued to ebb and flow. Cummins and Starc bowled fiery spells, but Kohli and Dhawan remained resilient. Singles and twos kept the scoreboard ticking, and whenever a loose ball was offered, it was dispatched to the boundary without hesitation. Kohli's ability to find gaps was masterful, and Dhawan's calculated risks paid off as he rotated the strike smartly.

At the 20-over mark, India stood at 124/1. The foundation had been laid for a big total, but the middle overs were going to be crucial. The Australians, known for their fighting spirit, were not going to let this game slip away easily.

As the drinks break approached, Kohli and Dhawan had a quick discussion at the center. Both batsmen were focused, understanding the importance of the next phase of the game. They knew that if they could see off the next few overs without losing a wicket, India would be in a commanding position.

The crowd was on its feet, sensing the importance of this battle. The commentators in the box—Harsha Bhogle, Sunil Gavaskar, and Allan Border—were discussing the importance of Kohli's presence at the crease. "If there's one man who can take this game away from Australia single-handedly, it's Virat Kohli," Gavaskar remarked. "He's built for these moments."

After the break, Australia turned to their most reliable bowler, Josh Hazlewood. His tight line and length made scoring difficult, forcing Kohli and Dhawan to adopt a more cautious approach. But Kohli, with his impeccable technique, found ways to keep the runs coming, flicking the ball effortlessly through mid-wicket and cover.

Dhawan, sensing an opportunity to accelerate, attempted an audacious scoop over fine leg, but mistimed it slightly. Fortunately, the ball landed safely, and he picked up two runs. The Indian dugout watched closely, knowing that one mistake could shift the momentum.

Then came the moment the fans had been waiting for. A short ball from Hazlewood sat up perfectly, and Kohli latched onto it with a magnificent pull shot. The ball soared over deep square leg for a six, sending the crowd into a frenzy. The energy in the stadium was electric, and the Australians felt the pressure mounting.

As the innings progressed, Kohli and Dhawan pushed India closer to a formidable total. The partnership between them was flourishing, built on trust, experience, and sheer class. Every run was being celebrated by the Indian fans, and the players in the dugout knew they were witnessing something special.

The match was perfectly poised, and the next session promised to be an absolute thriller.

The moment had arrived, and the stadium held its breath in anticipation. The match was progressing at a rapid pace, and India was dominating the scoreboard. But as the saying goes, all good things must come to an end.

28.4 Overs:

Harsha Bhogle's voice echoed through the commentary box, capturing the intensity of the moment.

"What just happened there! Dhawan has holed out for 106! It was under the armpit, the line Australia have targeted for so long. Dhawan used the pace, timed it perfectly, but saw it carry straight to the fielder at fine leg. Tremendous innings, and a big wicket for the Aussies. 184/2."

A collective sigh ran through the Indian fans in the stands. Shikhar Dhawan had played a magnificent knock, a masterclass in aggressive yet controlled batting, but his time at the crease had come to an end. As he walked off, raising his bat to acknowledge the crowd's applause.

Then, the moment arrived.

Aarav Pathak, the previous match's Player of the Match, the centurion, the man in form, walked onto the field.

The stadium erupted! The commentators could hardly contain their excitement.

"And here comes the man of the moment! Aarav Pathak! The last time he was on this pitch, he absolutely dismantled the opposition. Can he do it again?" shouted Nasser Hussain.

"The Aussies know the damage this man can do. And judging by his walk, his confidence, and his aura, they might be in for some serious trouble!" added Harsha Bhogle.

As I reached the crease, Kohli bhaiya welcomed me with a firm punch of the gloves. It was a simple gesture, but it spoke volumes. It was his way of saying, "Go on, lad."

I took a deep breath, looked around the field, and took my stance. Tapping the pitch twice with my bat, I locked eyes with the bowler. Today, I was in a different mood to bat.

The first two balls were all about assessing the pitch again. I defended them solidly, ensuring no chinks in my armor. I was patient. I was calculating. But inside, I was ready to explode.

Then came Adam Zampa from the other end.

First ball. Flighted delivery. A fraction short.

I saw it early. My feet moved instinctively. With a clean, effortless swing, I launched it high over long-on. The ball soared into the night sky and disappeared into the stands.

SIX!

The stadium went wild. The sound of the bat meeting the ball was pure. The commentators couldn't contain themselves.

"Oh, what a shot! Aarav Pathak is not here to mess around! That's into the second tier!" shouted Ricky Ponting.

Zampa, rattled, adjusted his length, but the fire had been lit.

Next ball—fuller, straighter.

I stepped out, met the ball on the half-volley, and sent it flying over extra cover for another massive six! Back-to-back sixes!

The crowd was now in a frenzy.

Zampa looked shaken. His third ball was flatter, quicker, trying to hurry me up.

Too late.

A swift flick of my wrists sent the ball sailing over deep mid-wicket. Another six! Zampa had no answers!

By the time his over ended, I had already raced to 20 off just 8 balls. The intent was clear—I was here to take the attack to the Aussies.

Pat Cummins was brought back, looking to break the momentum. But I was in the zone.

A length ball outside off—I punched it through covers with sheer precision for four.

Then came a bouncer—too predictable.

I rocked back and hooked it over fine leg for yet another six! The roar from the crowd was deafening.

Next ball—fuller, outside off. A textbook drive, piercing the gap, racing away to the boundary.

Before I knew it, I had reached my 50 in just 35 balls. I raised my bat, acknowledging the applause, but I wasn't done yet.

Kohli bhaiya on the other hand was laughing his ass out, he was jumping and laughing on each and every shot of mine. At my 50, he came and one handed hugged me and said "Keep going, champ."

Then came Mitchell Starc. Australia's spearhead. He had been waiting for his chance to get back at me.

But I was ready for him.

First ball—full and fast.

I cleared my front leg and launched it straight back over his head! SIX!

The crowd erupted. Starc, furious, charged in again.

Second ball—short-pitched.

I was waiting for it. A clean uppercut sent the ball flying over third man! Another SIX!

Starc was fuming now. His pace increased. The third ball—yorker length, aimed at the base of off-stump.

Too predictable.

A delicate flick off my toes sent it soaring over square leg for another maximum! Three sixes in a row!

The pressure was on Starc. He took a deep breath and charged in again.

Fourth ball—overpitched.

I stepped forward and smashed it over long-off! Four sixes in a row!

The stadium had turned into a madhouse. The commentators were losing their voices. Kohli was grinning at the non-striker's end. It felt unreal.

Then came the fifth ball.

I was hungry for more.

It was a well-directed slower ball, but I was too aggressive. I went for another huge hit over mid-wicket, but the timing was slightly off.

The ball soared into the sky.

Aron Finch the Aussies captain positioned himself under it.

Time stood still.

Then—SNAP! The ball nestled into Finch's hands.

Silence.

Then, applause.

I was out. But not before scoring 86 off just 49 balls.

As I walked off, I raised my bat, soaking in the cheers, the appreciation, the sheer energy of the moment. It was an innings to remember.

India stood at 299/3.

The damage had been done. And I knew, no matter what happened next, this match was going to be one for the history books.

As I walked off the field, the thunderous applause from the crowd echoed in my ears. My heart was still racing, my bat still tingling from the last few shots I had played. 86 off 49 balls. It was an innings to remember, but the job was far from done.

KL Rahul was the next man in. As I passed him at the boundary line, we exchanged a fist bump. "Keep the momentum going, bro," I said, still catching my breath.

He nodded, adjusting his gloves. "We'll finish strong."

Virat Bhai was still at the crease, and he was playing a captain's knock. With his signature aggression and precise shot selection, he anchored the innings. The Australian bowlers were trying everything—short balls, Yorkers, slower deliveries—but Virat Bhai had an answer for everything. His flicks off the pads were exquisite, his cover drives a sight to behold. Every time he punched one through the gaps, the crowd roared in appreciation.

Then came the moment that silenced the crowd momentarily. Adam Zampa, the leg-spinner who had already claimed one crucial wicket, bowled a loopy delivery that gripped the surface just a bit more than expected. Virat Bhai attempted to dance down the track and loft it over extra cover but misjudged the turn. The ball took the edge of his bat and ballooned straight to Steve Smith at short cover.

The stadium held its breath.

Caught! Kohli was out for 88 off 76 balls.

A collective sigh echoed through the stands, but as he walked back, he raised his bat to acknowledge the fans. His innings had set the foundation.

Now, it was up to KL Rahul and Hardik Pandya.

Rahul, elegant as ever, played his effortless sweeps and delicate glances, while Hardik brought out his brute power, smashing anything in his arc over the ropes.

The next 5 overs were mayhem. The crowd was on its feet, watching as the duo dismantled Australia's death bowling.

The final over saw three consecutive boundaries, pushing India's total to a mammoth 348/4.

Innings Break: Time to Regroup

As we walked into the dressing room, there was an air of confidence, but also a realization that the job was only half done. We knew the Australian batting lineup was dangerous—David Warner, Steve Smith, Glenn Maxwell—they had the firepower to chase this total.

The next 30 minutes were crucial. We freshened up, refueled with energy drinks, and went over our bowling plans. Jasprit Bumrah, aka Jassi Bhai, was going to open the attack.

"Let's hit them hard in the first few overs," Shami Bhai said, adjusting his wrist tape. "Early wickets, and they'll crumble."

We nodded in agreement. I was given the task of bowling first-change.

The break was over. It was time to take the field again.

First over. A masterclass in fast bowling. Maiden over.

The Australians were already feeling the pressure. Bumrah was relentless, his line and length impeccable, making David Warner uncomfortable.

The second over was another tight one—Shami Bhai followed up with another maiden.

By the fourth over, the pressure was mounting. David Warner and Aaron Finch were struggling to get the ball away.

And then, it happened.

I was handed the ball for the fourth over. I took a deep breath, my fingers gripping the seam tightly. I knew what I had to do.

I decided to go for a big in-swinging delivery.

I ran in, my heart pounding. As I reached the crease, I let the ball rip. It pitched around middle and leg, and then, like a missile, jagged in viciously.

Aaron Finch, expecting a straighter delivery, misjudged it completely.

The ball sneaked through the bat-pad gap and crashed into the stumps.

Bowled him!

I let out a roar, punching the air in celebration. The team swarmed around me, patting my back. The first breakthrough!

Finch, shaking his head in disbelief, walked back for just 12 runs.

Steve Smith, the man Australia depended on, walked to the crease. He was their backbone, their crisis man.

He started cautiously, playing out Bumrah's fiery spells. He rotated the strike well, frustrating our bowlers. Then, he shifted gears, pulling anything short, driving anything full.

His innings was a masterclass in controlled aggression.

By the 40th over, Smith was on 98. Two runs short of what could have been a fantastic century.

Kuldeep Yadav was brought back into the attack.

The first ball—a drifting leg-break.

Smith stepped out to loft it over mid-off.

But the ball spun more than he expected.

It sneaked past his bat and crashed into the stumps!

Bowled! Smith out for 98!

The heartbreak was evident on his face, but we knew this was the moment we needed. Australia was now 278/6.

The last 10 overs were all about keeping our nerves.

Bumrah , Aarav and Shami bowled tight lines, restricting the runs. Hardik Pandya chipped in with a crucial wicket. Australia's lower order crumbled under pressure.

The match reached its final over, and Australia needed an impossible 45 runs.

With only one wicket remaining, it was over.

The last ball—a slower bouncer from Bumrah.

Josh Hazlewood swung wildly, but the ball went straight to the fielder.

INDIA WINS!

The crowd erupted, and we all ran onto the field, hugging, celebrating. Australia was bowled out for 304.

I finished with figures of 10-1-37-1 at an economy of just 3.49.

The highest wicket-taker for India was Shami Bhai with 3 wickets.