

## Cricket 126

### Chapter 126

The floodlights shimmered down on the field as the players made their way to the dressing rooms. The match had ended, but the conversations had just begun. Cricketing legends and analysts gathered in the post-match studio to dissect the thrilling contest. The air buzzed with excitement, the atmosphere thick with analysis, admiration, and debate.

The expert panel included Ricky Ponting, Sunil Gavaskar, Ian Smith, Martin Crowe, and the ever-charismatic Harsha Bhogle, who was moderating the discussion. They were seated in a semi-circle, with the grand stadium in the background still echoing with cheers and celebrations. The energy of the match still lingered in the air.

Harsha Bhogle, ever the engaging host, opened the discussion with his signature enthusiasm.

"Gentlemen, what a match! A high-scoring thriller, a display of sheer talent and resilience. And one name that's on everyone's lips tonight again—Aarav. Let's get right into it. Ricky, your thoughts?"

Ponting leaned forward, his eyes shining with admiration. "You know, today, and even in the last game, what I saw from Aarav was absolute masterclass. His batting was sublime. The way he anchored the innings, the way he picked gaps, manipulated the field—it was artistry. It reminded me of the greats."

Ian Smith, nodding in agreement, jumped in. "Yeah! You could see the intensity in his eyes, the hunger for runs, the fire for wickets. It felt like watching a reincarnation of a classical batsman combined with the aggression of Dale Steyn. The way he handled pressure, the way he switched gears at will—this is the stuff of legends."

Martin Crowe smiled, his voice carrying the weight of experience. "For me, today felt like a glimpse into India's future. In the first match, Aarav ran 47 singles, showing his patience and discipline. Today, he took a different approach, smashing boundaries at will. That ability to adapt is what separates good players from great ones."

He paused, glancing around at the others before continuing. "When Aarav and Kohli bat together, it feels like the King and the Prince at the crease. There's an almost poetic symmetry to their batting. Kohli is the present, and Aarav... well, he looks like the future. Mark my words—when Kohli eventually retires in 2026 or 2027, Aarav will be there to say, 'Don't worry, I'm here. I will take Indian cricket to the next heights, just as Kohli did after Sachin.'"

The words hung in the air, their weight sinking in. There was an unspoken agreement among the panelists. Aarav was special.

But then, Sunil Gavaskar, leaned forward. "Now, now, let's not get ahead of ourselves," he said, his voice calm but firm. "Aarav is an exceptional talent, no doubt about that. But let's not crown him too soon. He has the skill, the temperament, and the hunger, but to be in the same league as Kohli, Sachin, or even Ponting here, he needs to be a match-winner over and over again. Let him prove himself in different conditions, against different attacks, in different formats."

He looked around the table, his gaze settling on Harsha. "We've seen young players shine bright and then fade away. I don't want that for Aarav. He must stay grounded, keep working hard, and let his performances do the talking. Talent alone doesn't guarantee greatness. It's the hunger, the discipline, and the ability to handle the weight of expectations."

Harsha Bhogle, the master moderator, let a small smile play on his lips. He had seen debates like these before—where admiration and caution clashed in a beautiful symphony of cricketing wisdom.

"So, what you're saying, Sunny bhai, is that while the potential is there, the journey to greatness is long?" Harsha asked, seeking clarity.

Gavaskar nodded. "Exactly. Look, I love what Aarav brings to the table. His technique, his shot-making, his aggression—it's all there. But cricket is a cruel game. You can be the hero today and struggle tomorrow. I want to see him dominate in England, in Australia, in South Africa, in New Zealand. I want to see him handle swinging conditions, bouncy tracks, and rank turners. That's when we'll know if he's truly destined for greatness."

Ponting, always one to appreciate a grounded perspective, chuckled. "Fair point, Sunny. But let's also give credit where it's due. The kid is special. And if he keeps up this form, we could be looking at the next great Indian cricketer or even the world cricket."

Ian Smith laughed. "Ponting's already giving him the 'next great' tag!"

Harsha Bhogle grinned. "It's always fascinating to hear the different perspectives. On one hand, we have admiration, and on the other, caution. But that's what makes cricket so special. The game is bigger than any one player, but every now and then, a player comes along who makes us believe we're witnessing something extraordinary."

He turned back to the panel. "Let's talk about what makes Aarav so special. Is it his adaptability? His shot selection? His temperament? What stands out the most?"

Martin Crowe was quick to respond. "For me, it's his ability to read the game. He knew when to play the anchor role and when to switch gears. That's not something you see in every young player. He has the mind of a seasoned cricketer."

Ponting added, "His confidence. He doesn't hesitate. Whether he's facing a world-class spinner or a 150 km/h pacer, he backs himself. And that's a quality you can't teach."

Gavaskar, despite his earlier caution, acknowledged Aarav's talent. "His fitness level is incredible. The way he runs between the wickets, his energy in the field, his ability to bowl and still maintain his batting form—it's a complete package."

The discussion went on, each expert offering their analysis, their predictions, their words of wisdom. Harsha Bhogle, ever the orchestrator, wrapped up the session with a closing thought.

"Regardless of where Aarav's journey takes him, one thing is clear—he has the world's attention. And with great attention comes great responsibility. It will be up to him how he shapes his future. One thing is certain: cricket fans are in for a thrilling ride."

As the discussion ended, the stadium lights dimmed, and the echoes of the crowd faded into the night. The match was over, but the legend of Aarav was only just beginning.

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After this match, we had a rest day before the next big game.

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As soon as the match ended, I walked straight into the dressing room, threw myself onto the sofa, covered my face with a towel, and stretched my arms and legs. My body felt heavy, every muscle sore from the intense match. I could feel the exhaustion settling deep into my bones, a fatigue unlike anything I had experienced before.

Seeing me like this, Virat Bhaiya walked over and asked, "What happened, champ? You look completely drained," he said, sitting beside me.

I let out a deep sigh. "I don't know, Bhaiya. My body just feels... completely exhausted. More than usual."

Hardik, who was sitting nearby tying his shoelaces, looked up and interjected, "That's because your body is still adjusting to the pressure, Aarav. I went through the same thing when I started my career. But here's the thing—my bowling speed is around 120-130 km/h, and I usually bat at six or seven. So, physically, it's a little easier on me. You, on the other hand, are bowling at 135-145 km/h and batting at number four. That's double the workload, bro. It's bound to take a toll on your body."

His words made sense. It was true—I wasn't just playing; I was pushing myself to the limit in every match. Bowling fast, batting aggressively, running hard between the wickets. It was a new level of strain that my body wasn't used to yet.

Hardik continued, "But don't worry. Give it a few more games. Your body will adjust. Trust me, it's just a matter of time before you build the stamina to handle it."

I nodded, absorbing his words. "Yeah, I guess I just need to let my body adapt."

Virat Bhaiya patted my back. "Just take care of yourself, Aarav. Recovery is just as important as training. Now go get some rest."

With that, we all headed back to the hotel. The moment I stepped into my room, exhaustion took over. Without even bothering to shower or eat dinner, I collapsed onto the bed and fell into a deep sleep.

The next morning, I woke up feeling a little better. My muscles were still sore, but the fatigue wasn't as overwhelming as before. Today was a rest day—no practice, no meetings, just a complete break before our next match. I took a long, refreshing bath, letting the hot water relax my muscles. It felt amazing, washing away the tiredness from my body.

After getting dressed, I made my way downstairs to the hotel dining area for breakfast. The aroma of fresh coffee and hot parathas filled the air. The team was already gathered, chatting and laughing over their meals.

"Morning, sleepyhead!" KL Rahul called out with a grin as I approached the table.

I smiled and took a seat beside him. "Morning, Bhaiya. I really needed that sleep."

Hardik chuckled. "See? I told you. Your body is already learning to recover. Just keep eating right, resting well, and you'll be good."

I nodded, picking up my plate and loading it with eggs, toast, and a generous serving of fruit. Today was about relaxing, refueling, and mentally preparing for the battles ahead. Because once we stepped back onto that field, there would be no room for fatigue—only performance.

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After finishing my breakfast, I made my way to the hotel's terrace lawn, looking for a quiet place to relax. The morning sun cast a warm glow over the greenery, and a gentle breeze rustled through the palm trees. I spotted a cozy swing in the corner, overlooking the city skyline. Taking my mango juice in hand, I settled onto the swing, stretching my legs out and letting my body sink into the gentle motion. The coolness of the juice soothed my throat, and I closed my eyes for a moment, savoring the peace of the morning.

As I was lost in my thoughts, the soft sound of footsteps reached my ears. Opening my eyes, I saw Virat bhaiya and Anushka Bhabhi walking towards me. Their presence always carried a sense of warmth and familiarity, making me feel like I was part of a family away from home. Virat bhaiya had a relaxed expression, dressed in casual sportswear, while Anushka bhabhi looked as elegant as ever in a light summer dress.

Virat bhaiya, with his usual affectionate and protective demeanor, greeted me first.

"How are you, champ? All good?" he asked, his eyes scanning me as if checking for any signs of exhaustion.

I smiled and nodded. "Yeah, bhaiya, all good."

Anushka Bhabhi, asked, "What happened? Anything serious?" she asked with genuine concern in her voice.

I shook my head lightly and replied, "Nah, Bhabhi. Nothing much, just a little game fatigue."

She sighed softly and gave me a knowing look. "You need to take good care of yourself, Aarav. You're still young, and pushing your body too hard can have long-term effects. Make sure you rest properly and recover."

I nodded reassuringly. "Yeah, don't worry, Bhabhi. I'll be fine."

She gave me a small smile, her motherly instinct clearly in play.

We then moved on to normal, everyday conversations—nothing about cricket, just casual family talk. We laughed over silly moments from past matches, joked about team habits, and even discussed random things like movies and travel. It felt refreshing, like a break from the intense cricketing world.

That day, sitting with Virat bhaiya and Anushka Bhabhi, I truly felt like they were my real elder brother and Bhabhi, looking out for me like family. Their words, their gestures, and their presence made me realize how lucky I was to have such amazing people by my side. It wasn't just about cricket; it was about relationships, about bonds that go beyond the field.

As the breeze continued to sway the swing lightly, I took another sip of my mango juice and smiled to myself. Moments like these were rare, and I cherished them deeply.

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The day of the match arrived. The stadium was packed, buzzing with energy as the crowd chanted slogans and waved the Indian flag with pride. Australia had won the toss and opted to bat first, hoping to set a challenging target on what seemed to be a good batting pitch. However, little did they know that today would be a historic day for young Aarav, who was playing with immense determination and a lot of fatigue.

With Bumrah rested and Khaleel Ahmed taking his place, along with Navdeep Saini replacing Mohammad Shami, India had made strategic changes. But all eyes were on Aarav as he was handed the new ball. The air was filled with tension as he marked his run-up, ready to bowl the first over of the innings.

Over 1:

David Warner took the strike, facing Aarav's first delivery. The young pacer charged in, his eyes focused like a hawk. He delivered a sharp length ball, which Warner nudged away for a single. This brought Aaron Finch to the crease.

Aarav knew Finch was strong on the back foot but vulnerable against the moving ball early in his innings. He delivered three consecutive in-swingers, each one testing Finch's technique. The Australian captain stood firm, defending them with precision.

Then came the moment of magic. Aarav switched to an outswinger, a perfect setup. The ball landed just outside off, swung away late, and took the outside edge of Finch's bat. The ball flew straight into the hands of first slip, where Kohli completed a safe catch.

The crowd erupted! Finch was out for a duck, and Aarav had struck in his very first over.

Over 5:

With Finch gone early, Australia looked to Steve Smith to stabilize the innings. Smith, known for his unconventional batting and strong defensive play, was not going to give away his wicket easily.

Aarav, however, had different plans. After bowling a few deliveries outside off, he pitched one slightly fuller, inviting Smith to drive. Smith took the bait, leaning forward for an exquisite cover drive. But the ball, instead of swinging away, nipped back in sharply, sneaking between his bat and pad, crashing onto the off-stump!

Smith stood there in disbelief, staring at his shattered stumps. The stadium erupted once again. Two wickets in five overs! India was on fire, and so was Aarav.

Over 23:

Australia was struggling, and their wicketkeeper-batsman, Alex Carey, walked in to steady the ship. But Aarav, sensing blood, was relentless. He bowled a vicious bouncer, pushing Carey on the back foot. The

next ball was a full delivery that tailed in late. Carey misjudged the swing, and the ball crashed onto his pads.

A massive appeal erupted from the Indian fielders. The umpire took his time but eventually raised his finger. Carey immediately reviewed the decision, but the ball-tracking showed three reds – OUT!

Aarav had his third! Australia was now 83 for 3.

Over 29:

The middle order had crumbled, and Ashton Turner had to take the responsibility. But Aarav was in no mood to slow down. He bowled a fiery spell, mixing up short balls with well-directed yorkers.

On the fourth ball of the 29th over, Aarav unleashed a toe-crushing yorker. The ball swung in late, sneaking under Turner's bat and smashing into the base of middle stump.

Turner looked stunned, completely bamboozled by the brilliance of the delivery. Aarav roared in celebration, punching the air. He had picked up his fourth wicket, and Australia was reeling.

Over 45:

Despite losing wickets, David Warner had held one end firmly, anchoring the innings. He had reached 46 off 91 balls and was looking to accelerate.

Aarav, knowing Warner's weakness against short-pitched bowling, decided to set him up. He bowled two quick bouncers, forcing Warner to duck. Then, in an unexpected move, he delivered a deceptive slower ball. Warner, expecting another short one, was early into his pull shot. The ball took the top edge and ballooned high in the air.

Shardul Thakur, positioned at deep square leg, sprinted forward, eyes locked on the ball. He dived forward and grabbed it inches above the ground.

OUT! Warner was gone, and Aarav had his first five-wicket haul!

The entire Indian team rushed to him, patting his back and ruffling his hair. Kohli hugged him."

Final Blow –

With Australia in deep trouble at 180 for 9, Aarav returned for one last burst. He bowled a fiery inswinger, trapping the tailender plumb in front. The umpire raised his finger immediately, and with that, Aarav had completed a six-wicket haul!

Australia All Out for 189

Thanks to Aarav's spellbinding performance, Australia was bundled out for a mere 189. The pitch that was expected to be a batting paradise had turned into a nightmare for them.

India's Chase –

Chasing 190 was never going to be difficult with India's formidable batting lineup. Rohit Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan started cautiously but then opened up, finding boundaries at ease. Both scored fluent fifties, putting India in a commanding position.

Kohli, who walked in after Dhawan's dismissal, played a captain's knock, anchoring the chase. Even though Aarav didn't get a chance to bat, he cheered from the dugout, feeling immense pride in his bowling performance.

In just 37 overs, India crossed the line. A comprehensive victory, built on the foundation of Aarav's sensational six-wicket haul.