

Cricket 149

Chapter 149

The break before the big game against Delhi Capitals was supposed to be relaxing—a time to recalibrate, rejuvenate, and just breathe. Three days off the rest sounded like a dream, especially after the intense schedule we'd been following. But dreams, like form, can disappear overnight. And this one did, in the worst way possible.

It all began when we were chilling at the team hotel. We had just finished a hearty lunch. I was sprawled on the sofa, half-asleep, while some of the boys were tossing around a tennis ball in the hallway. There was laughter, there were jokes, and the room had a lightness that only comes when everything feels like it's finally going right.

That's when Mike Hesson walked in, his face clouded with seriousness. He was accompanied by our team physio. The vibe shifted immediately. Everyone turned.

"Guys, we have a bit of a setback," Mike began, his voice unusually low. "Dale's picked up a side strain during practice. He's out for the next match. Possibly longer."

The silence that followed was deafening.

Dale Steyn. Injured.

No one said anything for a good ten seconds. Dale was our thunderbolt. A man who didn't just bring heat with the ball, but carried a legacy with him. His very presence uplifted us.

I looked over at Kohli. His jaw was clenched tight. You could see the storm brewing inside him. Then, he simply nodded.

"We go more harder now and Aarav you would lead the pace now!," he said quietly, like a general to his troops.

And that was it. No drama. Just resolve. Pure, burning resolve.

For me, though, the moment came with personal frustration too. I had been having the season of my dreams. Dominating with both the bat and the ball. Holding the Orange Cap and Purple Cap simultaneously was something even legends dream about. But the leaderboard doesn't wait for you.

KL Rahul had overtaken me in the Orange Cap race.

Twenty runs. Just a gap of twenty runs. But it felt like a chasm. In this game, every stat tells a story. And this one was telling me that I'd been caught. I held the Purple Cap close, a small reminder of my dominance. But I missed the Orange.

It had been my companion. My pride. From dressing room celebrations to memes on social media to late-night video calls with Shraddha—where she'd tease me saying, "Don't lose it, superstar." And now?

Someone else wore it. But that wouldn't last. I had a fire inside me. A hunger.

I wanted both. And I wasn't going to stop until they were mine again.

Matchday: RCB vs DC

The atmosphere was electric, despite the absence of fans. The bus ride to the stadium was unusually quiet.

Kohli sat in front, lost in his music.

RCB won and chose to field first.

RCB's Playing 11!

Aron Finch ✈️

Virat Kohli

Aarav Pathak

AB Devillers ✈️ ☐

Moen Ali ✈️ ☐

Shivam Dube

Chris Morris ✈️ ☐

Washington Sundar!

Navdeep Saini

Md. Siraj

Yuzi Chahal

1st Over

Mohammed Siraj took the new ball. First delivery—sharp, swinging. Dhawan guided it for two. Some inside edges, a cut shot, and the over ended with 8 runs. Solid start from DC.

2nd Over

Navdeep brought raw pace. Shaw took him on, smashing one over cover for four. But Saini adjusted well. The over tightened up.

By the end of the Powerplay, DC was comfortably placed.

DC: 59/0 after 6 overs.

"Here comes Aarav Pathak. The man with the magic. Purple Cap holder, second in runs—this guy's having a dream season!"

"Absolutely, he's the glue of this RCB side. With both bat and ball, he's turning games single-handedly. You don't often see this level of consistency at such a young age."

"And let's not forget, he's 20. Just 20!"

6th Over - Aarav Pathak

I took the ball. My face was full of confidence and I knew, i am going to take wickets today and even score runs as

Ball 1: To Dhawan. Short of length. Played to point. Dot.

Ball 2: Fuller outside off. Dhawan leaned in. Picture-perfect cover drive. Four.

Ball 3: Good Length to Dhawan, played to the fielder for one run.

Ball 4: Reverse yorker. Shaw tried to dig it out.

He missed.

TIMBER.

The stumps lit up. I roared. Kohli ran to me like a bullet, jumped onto my back.

"YESSSS! COME ON!" he screamed.

Prithvi Shaw: 42 (23) - OUT

DC: 68/1

Ball 5: New man, Shreyas Iyer. Defended.

Ball 6: Another dot.

End of a game-changing over.

After the over, we have 2:30 minutes strategic time out!

Yuzi tapped me on the helmet. "Bro, are you even real? What are you? A glitch in the matrix?"

I grinned. "Nah, man. Just hungry."

9.4 Over – Yuzvendra Chahal to Shikhar Dhawan

Commentator - Harsha Bhogle:

"Chahal floats this one up, a classic leggie, inviting the drive. Dhawan takes the bait! He steps out, eyes lighting up—this is going for six, surely! But wait—he's mistimed it!"

Commentator - Ravi Shastri:

"Straight up in the air! Long-on's running in. That's Moeen Ali settling underneath it... AND TAKEN! That's a big wicket for RCB. Dhawan perishes looking for the big shot!"

Commentator - Jatin Sapru:

"Shikhar Dhawan goes for 32 off 28. Delhi—82 for 2 in 9.4 overs. It looked so promising for him, but this stadium's shorter boundaries come with their own deceptions."

Sunil Gavaskar:

"He was slightly early into the shot, Harsha. The bat face closed just a fraction, and that made all the difference. Didn't get the elevation, didn't get the distance. That's how deceptive the slower surface here can be."

Commentator - Harsha Bhogle:

"Well, well, well... here comes the storm. The left-handed dynamo, the chaos generator—Rishabh Pant walks in. When he's on song, stadiums lose roofs."

Pant takes his guard, taps the pitch twice, twirls his bat with that usual flamboyance, eyes locked in. Field placements shift. Kohli has deep fine leg, deep square leg, and a wide long-on ready.

11.3 Over – Washington Sundar to Shreyas Iyer

Commentator - Ravi Shastri:

"Short and flat, Iyer punches it straight down the ground! It's racing towards long-on. Aarav Pathak is sprinting in—wait, he's going for it!"

Commentator - Harsha Bhogle:

"Ohhh he's caught it! But hold on... he's tumbling over the boundary rope. Wait, he throws it back in the air mid-air! He leaps back in from outside the rope and... OH MY GOODNESS! He takes it again! THAT. IS. UNREAL."

Commentator - Jatin Sapru:

"WHAT A CATCH! He's not human! Aarav Pathak with an absolute screamer at the boundary! Shreyas Iyer departs for 11 off 13. Delhi now 90 for 3."

Sunil Gavaskar:

"That required awareness, athleticism, and poise! This young man is rewriting the fielding manual! That's one for the ages!"

Teammates rush in. Kohli claps furiously, arms raised. Chahal runs over, jumps into Aarav's back. Replays flash on the screen, showing Aarav's footwork on the edge—like a ballet dancer's precision.

Commentator - Harsha Bhogle:

"Marcus Stoinis, the man of muscle. He's known for that brute power. RCB can't afford to relax. One bad over, and the momentum shifts entirely."

Stoinis takes strike, adjusts his gloves, eyes the field. Deep midwicket and long-off drop back. The pressure cooker intensifies.

16.0 Over – Aarav Pathak

Kohli tosses the ball to Aarav.

Commentator - Ravi Shastri:

"Here comes Aarav Pathak. Has already created magic in the field with that stunning catch and the wicket of Shaw."

Ball 1: Yorker length, dug out by Pant. Single.

Ball 2: Stoinis rocks back—FOUR! Pulled behind square.

Commentator - Harsha Bhogle:

"Too short. Stoinis doesn't miss out on those. Blink, and it's gone."

Ball 3: Slower delivery, full. Dot ball.

Ball 4: Width given—FOUR again! Sliced over point.

Commentator - Jatin Sapru:

"That's high-class batting. Aarav needs to adjust. It's the margins that define you in T20s."

Ball 5: Slower bouncer. Stoinis miscues it, just a single.

Ball 6: Pant pushes to deep cover for one.

End of Over – Delhi 144/3

10 runs from it. Respectable start under pressure.

18.0 Over – Aarav

Kohli throws the ball again to Aarav.

Virat Kohli:

"Forget the last over. This one's yours. Just bowl smart. Trust your change-ups."

Aarav nods. Breathes in deeply.

Ball 1: Slower ball again. Pant reads it, but finds the fielder. Dot.

Ball 2: Back of a length, just outside off. Pant goes BIG. Swings hard.

But all he hears is... TIMBER!

Commentator - Harsha Bhogle:

"Cleaned him up! Slower ball, deceived him completely! Pant was deep in his crease, gave it the kitchen sink, but Aarav outsmarted him. That is T20 bowling at its best!"

Commentator - Ravi Shastri:

"You miss, I hit. Classic death-over stuff. RCB are pulling it back."

Pant out for 41 off 26.

Delhi – 179/4

Ball 3: Yorker. Dot. Hetmyer still settling in.

Ball 4: Inside edge, single.

Ball 5: Stoinis cuts late. Two runs.

Ball 6: Overpitched—driven hard, straight down the ground, Six!.

End of Over – 9 runs, 1 wicket. Delhi 188/4

20.0 Over – Final Over, Aarav to Bowl

Commentator - Jatin Sapru:

"Here we go! Final over. Aarav Pathak again. 3 overs, 24 runs, 2 wicket so far. Can he finish strong?"

Ball 1: Slower ball to Stoinis. He swings. Misses!

Dot. Ball 2: Another slower one. Misses again! Dot!

Commentator - Sunil Gavaskar:

"He's playing mind games. Two dots under pressure? That's gold. The lad's got nerves of steel."

Ball 3: Bouncer. Stoinis connects with an upper cut—FOUR!

Commentator - Harsha Bhogle:

"Improvisation at its best! Brilliant counter! But Aarav won't mind that."

Ball 4: Full, flicked to deep midwicket. Single.

Ball 5: Hetmyer on strike. Full toss.

CRACK! SIX straight down the ground!

Commentator - Ravi Shastri:

"That's in orbit! Hetmyer launches one. Wow! But one ball remains. Can Aarav have the last laugh?"

Ball 6 – Final Ball of Innings:

Hetmyer shuffles across. Tries the leg-side flick. Misses!

HUGE APPEAL! GIVEN OUT! LBW!

Commentator - Harsha Bhogle:

"Would you believe it! He's got him! What a finish! What a final over!"

Commentator - Sunil Gavaskar:

"This boy has nerves of steel. Under pressure, he delivered a diamond."

Delhi finishes at 209/6.

Aarav Pathak's final figures: 4 overs – 3 wickets – 35 runs

Post-Innings Analysis

Harsha Bhogle:

"Three wickets, a game-turning catch, a nerve-wracking final over. Aarav Pathak, take a bow."

Ravi Shastri:

"He's becoming the heartbeat of this RCB team. With bat, ball, and even in the field. There's nothing this man can't do."

Sunil Gavaskar:

"A match-winner, pure and simple. Not many handle pressure the way he does. He's the spark every team hopes for."

The chase was set. The target: 210. The ever-dependable Virat Kohli, radiating calm aggression with every stride, walked out alongside the seasoned Aaron Finch. Their expressions were focused, their bats tight in hand, ready to answer the challenge laid before them.

Kagiso Rabada stood at the top of his mark. The ball in his hand gleamed under the lights. His eyes, sharp and calculating, were locked on Kohli. The first over was about to begin, and the stage was set.

Over 1: Kagiso Rabada to Kohli.

Ball 1 – Lightning pace, good length. Kohli gets behind it, solid defense.

Ball 2 – Short of a length, angling in. Kohli nudges it off his hips. One run.

Ball 3 – Finch takes strike. Rabada goes wide of off. Finch lets it go.

Ball 4 – Full and straight. Finch drives, but finds cover. Dot ball.

Ball 5 – Rabada bangs it in short! Finch ducks quickly. A bouncer to test him early.

Ball 6 – Short and outside off. Finch upper-cuts! It bounces before reaching third man. One run.

2 runs from the over.

The Delhi fielders chirped with energy. Rishabh Pant clapped behind the stumps, a big grin across his face.

Over 2: Anrich Nortje to bowl now.

Ball 1 – Yorker! Finch jams it out just in time for one run.

Ball 2 – Short. Kohli attempts a pull! Mistimed. They sneak a single.

Ball 3 – Finch faces. Length ball outside off. Left alone.

Ball 4 – Nortje goes short again. Finch cuts it softly behind point. One run.

Ball 5 – Slower ball. Kohli winds up... and misses! Dot ball.

Ball 6 – Full outside off. Kohli drives with intent! Straight to the fielder at mid-off. one run.

Another tight over. Only 4 more runs. The required run rate was going very high now.

Harsha Bhogle (commentary): "You can sense something building. RCB haven't hit their rhythm. It's simmering just below the surface. And Sharjah's surface isn't easy tonight and it looks like batsman would take risk now, which could make the next over big for RCB or DC could get the wicket!"

Jatin: - Ashwin to bowl the third over, in powerplay, we had seen him bowl in powerplay before too.

Ball 1 – Tossed up invitingly. Kohli stretches forward, drives straight to cover.

Ball 2 – Quicker this time. Kohli taps it and calls for a sharp single. Pant swoops in, underarms a direct hit... but misses! Kohli makes it just in.

Ball 3 – Finch to face. Attempts a reverse sweep! Misses by inches. Dot ball.

Ball 4 – Again tossed up. Finch plays it safe to long-off. One run.

Ball 5 – Kohli back on strike. Dances down the track. Lofted inside-out! FOUR over extra cover. Pure timing.

Ashwin smiles, unfazed. He adjusts his grip.

Ball 6 – Slows it down. Wider outside off. Kohli reaches out, aiming long-on. But the ball dips suddenly, takes the turn. Kohli mistimes it!

Straight to deep midwicket. The fielder doesn't move. It's a clean catch!

Kohli OUT for 8 (09).

Jatin Sapru (commentary): "Oh, masterclass from Ashwin! That was a chess move. Set him up brilliantly and executed perfectly."

RCB 11/1.

Kohli walks over to the dugout boundary. Points to Aarav.

Kohli: "You're up, mate. Let's calm things down, yeah? Take your time."

Aarav, the youngster with nerves of steel, grabs his helmet. He straps on his gloves and walks in with calm determination. The Sharjah floodlights reflect off his visor.

Ravi Shastri (commentary): "And here comes the wonder boy. He's already impressed with the ball and the bat."

Over 4: Axar Patel steps in.

Ball 1 – Finch plays it off the front foot. No run.

Ball 2 – Length ball again. Flicked to midwicket. one run.

Ball 3 – Aarav on the strike, watches the field closely. taps the bat on the pitch. got ready to play the ball. took the stance! Slower through the air. Aarav tries to nudge it but can't beat point. Dot again.

Ball 4 – More air on this one. Aarav charges! Misses completely. Pant tries a stumping... but Aarav showed his flexibility, just survives.

Pant: "Areee, ek aur inch hota toh gaya hota! Next ball, Axar!"

Ball 5 – Aarav gets a single to rotate the strike.

Ball 6 – Finch on strike, checks for the field.

Axar loops it up. Finch shapes for a forward defensive, but the ball dips sharply, turns late... and kisses the outside edge!

Straight into Pant's gloves. Caught behind! Finch OUT on this ball!

Harsha Bhogle: "Oh wow! That's a dream delivery for any spinner. Flight, dip, turn, and a feathered edge. Brilliant from Axar!"

RCB 13/2. The dugout is stunned. Faces tense. Silence grows.

AB de Villiers walks out, calm and composed.

He twirls his bat, takes a deep breath. The entire Delhi field tightens.

Pant (to bowlers): "Yeh banda dangerous hai bhai. Ek chance bhi nahi dena. Tight rakh."