

KING OF CRICKET

Chapter 15: Zonal Preparations

After three days of rest, the training ground was alive again, buzzing with energy and anticipation. The Zonal Championship was just a week away, and the stakes had never been higher. This tournament would decide which players from our region would make it to the Vijay Merchant Trophy U16 League, the pathway to bigger dreams like Ranji, Vinod Mankad Trophy, and perhaps even national selection.

Coach Ashwin gathered us near the practice pitch. His voice was calm but carried the weight of expectation.

"Listen carefully," he began. "This is your chance to impress the selectors. Winning is important, but performance matters more. For batsmen, play your shots confidently, especially on the side where the selectors are seated. Let them see your ability to dominate. Bowlers, show aggression. Every wicket is an opportunity to prove your skills—celebrate it, make them notice you. Fielders, stay sharp; a single save can make all the difference."

With a nod, he dispersed us to our respective practice routines.

I knew where my weaknesses lay—short balls and length deliveries often troubled me. Determined to overcome this, I approached Kamal, a senior fast bowler known for his lethal bouncers.

"Kamal bhai, can you help me with my short-ball technique?" I asked, holding my bat tightly.

He grinned. "Sure, Aarav. But be ready. I'm not going easy on you."

For the next few hours, I faced an onslaught of bouncers and back-of-a-length deliveries. Kamal's sharp deliveries whizzed past my helmet as I ducked, weaved, and adjusted. Slowly, I gained confidence. I started hooking and pulling the short balls and driving the length deliveries with finesse.

"Good, Aarav," Kamal said after an intense session. "You've improved. Keep practicing, and you'll handle any bowler in the Zonal Championship."

Playing XI Selection

As the sun set and the training concluded, it was time to finalize the Playing XI for the Zonal Championship. The core team remained the same as our last practice match:

MayankAbhishekAarav (Captain)RahulAniketYashArjunKaranKamalVikas
(Wicketkeeper)Aditya

The team looked strong, a perfect blend of experience and youthful energy.

That night, as I lay in bed, my mind wandered to the possibilities. I opened my personal panel, a system I had created to track my progress and set goals:

Name: Aarav Pathak

Age: 13 years (Birthday: 31 August 2000)

Talent Level: SS (Rare)

Skills: Low injury risk, fast recovery, sleep fatigue healing

Bowling Type: Left-arm medium pace

Fielding Skill: Best fielder (22.12%) + Training Module

Height: 5'3"

Talent Development:

KL Rahul Talent: 49.0093% (Training Module active – estimated 2-3 years for 100% completion at current pace.)

I stared at the data, feeling a mix of pride and determination. My ultimate dream was to win the Vijay Merchant Trophy while being the tournament's top

scorer. But beyond that, I aspired to attend the BCCI Zonal Cricket Academy (ZCA) camps, where players were groomed for Ranji and other elite competitions.

Consistency was the key. I reminded myself to focus on the present: the Zonal Championship.

With that thought, I closed my eyes, visualizing myself lifting the trophy and hearing the roar of the crowd. My journey had just begun, and I was ready for it.

Author's Note:- I know Chapter's length are small, but don't worry soon the length of each chapter would increase around 1100 words per chapter, as Currently i am writing outline of how to writing this story further.