

Cricket 134

Chapter 134

The break after our innings had ended was brief—just twenty minutes. Just enough time to refuel, catch our breath, and mentally prepare for the next challenge. We had posted a mammoth 397/5, but cricket was a game of uncertainties. We couldn't afford to be complacent. The real battle was about to begin.

As I laced up my bowling shoes, the energy in the dressing room was electric. Everyone was fired up, eager to step onto the field and defend our total. I took a deep breath, knowing my role in this defense was crucial. This was my moment to prove myself not just as a batsman but as a genuine all-rounder.

New Zealand openers Martin Guptill and Henry Nicholls walked out with determination. They knew they had a mountain to climb, but they were no strangers to chasing big totals. The crowd buzzed with anticipation. The first ball of the innings was about to be bowled.

Bumrah was ready for the first over. His run-up was smooth, controlled, and calculated. The first ball—a perfect length delivery—was defended cautiously by Guptill. But New Zealand was aggressive from the start, capitalizing on anything even slightly off-line. Bumrah's over went for 9 runs, with Guptill flicking a full delivery for four and picking up a couple of singles.

Now, it was my turn. I handed my cap to the umpire and took my mark at the top of my run-up. The feeling of bowling in an ODI match, defending a massive total, was exhilarating. The fielders set themselves in position. I took a deep breath and charged in.

First ball—back of a length, rising sharply. Nichollas was taken by surprise! He misjudged the bounce and the ball zipped past his outside edge, whistling through to the keeper. A collective gasp went through the players.

Second ball—fuller delivery, swinging in. Nicholls shuffled across, got his bat down just in time, and pushed it to mid-wicket for a single.

Third ball—I decided to go for the off-cutter. I gripped the ball, rolled my fingers over it, and let it go. The ball dipped, gripped the surface, and turned slightly. Guptill was beaten again! It missed the off-stump by mere inches!

A sharp "OHHH!" echoed across the field as the close-in fielders threw their hands on their heads.

Fourth ball—bouncer! Guptill swayed away just in time. The umpire signaled one for the over.

Fifth ball—wide yorker. Guptill punched it to point the boundary for six.

Last ball of the over—length ball, just outside off. Nicholls leaned forward and played a defensive push. Dot ball.

I walked back to my fielding position. 8 runs off my first over. Decent, but I knew I could do better.

Bumrah came back for his second over and tightened things up, giving away only 7 runs in his next two overs. The pitch had some assistance for fast bowlers—there was movement if we hit the right areas.

My second over was sharper. I adjusted my length slightly, targeting the top of off-stump.

First ball—absolute beauty! It pitched on a good length, moved away late, and once again missed the edge of Guptill's bat. He looked frustrated, shaking his head.

Second ball—slower ball. Guptill read it well and drove it to covers. No run.

Third ball—on middle and leg, flicked away for two runs.

Fourth ball—short ball! Guptill went for the pull, but mistimed it! The ball flew in the air... but landed safely just short of mid-on. Nervous moment.

Fifth and sixth balls were tight on length. Guptill and Nicholls managed just singles. Another tidy over.

I bowled four overs in my spell, conceding only 18 runs. I hadn't taken a wicket, but I had beaten the bat multiple times. The close-in fielders could sense it—a breakthrough was coming.

At the end of the first 10 overs, New Zealand stood at 51/0. They had survived the initial burst, but we had kept things tight.

Here were the figures so far:

Aarav Pathak – 4 overs, 18 runs, 0 wickets

Jasprit Bumrah – 4 overs, 16 runs, 0 wickets

Mohammed Shami – 1 over, 6 runs

Shardul Thakur – 1 over, 11 runs

The game was still balanced. New Zealand hadn't lost wickets, but the pressure was mounting. I could see it in their eyes. One wicket, and the floodgates would open.

I took a breather, wiping the sweat off my forehead. The captain walked over, clapping his hands. "Great spell, Aarav. You're beating the bat—just a matter of time."

I nodded. My eyes locked on Guptill, who was adjusting his gloves. I knew he wasn't comfortable. That last mistimed pull had rattled him.

Shardul ran in for his second over. First ball—short and wide. Guptill pounced on it! Cracking sound, the ball racing away to the boundary. Frustration crept into the fielding side.

"Tighten up, boys!" the skipper shouted.

Next ball—on the stumps. Guptill tried to flick but missed! Huge appeal! The umpire shook his head. We considered a review but decided against it.

The intensity of the game was building. The longer they went without losing a wicket, the harder it would be for us. But I knew, deep down, that we were just one delivery away from turning this game around...

The momentum was shifting. New Zealand's openers had done well to survive the powerplay, but they weren't in control. The pressure was mounting with every dot ball, and we knew it was just a matter of time before we got the breakthrough. The energy in the field was electric, every player buzzing with anticipation, waiting for that one mistake from the batsmen.

Shardul Thakur had been brought into the attack to provide some variation. He ran in, eyes locked on Martin Guptill, knowing a mistake was imminent. The field was set, with three men on the boundary and attacking close-in fielders ready to pounce.

It came in the 14th over.

A short ball, angling in from over the wicket. Guptill had been waiting for a chance to free his hands, but this was too cramped for comfort. He went for a ramp shot, trying to guide it over the infield, but mistimed it. The ball flew straight to Ravindra Jadeja at deep third man!

OUT!

The entire team erupted! Jadeja pumped his fist as he clutched the ball securely. Shardul ran across the pitch, arms wide, screaming in celebration. The stadium roared, and we swarmed Shardul, ruffling his hair, patting his back. This was the moment we were waiting for.

Martin Gupthill c Jadeja b Shardul Thakur – 34 (46)

New Zealand: 92/1 in 14 overs.

Tom Blundell strode to the crease. He looked composed. Losing a set opener was a big blow, and now he had to build a partnership. The Indian team sensed an opportunity, closing in with sharp fielding and aggressive bowling.

Kuldeep and Jadeja were introduced into the attack, tightening the screws with their spin variations. The runs slowed, and the tension built. The batsmen were looking to rotate the strike, but boundaries were drying up. The moment was ripe for another strike.

Captain Kohli threw me the ball in the 23rd over.

I had been waiting for this moment. I took my mark, breathing deeply, feeling the ball in my hand. This was my chance to make an impact.

First ball – Fast and full on off-stump!

Blundell was caught off-guard. He got his bat down just in time, but the ball thudded onto the pitch and rolled to the fielder at cover. Dot ball.

Second ball – Bouncer!

Blundell ducked under it, but I could see he was rattled. He wasn't expecting that pace and bounce. The crowd loved it, cheering loudly. Dot ball.

Third ball – Good length, nipping away!

Blundell poked at it hesitantly but missed. The ball zipped past his outside edge, kissing the air. I let out a loud appeal, but the umpire remained unmoved. Dot ball.

Fourth ball – Yorker!

Blundell barely got his bat down in time, jamming it out to mid-wicket. No run. Dot ball.

Fifth ball – Slower delivery outside off!

Blundell looked to guide it past point but failed to make contact. I clenched my fist. Dot ball.

Last ball – Fast and straight!

Blundell played a defensive push, but the ball rolled straight to Kohli at covers. Dot ball!

A maiden over!

I walked back to my fielding position, fists pumping. The pressure was on them now. They weren't getting easy runs. I was just warming up. My teammates came up, patting me on the back. Kohli nodded approvingly, knowing that the pressure I had built would force a mistake soon.

By now, Blundell and Henry Nicholls were struggling to rotate the strike. Their body language screamed frustration. The pressure was unbearable, and I could feel it. This was the over to strike.

I charged in for the 25th over, eyes set on Blundell.

First ball – Length ball, outside off!

Blundell hesitated but pushed at it. The ball flew straight to Virat Kohli at slip!

OUT!

Kohli took the catch and immediately roared in celebration! He threw the ball up, punching the air as the entire team ran towards me. I screamed in joy, pumping my fists. Kohli ruffled my hair, shouting, "That's how you do it, champ!"

Tom Blundell c Kohli b Aarav – 19 (35)

New Zealand: 131/2 in 24.1 overs.

The crowd was on its feet, and we weren't done yet.

Second ball – Fast, angling in!

Nicholls, shaken by the last dismissal, pushed defensively. The ball rolled to point. Dot ball.

Third ball – Short ball!

Nicholls mistimed his pull. The ball skied high... Jadeja ran in from deep mid-wicket, dived forward, and took it brilliantly!

OUT!

Nicholls stood there, stunned. Jadeja sprinted towards me, arms wide, screaming in excitement. The entire team huddled together, jumping in celebration. Two wickets in two balls!

Henry Nicholls c Jadeja b Aarav – 42 (56)

New Zealand: 131/3 in 24.2 overs.

The momentum had shifted completely. We were on fire, and New Zealand was crumbling. I had delivered exactly what the team needed—aggression, accuracy, and wickets. Every dot ball, every dismissal added to their frustration. We could see the panic setting in.

Shardul, seeing the opportunity, came charging in from the other end. His energy was contagious. He bowled a perfect in-swinging yorker to Ross Taylor, sending his middle stump cartwheeling. Another eruption of joy! The crowd was going wild, and the Kiwis looked shell-shocked.

Ross Taylor b Shardul Thakur – 4 (7)

New Zealand: 125/4 in 26 overs.

The match was slipping away from New Zealand, and we weren't going to let them recover.

The battle wasn't over yet. With the middle order exposed, we could smell victory.

New Zealand had fought hard, but in the end, they fell short. Their innings ended at 248/9 in 50 overs.

Final Bowling Figures

Jasprit Bumrah – 2 wickets

Aarav – 2 wickets

Shardul Thakur – 2 wickets

Mohammed Shami – 1 wicket

Ravindra Jadeja – 1 wicket

Kuldeep Yadav – 1 wicket

Each wicket had been crucial, and every bowler played their role to perfection. But there was something extra special about my performance. Taking those two key wickets at the perfect moment turned the game in our favor. The intensity of the moment, the pressure on my shoulders, and the roaring crowd—it all made my performance even more meaningful.

As the match concluded, the atmosphere was electric. The crowd erupted in cheers as we celebrated a well-fought victory. The post-match presentation was about to begin, and I could feel my heart pounding as I stood among my teammates, waiting.

Then, the announcement came:

"The Player of the Match award goes to... Aarav!"

I walked up to the podium, after receiving the award, I was greeted by none other than Harsha Bhogle, who had the signature warm smile on his face, ready for the post-match interview.

Standing under the bright lights, microphone in hand, I took a deep breath, soaking in the surreal moment. This was a dream turned into reality.

Interview with Harsha Bhogle

Harsha Bhogle: Aarav, first of all, congratulations! What a performance today! Two crucial wickets, and of course, a magnificent double century. How are you feeling right now?

Aarav: Thank you so much, Harsha! This is an incredible feeling. Scoring 200 and taking two key wickets in such a match—it's just surreal. I knew I had to give my best when I stepped onto the field, and I'm happy I could deliver when the team needed me most.

Harsha Bhogle: Let's start with that double century. Not many players get to experience what it feels like to score 200 in an international match. Take us through that journey.

Aarav: Honestly, it still hasn't sunk in. It was one of those innings where everything just clicked. The bowlers kept challenging me, but I stayed patient, picked my shots carefully, and built my innings step by step. When I crossed 150, I knew I had a chance to get to 200, but I didn't want to force it. I focused on rotating the strike, punishing the loose balls, and keeping my concentration high. When I finally got there, the emotions were overwhelming. Seeing my teammates applaud from the dressing room, the crowd on their feet—it was a moment I'll never forget.

Harsha Bhogle: Now, let's talk about those two wickets. First, you dismissed Tom Blundell, and then Henry Nicholls in the very next ball. Walk us through that over.

Aarav: Absolutely! When I came on for that spell, the game was at a crucial juncture. Tom Blundell and Nicholls were trying to rebuild, and we needed a breakthrough. The first wicket was all about patience—bowling in the right areas, maintaining pressure, and forcing the mistake. When Blundell edged one to Virat at slip, I knew we had cracked their defense. And then, the very next ball—short, quick, and straight—Nicholls misjudged it, and Jadeja took a stunning catch. That moment was pure adrenaline, and I'll never forget the roar of the crowd!

Harsha gave me a firm handshake, and I held up the trophy as the crowd cheered. This was a moment I would never forget.

As I walked back to my teammates, they were already preparing for the real celebration. The entire squad surrounded me, cheering and chanting my name.

"Speech! Speech! Speech!" they chanted.

I laughed, raising my hands to quiet them down mimicking a serious man.

"Boys, this is OUR victory! Every single one of us played a role in this win, and I couldn't have done this without you. Let's celebrate this moment, because this is just the beginning of many more!"

with this we all laughed and enjoyed and just enjoyed.

With that, the celebration began in full swing. Shardul and Kuldeep lifted me onto their shoulders, carrying me around as the rest of the team clapped and cheered. It was a moment of pure joy, a night that would be etched in my memory forever.

Inside the dressing room, it was pure madness. Music blasted through the speakers, and the laughter echoed through the walls. Kohli came over, patting my back with a proud smile.

"Keep bowling like that, and we're going to win a lot more matches together."

I nodded, grinning. This was the best night of my career so far, and I knew—this was just the start of something bigger.

The match was over, but the memories were forever. And as I sat there, holding my Player of the Match trophy, I promised myself one thing:

I would keep pushing, keep improving, and keep winning.