

Cricket 142

Chapter 142

The world had changed overnight. The streets were empty, stadiums silenced, and the once-bustling arenas of cricket had become relics of a time before the virus. The COVID-19 pandemic had forced the world into lockdown, and with it, the IPL was temporarily put on hold.

With the news flashing across every major channel, one thing became clear: IPL 2020 was postponed.

I had already experienced this in my past life, and if my memory served me correctly, the tournament would resume in September. That meant I had a solid 5-6 months to refine my game, build my brand, and elevate myself to a level beyond any competition. I wouldn't let this setback define me—I saw it as an opportunity to dominate when the world reopened.

While the world panicked, I saw an opportunity.

As soon as the lockdown was announced, my parents and the servants in my house relocated to our farmhouse, where we had pre-planned everything. The farmhouse was fully stocked with supplies, and most importantly, it had a private training facility I could use. Unlike most athletes who were stuck improvising home workouts, I had a full-fledged training ground at my disposal.

For the first time in years, I had an extended period to focus solely on self-improvement without distractions. No travel, no events, no interruptions—just pure, uninterrupted growth.

The plan was clear: Train, Build My Brand, and Dominate.

Flashback: -

One evening, while on a video call with Abhishek, Shubman Gill, and Jaiswal, the conversation took an interesting turn.

Gill's expression was filled with disappointment.

"Bro, I just got my first solo sponsorship from my agency, but they offered me such a low fee. It's almost insulting," he said, shaking his head.

I spoke. "That's because your brand value is low, Gill. Companies don't just pay for talent; they pay for influence and reach."

Jaiswal nodded. "But how do we increase brand value? We are young players, and we had not even so many matches like you did Aarav, and although I have saved some money, but I wouldn't the amount be enough for this indefinite time Lockdown. How could we make our brand value increase in the Lockdown?"

That's when the idea hit me.

"YouTube. We start doing live streams—not just cricket talk, but gaming, challenges, and fun content. We speak English to reach all parts of India and even global audience. Think about it: Millions of cricket fans are stuck at home right now. They need entertainment. We can be that entertainment."

Abhishek's eyes widened. "That's actually brilliant. We could turn this into something huge."

Gill grinned. "Bro, imagine us streaming FIFA, cricket games, and even hosting Q&A sessions with fans!"

Jaiswal laughed. "We could also do crazy challenges to keep things exciting."

The plan was set. We would leverage social media like never before, reaching an audience beyond cricket fans. This was our chance to become not just athletes, but influencers.

While planning our YouTube journey, another opportunity surfaced.

I knew that this was Astra's moment to explode.

Gill, Jaiswal, and Abhishek hired teams of editors and marketers. They needed professionals to edit highlight clips, design thumbnails, and manage engagement on social media.

I, however, already had a complete PR and management team in place.

With everything in place, my daily routine became intense and structured.

Aarav's POV:

5:30 AM – Wake up.

6:00 AM – Gym. Intense three-hour session, including weight training, endurance drills, and daily challenges. Sometimes, I'd send challenges to Gill, Jaiswal, and Abhishek—like one-finger push-ups or a plank endurance contest.

9:00 AM – Freshen up & breakfast.

10:00 AM – Family time. Spent two to three hours with my parents, discussing everything from business to life.

1:00 PM – Cricket Training. A five-hour training session focused on batting, bowling, and fielding. With my new cricketer templates, I pushed my limits further than ever before.

7:00 PM – YouTube Live Streams. A three-to-four-hour interactive session engaging with fans, playing games, and growing our brand.

11:00 PM – Sleep.

This was my life in lockdown—and I thrived in it.

The night arrived for the First YouTube Live Stream.

The anticipation was electric.

We had graphics, a countdown timer, and an engaging title:

"LIVE with Aarav, Gill, Abhishek, and Jaiswal | Gaming Madness!"

As soon as we went live, thousands joined instantly. The chat was flooded with messages:

User1: "Let's gooo! Can't wait for this!"

User2: "Yo, Gill's finally on YouTube!"

User3: "Aarav bro, what's your next move in IPL?"

I smiled at the camera. "Alright, guys, welcome to the stream! We're gonna have a blast tonight. Some gaming, some fun cricket talk, and who knows? Maybe we'll even spill some IPL secrets."

Gill laughed. "No leaks, bro! I don't wanna get fined."

Abhishek added, "Alright, let's start with a match in FIFA. Who's betting against me?"

The engagement skyrocketed. Viewers loved the chemistry, the banter, and the authenticity. Within two hours, we had over 50,000 concurrent viewers.

This was just the beginning.

Over the next few months, our strategy worked flawlessly:

Highlights from our live streams flooded Instagram and Twitter and my own platform REELS.

Memes of our funniest moments went viral.

Clips of my insane cricket training built an aura of mystery and excitement around my game.

The result? Millions of followers.

And just like I had predicted, by the time September arrived, we weren't just cricketers anymore.

We were icons.

By the time IPL resumed, I wouldn't just be a player in the tournament.

I would be the biggest name in cricket.

The world was still confined within the four walls of lockdown, but inside my room, my universe had expanded to include a single glowing screen—Shradha.

We weren't lovers, not yet. But we weren't just friends anymore, either. There was something more in our late-night talks, something heavier in the silences between words, something unspoken yet deeply felt.

Our routine was unplanned but inevitable. As soon as my streams ended and the house fell silent, my phone would light up with a notification:

Shradha: "Awake?"

And every single time, my response was immediate.

Me: "For you? Always."

One night, as I lay on my bed, my phone vibrated. Video Call Incoming: Shradha.

I smirked, swiping to accept. "Miss me already?"

Her face appeared on the screen, framed by the dim glow of her bedside lamp. Her hair was slightly messy, her cheeks faintly pink. She pouted. "Don't flatter yourself, Mr. Superstar. I was just... bored."

I chuckled. "Right, and I just happened to be the only contact in your phone."

She rolled her eyes but couldn't hide the small smile tugging at her lips. "Fine, maybe I wanted to see your face. Happy?"

I leaned closer to the screen. "Ecstatic."

She laughed softly, her fingers playing with the loose strands of her hair. "So, how does it feel to have half the country crushing on you?"

"Crushing on me?" I raised an eyebrow. "Where did you hear that?"

She huffed. "Oh please, Aarav. I see the comments on your live streams. 'Aarav, marry me!' 'Aarav, you're my dream man!' 'Aarav, please notice me!' You have a full-blown fan club. and even comments on your Reels and photos!"

I smirked. "Jealous?"

Her eyes widened slightly, then she crossed her arms. "Me? Jealous? Ha! Keep dreaming."

I tilted my head. "So, if I say yes to one of them, you wouldn't mind?"

She hesitated for a fraction of a second, her lips parting slightly before she quickly masked it with a shrug. "Do whatever you want. Not my problem."

But her ears turned red. And I noticed.

Our talks were never just about one thing. We hopped from topic to topic like excited kids in a candy store, tasting everything, savoring every moment.

"Okay, random question," she said one night, her chin resting on her palm. "If you could have dinner with any three people in the world, dead or alive, who would they be?"

I thought for a moment. "Sir Don Bradman, because cricket. APJ Abdul Kalam, because of his philosophy. And..." I smirked. "You."

She blinked, surprised. "Me? Overall, the legendary people in history?"

I nodded. "What can I say? I like your company."

She bit her lip, looking away for a second, clearly flustered. "That was smooth, I'll give you that."

"You should know by now—I don't play just on the cricket field."

She groaned. "Ugh, terrible line."

I laughed. "But it made you smile."

She shook her head, hiding her face behind her hands. "I hate you."

"No, you don't."

She peeked through her fingers, grinning. "Shut up."

One night, after a long talk filled with laughter and teasing, there was a sudden stretch of silence.

"Shradha?"

No response.

I looked at the screen. Her eyes were closed, her breathing soft and even. She had fallen asleep.

I watched her for a moment, a strange warmth spreading in my chest. There was something so peaceful, so real about this moment. I took a screenshot before whispering, "Goodnight, Shradha."

Then, I ended the call, smiling to myself.

One evening, she seemed quieter than usual.

"Hey, what's up?" I asked.

She hesitated. "It's just... this lockdown is suffocating sometimes. I miss going out, meeting friends, doing normal things."

I softened. "Yeah, I get it. It's been tough."

She sighed. "Do you ever feel... lonely? Like, despite all the people cheering for you, all the messages, there's still this weird emptiness?"

I paused, her words hitting closer than I expected. "Yeah. More than I'd like to admit."

She looked at me, her eyes searching mine through the screen. "But talking to you helps."

I swallowed. "Same."

A small, soft smile tugged at her lips. "Good."

It was past midnight when she said, "Aarav, can I ask you something?"

"Shoot."

She hesitated. "Do you ever think about us? Like, what we are?"

I exhaled, running a hand through my hair. "All the time."

She looked surprised, her cheeks darkening. "Oh."

I smirked. "Why? Do you?"

She stuttered. "I-I mean... maybe."

"Maybe?" I leaned in. "That's not an answer."

She pouted. "Ugh, you're so annoying."

I laughed. "And yet, you keep calling."

She sighed dramatically. "Maybe I like annoying people."

I smiled. "Maybe I like you."

She sucked in a breath. "Aarav—"

Just then, her mom's voice echoed in the background. "Shradha! Go to sleep!"

She panicked. "Crap, gotta go! Bye!"

Before I could say anything, the call ended.

I stared at the screen, grinning.

This? This was something real.

And I wasn't going to let it slip away.

To Be Continued...