

Cricket 150

Chapter 150

As the dust of two early wickets still hung heavy in the air, the stadium had gone silent. Royal Challengers Bangalore were gasping at 11/2. Kohli had mistimed one against Ashwin and Finch was castled beautifully by Axar. It was looking like a one-sided affair in favour of Delhi Capitals. But then... the script flipped dramatically, not with a whisper, but with a deafening roar.

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen," Harsha Bhogle's voice crackled through the airwaves, steady and composed as always, "To what could be the resurrection of the RCB innings. Aarav Pathak walks in, a youngster filled with hope, paired with the maestro himself, AB de Villiers."

Matthew Hayden added with a grin, "They say pressure makes diamonds, and RCB need a whole mine right now. Let's see if this pair can deliver under fire."

And deliver they did. What followed was nothing short of a cricketing masterclass, a storm of pure genius, grit, elegance, and aggression that swept across the field and rewrote the script of the match in bold letters. Every stroke from their bats became a line in a poem, every run a word in the story of RCB's resurrection.

The first sign of intent came when Aarav leaned into a length ball from Nortje and caressed it past mid-off with the grace of an artist brushing a masterpiece on canvas. "That's not just a shot," said Jatin Sapru, his voice rising with excitement, "That's a statement! That shot was masterpiece!"

Next over, AB flicked Rabada nonchalantly to deep square for four. Then he reverse-swept Ashwin with such audacity that the entire commentary box broke into chuckles.

"He's got wrists of silk and eyes like a hawk," exclaimed Harsha. "What composure from AB, and look at Aarav responding in kind. The chemistry is brewing and the scoreboard is moving."

Navjot Singh Sidhu couldn't hold back his signature style. "If AB is the storm, then Aarav is the thunder! When talent marries timing, the bowlers start miming! He's not just hitting balls; he's rewriting scrolls on the walls of cricketing halls!"

Aarav's innings truly picked up in the 8th over. Mishra floated a teasing leg-break. Aarav danced down and launched him over long-on. The ball soared into the stands, clearing them with ease.

"That's gone into orbit! Call NASA, we've got lift-off!" roared Matthew Hayden.

The current run rate climbed steadily to match with the required run rate. The boundaries flowed like a river breaking through a dam. Aarav was playing the innings of his life. The way he used his feet, read the spinners, and punished anything loose—he was unstoppable, untouchable, uncontainable.

Aarav didn't just survive Rabada and Nortje, he dismantled them. He upper-cut Nortje for six over third man. He pulled Rabada with authority that made the South African ace shake his head in disbelief. He stepped out to Ashwin and inside-outed him for four over cover. The stadium was now roaring with every stroke, the momentum had shifted.

At the halfway stage, RCB were 95/2. Sidhu exclaimed, "This isn't just a recovery, this is a resurrection! Like a phoenix from the ashes, Aarav rises with eyes of fire and wings of gold!"

AB played the perfect partner's role. His signature lap shots, the late cuts, the flicks—they all came out with style and precision. He rotated the strike with elegance, let Aarav keep the tempo up, but always stayed ready to explode.

But make no mistake—this was Aarav's night.

Harsha Bhogle, awe in his voice, said, "We're watching something special tonight. This young man, Aarav, is building his legacy, one glorious stroke at a time."

Aarav's fifty came up in just 26 balls. He raised his bat with humility, a quiet nod to the dugout, his teammates, and perhaps to the fans on the other side of the screen for this moment.

Then came over number 14. Nortje back into the attack. First ball, Aarav shuffled across and scooped him over fine leg for six. Second ball, he lofted him inside-out over extra cover for four. Third, he cut him square—another boundary.

"He's dissecting the field like a surgeon!" Jatin Sapru shouted.

"Bowlers have become philosophers now," laughed Sidhu, "They keep asking, 'What is the meaning of this? Where do we bowl to this blazing bliss?'"

In the 16th over, Aarav reached the 90s. The stadium was on its feet. Everyone sensed history.

Ashwin bowled a carrom ball. Aarav reverse-swept it for four. 94. Next ball, a slider. Aarav charged down, met it on the full, and sent it soaring over long-on. SIX! He dropped to one knee, punched the air—a hundred! His first IPL century. 58 balls. A roar echoed through the stands like thunder chasing lightning.

"Take a bow, young man! This is what dreams are made of!" said Harsha.

AB ran to him, hugged him tightly. Cameras flashed. The dugout was on its feet, clapping, cheering, yelling.

"He came in at 11/2, and now he's made it 160/2! This is the stuff of legends," Hayden declared.

Sidhu was poetic and jubilant. "The youth has roared, the game has soared! With willow in hand and fire in heart, he's painted a masterpiece, stroke by stroke, part by part!"

With the match now almost in the bag, AB pressed the accelerator. A scoop over fine leg, a drive through cover, a pull into the stands—AB brought up his fifty in just 23 balls. The flow was effortless, the impact was brutal.

"When AB starts dancing, even the best bowlers lose rhythm," chuckled Harsha.

Rabada's frustration was palpable. He ran in harder, gritted his teeth, and bowled a perfect yorker, but Aarav dug it out with soft hands and ran two, retaining the strike.

Then came the climax. The finishing blow arrived in the 18th over. Mishra tossed it up, AB stepped out with the swagger of a showman and launched it high and deep into the night sky.

"And that... is the match! RCB win with two overs to spare!" screamed Jatin.

Aarav was 124 off 61 now. The partnership stood at 204—an season record of IPL 2020 till now. What began as a crisis had now become an epic.

The camera zoomed in. AB and Aarav walked off, bats raised, shoulders tall, hearts full. The teammates gave them a standing ovation.

"Aarav Pathak—remember the name," said Harsha. "Tonight, this man took once again the orange cap with him and again retain both the caps with him. what is he playing, he comes to the ground, plays big, huge took wickets, give interview after winning the Player of the match and then went to the hotel and then repeat again!"

The dugout erupted. Kohli hugged Aarav with pride in his eyes. Finch patted his back with a smile.

Presentation ceremony. Aarav won Player of the Match. He smiledproudly, holding the award like it was made of gold.

"It was surreal," he said. "Batting with AB made it easier. He kept calming me, encouraging me. I just wanted to stay there till the end and repay the trust."

AB took the mic next. "This young man—he's the future. What composure, what shot selection. I just enjoyed the best seat in the house."

Sidhu ended it best, voice booming like a bard: "He walked in when the ship was sinking, But he steered it to shore with fearless thinking! Aarav the bold, Aarav the bright, Bathed the stadium in glorious light! RCB has found their shining knight, With blade of steel and mind of might!"

And so, in the heart of Delhi, under the glowing lights and the roar of thousands, a new hero rose—not just in numbers, but in courage, character, and class. Aarav Pathak's innings that night wasn't just a century, it was a statement carved in fire. The IPL had witnessed a new era, and it began with a thunderous roar that echoed far beyond the boundaries of the stadium.

Harsha Bhogle's voice cracked the airwaves with anticipation, "Well folks, I've seen many innings, many partnerships, but something about this pair... it feels special tonight. Something is brewing!"

The Delhi Capitals had set a mammoth 210. But what followed wasn't a chase—it was poetry. It was theatre. It was domination. From the very start of both of their inning's AB and Aarav came together, the aura changed.

Matthew Hayden chuckled, "You can feel it, Harsha. It's like watching a tiger and a cheetah hunt together. One glides. The other pounces. This is going to be special."

124 not out off 58 balls.

4 overs, 3 wickets for 35 runs.

Man of the Match—again.

Orange Cap holder—again.

Purple Cap holder—again.

The floodlights at the empty Stadium bathed the ground in a warm glow. The scoreboard read 215/2 in 18 overs. Royal Challengers Bangalore had done the unthinkable — chased down a target against Delhi Capitals with sheer dominance. Aarav Pathak, 124* off 58 balls, stood tall, bat in one hand, the other raised in quiet triumph. Add to that his 4 overs, 3 wickets for 35 runs — an all-round performance that made the evening unforgettable.

The presentation ceremony began. Harsha Bhogle stepped up to with the microphone with his familiar charisma, smile etched deep and eyes gleaming with admiration.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we've just witnessed a once again amazing performance. It's not often a player walks in at 11/2 and walks out 124* not out. Batting, bowling — he did it all. Please welcome, the Player of the Match, Aarav Pathak!"

Aarav, still panting slightly, walked up in his sweat-drenched jersey.

Harsha: "Aarav, congratulations. What an incredible performance. 124 not out off just 58 balls, and three key wickets. You're once again holding both the Orange and Purple Caps. Tell us... what was going through your mind when you walked in at 11/2?"

Aarav smiled, looked at the sky for a second, then spoke:

"Thanks, Harsha. Honestly, when I walked in, it was a bit of a blur. Two quick wickets — Finch and Kohli — and suddenly there was a little bit of pressure, but I believed in myself and I know I could win the game, and with AB's support this was too easy for us. In min-innings AB walked up to me and said, 'Let's rebuild, let's play smart. We don't have to win it in 5 overs.' That calmed me down. We decided to take it over by over. The first goal was just to survive the powerplay."

Harsha: "And not just survive — you started scoring with flair. Those upper cuts, those inside-out drives and the best thing seeing unorthodox 360-degree shots from both of the ends... It looked like you were seeing the ball like a football. What clicked for you tonight?"

Aarav: "I think it was the mindset, Harsha. I didn't want to play defensively because I know that's not me. But I didn't want to go all guns blazing either. AB and I spoke — we said, 'Let's play percentage cricket.' If the ball's there to hit, hit it. If not, rotate strike. Once we got our rhythm, it felt like we were in control."

Harsha: "Let's talk about that partnership with AB de Villiers — 204 runs, absolutely majestic. What was the chemistry like out there?"

Aarav: (laughs) "Oh man, AB is something else. He keeps it so calm. Between overs, he's cracking jokes, reminding me to hydrate, and at the same time, he's guiding me. 'This bowler likes to bowl wide yorkers; watch out.' 'This guy's going to push in the short one, get ready to pull.' He's a genius. And he gave me confidence. I think at one point he said, 'You're the main guy tonight, Aarav. Go own it.' That meant a lot."

Harsha: "And own it you did. That six over long-on to bring up your century — pure class. Your first IPL hundred this season, and under such pressure! What does this moment mean to you?"

Aarav: "It means everything. I've dreamt of this moment to win a match from a such situation. And to do it in the company of Virat bhaiya and Ab, with the team in trouble, is something I'll carry forever. But I also know it's just one match. I want to stay grounded, keep contributing. The season's long."

Harsha: "You've now taken 3 wickets today as well, and you're topping both the batting and bowling charts. Are we seeing the rise of a new all-round superstar?"

Aarav: (smiling) "I don't know about that! I just try to do what the team needs. When the captain asked me to bowl, I said yes immediately. I love contributing in every way. I've been working a lot on my variations and lengths. So it was nice to get the rewards."

Harsha: "Take us into the dressing room. What was it like when you walked back after the win?"

Aarav: "Electric. Coach gave me a big hug. Virat came running, lifted me up — I think my back still hurts from that! AB said, 'Dinner's on me.' (laughs) Everyone was pumped. But more than the celebration, there was this sense of belief — like we can win from anywhere. That's powerful."

Harsha: "Well, it was a match for the ages. Final question: what message do you have for all the young cricketers like you watching you tonight?"

Aarav: "Don't be afraid of failure. Play the game with heart. Work hard in the nets, respect your coaches, but when you step on the field — back yourself. There's magic in belief. And most importantly, enjoy it. If you're not having fun, you're doing something wrong."

Harsha: "Wise beyond your years. Ladies and gentlemen, Aarav Pathak — Player of the Match, holder of the Orange Cap, Purple Cap, and the heart of every RCB fans tonight. What a player, what a night."

Aarav held up the trophy.

Back in the RCB camp, the celebrations were wild. The video analyst played back Aarav's sixes on loop. The physio handed him an energy drink and patted his shoulder.

"That scoop over fine leg?" Devdutt Padikkal asked him. "Bro, where did that come from?"

Aarav laughed, "I watched AB do it for years. Figured it was time I gave it a go."

Everyone burst into laughter.

But deep down, they all knew. This was no fluke.

As the team bus rolled out of the stadium, the chatter was constant. AB sat beside Aarav.

"You know," AB said, "One day people will say they watched your early days. They'll remember this innings. Don't change. Just keep playing your game."

Aarav nodded. "Only if you're still around to guide me."

AB smiled. "Always."

And as the bus disappeared into the night light, RCB's journey looked brighter than ever — powered by talent, mentorship, belief, and a young man named Aarav, who turned pressure into poetry with his bat and ball.