

Cricket 151

Chapter 151

The sun had begun to set on the league stages of the most thrilling IPL season in recent memory. The group matches were over, and the dust had finally settled. Across stadiums, from Sharjah to Dubai. Now, only four remained.

And in points table standing tall—undisputed —at the very top, was Royal Challengers Bangalore.

1. Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) – 10 wins, 4 losses

2. Delhi Capitals (DC) – 8 wins, 6 losses

3. Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) – 7 wins, 7 losses

4. Mumbai Indians (MI) – 7 wins, 7 losses

The league had witnessed a storm named Aarav Pathak. In 14 games, this 20-year-old sensation had lit the tournament on fire. With 758 runs and 26 wickets, he wasn't just dominating, he was redefining what it meant to be an all-rounder.

Orange Cap Leaderboard:

Aarav Pathak – 758 runs

KL Rahul – 670 runs

Shikhar Dhawan – 618 runs

Purple Cap Leaderboard:

Aarav Pathak – 26 wickets

Kagiso Rabada – 24 wickets

Jasprit Bumrah – 23 wickets

The chatter in the cricketing world was loud, excited, buzzing like a beehive before a storm. The fans had already taken sides. The expert panels debated for hours on prime-time TV. Could Aarav carry RCB to their maiden title? Was this finally the season the red army's trophy cabinet would be opened?

And now, the playoffs were upon us.

Tomorrow, it would be Qualifier 1. RCB vs DC. At the magnificent Dubai International Cricket Stadium.

Win this match—and a direct ticket to the IPL Final. Lose—and another chance, but through the tougher route.

Inside the RCB team hotel, the atmosphere was strangely calm, like the eye of a hurricane. The players were lounging around in a casual team meeting after dinner. Laughter echoed in parts, but tension lingered behind every relaxed smile.

Virat Kohli, the captain, stood before the team, flipping through his notes on the whiteboard. Aarav, now the star of the nation, sat next to AB de Villiers, sipping on Milk-shake, legs folded, eyes closed.

"Tomorrow," Virat began, "isn't just a match. It's our chance to erase the past, to fill our cabinet with the trophy we desire from last 12 years!. We've worked hard, we've fought harder. Let's play fearless cricket. And remember—we've got our man in red-hot form."

He looked toward Aarav. The team clapped. AB patted his shoulder.

"Both caps?" AB whispered. "Show off."

Aarav smiled and raised his Juice glass in air.

Back in the commentary studio.....

Harsha Bhogle leaned forward as the camera zoomed in.

"This IPL season has been nothing short of breathtaking. But there's one name everyone's been talking about. Aarav Pathak. 758 runs. 26 wickets. At just 20. It's not just his numbers—it's the way he does it. The elegance. The calm. The fire in his eyes."

Sanjay Manjrekar chimed in. "Tomorrow's match is more than just a semi-final. It's Aarav versus Ashwin. It's Rabada versus AB. It's Delhi's bowling wall against Bangalore's blazing bats. The kind of cricket you clear your schedule for."

Matthew Hayden added, "And remember, DC were one of the 4 team to defeat RCB once in the league stage."

Aarav POV:

He sat on the bed, legs stretched out, scrolling through the comments on his recent Instagram post. A photo of him raising his bat after the century. The caption: "For the team. For the fans. Not done yet."

Comments flooded in:

@rcbforever: "We're winning it this year bro!!!"

@delhikibilli: "Don't get too comfy, DC is coming 🦁"

@sachinfan99: "He's the real MVP this season. Unreal!"

He smiled.

The night was unusually quiet in Dubai.

The city that never really slept seemed to hold its breath for tomorrow. For cricket lovers, it was the moment they waited all season for—Qualifier 1 of the IPL. The stakes? A direct ticket to the finals. The venue? The grand Dubai International Cricket Stadium. The teams? Royal Challengers Bangalore vs Delhi Capitals.

And in the heart of the silence, amid team meetings, strategy sessions, and media briefings, one player sat alone in his hotel room restless.

Aarav Pathak.

750+ runs in the league stage. 26 wickets. Holder of both the orange and purple caps. A season people were calling "one for the ages."

He stared at his phone.

His thumb hovered over her contact.

He hesitated.

Shradha.

She wasn't his girlfriend. Wasn't even officially "special" in his life.

But Aarav would be lying if he said she didn't matter.

He clicked "Call."

[Phone ringing...]

Shradha (groggy): "It's 11:36 pm, Aarav. Either you've just won the IPL in advance or you've lost your mind."

Aarav (laughs nervously): "Can it be both?"

Shradha (teasing): "You're nervous, aren't you?"

Aarav: "I'm not nervous... I just... couldn't sleep. Just wanted to hear your voice."

Shradha (softly): "That's kinda unexpected... and kinda cute. What's going on, Mr. Dual-Cap Holder?"

Aarav: "Big match tomorrow."

Shradha: "Duh. The Qualifier. I've already locked my evening—phone on Do Not Disturb, popcorn ready, mood set. Everyone in my house knows I'll be unavailable after 6:45."

Aarav (grinning): "Wait, are you saying you're cheering for RCB tomorrow?"

Shradha (mock offended): "Excuse me? You know MI's in my blood. I've literally grown up yelling 'Sachin! Sachin!' or Dad ! Dad!"

Aarav (dramatic): "Wow. Cold. Brutal. I was hoping for some support from a friend."

Shradha: "Oh don't guilt trip me! You and guilt don't go together."

Aarav: "Okay fine. I'm not asking you to burn your MI jersey. But just for tomorrow... keep it hidden? Like pretend you're neutral. Secretly support RCB for once?"

Shradha (with a laugh): "Only because it's you, Aarav. Fine. No MI jersey. No blue. I'll wear Red."

Aarav: "That's all I ask. Red is classy. Red is bold. Red is... RCB-compatible."

Shradha (smiling): "You sound less stressed already."

Aarav (soft): "I am. You calm me down. Always have."

There was a pause. Long enough to feel it.

Shradha: "You okay?"

Aarav: "I guess. But it's weird. All this praise, all this media hype, and still... it doesn't feel complete. Like something's missing."

Shradha (quietly): "And what's that?"

Aarav (soft): "Maybe it's you."

A silence. Thick. Charged.

Shradha: "That was either really sweet... or really dangerous."

Aarav (laughs): "Both. Maybe I'm reckless before big games."

Shradha: "Clearly. You should be sleeping, not buttering me."

Aarav: "Okay okay, last reckless act of the night. I want to see you tomorrow. Before the match. Just five minutes."

Shradha (surprised): "Wait what?"

Aarav: "yeah! a simple best of luck from you! I don't care. I just want to see you."

Shradha (softly): "You think I'm your lucky charm or something?"

Aarav: "Not lucky charm. Just... please do it for me!"

Shradha (after a pause): "Fine. I'll come. But don't you dare lose after that. Or I'm going back to supporting MI permanently."

Aarav (grinning): "Deal."

Shradha: "Now go to sleep, idiot. You have a war to win."

Aarav: "Good night, MI girl."

Shradha: "Good night, RCB boy."

He hung up, smiling. Somewhere between the chaos of cricket and the roar of a stadium, something quiet was blooming.

Not love.

Not yet.

But something close.

Maybe, after the finals... who knows?

The Qualifier 1

The atmosphere was surreal. A blanket of silence covered the massive Dubai International Cricket Stadium, only to be broken by the occasional flutters of flags in the wind and the buzz of drones capturing every corner of the venue. It was IPL Qualifier 1 – the battle of the giants, the face-off between the best of the league: Royal Challengers Bangalore vs Delhi Capitals. Both teams had never tasted the glory of lifting the IPL trophy, and today, they stood on the brink of rewriting history.

Standing in the middle of the pitch, microphone in hand, was the ever-energetic and iconic voice of Indian cricket – Ravi Shastri.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen watching from across the globe! We are LIVE from the Dubai International Cricket Stadium, and today we witness the first big clash of the playoffs – RCB taking on DC for a place in the grand finale!"

The camera panned toward the two captains walking out for the toss – Virat Kohli, calm and composed, representing RCB, and Shreyas Iyer, with confidence in his stride, leading the Delhi Capitals.

The coin went up. "Heads," called Kohli.

The match referee checked, "It's tails. Delhi Capitals have won the toss."

Shreyas Iyer smiled and faced Ravi Shastri for a quick chat.

Ravi Shastri: "Shreyas, you've won the toss. What's the plan today?"

Shreyas Iyer: "We'll bat first, Ravi. It's a big match. Pressure games like these, we want to set a target and let our bowlers defend it."

Ravi Shastri: "Big call. Any changes to the playing XI?"

Shreyas Iyer: "No changes. We've come this far with this squad, and they've delivered. We trust our combination."

He then handed the mic to Ravi, who turned toward Virat.

Ravi Shastri: "Virat, tough luck at the toss. But it's game time. Thoughts?"

Virat Kohli: "Yeah, Ravi. Would've loved to bat first too, but honestly, we're not too bothered. We're confident chasing. It's about keeping calm and executing."

Ravi Shastri: "Same team?"

Virat Kohli: "Absolutely. This group has fought tooth and nail to reach here. No need to fix what's not broken."

Shastri, with a gleam in his eye, leaned in for a more personal question.

Ravi Shastri: "And before you go... Aarav. What a season he's having. 758 runs, 26 wickets, holder of both orange and purple caps. Tell us – how important is he for RCB?"

Virat's eyes lit up, and he chuckled briefly.

Virat Kohli: "Aarav's been phenomenal. Honestly, I've run out of adjectives. He's not just performing – he's just doing something, I don't have any words. Whether it's saving us with the bat, or striking with the ball, he's the X-factor every team dream of. More than numbers, it's the mindset. He's calm, focused, and fearless. The way he's stepped up in pressure situations... that's rare. He's a match-winner, period."

Ravi Shastri: "Well said, champ. All the best for the big clash."

With that, the captains walked off to regroup with their teams. The stage was set, the lights shone down on the pristine green outfield, and cricket fans around the world held their breath.

It was time – RCB vs DC. The battle for the ticket to the final had just begun.

After the interview, Kohli jogged back to the dugout and clapped his hands, rallying the troops.

Virat (in the huddle): "Okay guys, we know what to do. Let's just play like we've always played. Just bang it from ball one! No fear, no pressure. We came this far to WIN. And we WILL WIN. LET'S GO RCB!"

The team echoed his roar. The energy was unmissable.

Meanwhile, as the players warmed up, social media was already on fire. Fans were losing their minds.

Trending: #RCBvsDC #PrinceAarav #AaravNextKing #GoatAarav #ViratTheKing #ABDevogs

Here's what the RCB fandom was posting:

● @CholeBiryaniForever: "Brooooo if Aarav scores again, I'm gonna get his name tattooed on my forehead 🎉 #AaravNextKing"

● @RCBFanSinceBirthNotGloryHunter: "If you aren't supporting RCB tonight, you have no taste in cricket. Sorry not sorry 🎉 #GoatAarav #ViratTheKing"

● @ABdeVillainOfHearts: "AB + Aarav + VK = Infinity stones of cricket. Try stopping us now, DC. TRY. #ABDForever"

● @I_Love_Bananas_RCBBoi: "Prediction: Aarav hattrick and century today. Manifesting hard. My parrot also said RCB will win."

● @PineappleOnPitch: "Tell me why I'm nervous like it's my own exam bro 🎉 LET'S GO RCB 💥"

● @YourMomsFavRCBFan: "RCB fans when Aarav walks in: STANDING OVATION MODE ACTIVATED #PrinceAarav"

● @RCBKiShaadiKabHogi: "Kohli's intensity, Aarav's consistency, AB's legacy. DELHI BHAAGOOO
🔥🔥🔥"

● @EmotionalDamageChai: "If Aarav wins us the match, I'm changing my kid's name to Aarav even if she's a girl. #DealWithIt"

Even neutral fans couldn't help but join in:

☒ @MIbutLoveGoodCricket: "Okay okay I support MI BUT can we all agree that Aarav is UNREAL? Kid's built different."

☒ @CSKfanOnVacation: "I don't like RCB, but damn, Aarav plays like Dhoni + Kohli + ABD combined 😊"

And the fan armies were at it:

RCB Fans: "We bleed red and gold. Aarav is our prince. Kohli is our king. AB is our Alien "

DC Fans: "Rishabh Pant gonna silence all these fanboys today."

Neutral Fans: "Let's be real, we're here for Aarav's magic."

Back in the stadium, the team huddled near the boundary ropes, stretching, prepping. The commentary box was buzzing.

Harsha Bhogle: "So here we are. The dream clash. But all eyes — and I mean all eyes — are on Aarav tonight. Can the 20-year-old sensation pull off another miracle and take RCB straight into the finals? Stay with us. This is going to be special."

The camera zoomed in on Aarav, calm as ever, humming a tune to himself, warming up, looking up at the sky for a brief moment.

Flashback POV:

Players were stretching by the boundary lines. But away from all that noise, in a quieter corner of the RCB dressing room, Aarav held his phone, staring at the screen for a second before pressing dial.

Calling... Shraddha 

It was a ritual now. She had become his calm before every storm. His good luck charm. Not officially anything, not defined, not labeled. That comforting, dangerous in-between.

Shraddha picked up on the second ring.

Shraddha (smiling): "So... Mr. Orange-and-Purple-Cap. Calling before the toss. What happened? Nervous much?"

Aarav (grinning): "Nope. Just checking if my good luck charm remembered her promise."

Shraddha: "I remember everything. I even wore red today. My Mumbai Indians heart is in pain, just so you know."

Aarav: "Aww. That's dedication. Can I just say... you're looking super cute right now in that imaginary red jersey."

Shraddha: "Haha. Imagination is a powerful thing, Aarav. So is pressure. Feeling it yet?"

Aarav (smirking): "Only the pressure of not smiling too much while talking to you. Don't want the boys to tease me again."

Shraddha: "They should! India's top performer is turning mushy before a match. Headlines will be like: 'Prince Aarav's Weakness – A Certain Someone in Red.'"

Aarav (laughing): "Stop it! Or I'll hit a century just to make you regret this."

Shraddha: "Deal. Hit a century. But only if you dedicate it to me. Just whisper 'this one's for the girl in red' in your mind."

Aarav (softly): "I already do that before every match."

There was a pause. A warm, heavy silence between them that didn't need filling.

Shraddha (after a beat): "You'll do great. I know it. Just go out there and be you. And don't worry... even if my family roast me, I'm cheering for RCB tonight."

Aarav: "You have no idea how much that means. You're really something else, Shraddha."

Shraddha (teasing): "Something else as in...?"

Aarav (grinning): "Let's not go there... not before a match. I already have enough butterflies."

Shraddha: "Butterflies? Mr. calm-under-pressure gets butterflies?"

Aarav: "Only for one person. And she's talking to me right now."

Shraddha didn't respond immediately, but Aarav could hear her smile through the phone.

Shraddha (softly): "Go win it, Aarav. And call me after. No matter what. Okay?"

Aarav: "I promise. But fair warning, if we win... you're stuck with a post-match rant"

Shraddha (laughing): "Looking forward to it. Good luck, Champ."

Aarav: "You're my luck, Red Girl. Wish me from your heart."

Shraddha: "Always."

Call ended.

With a subtle smile, Aarav slipped the phone back into his pocket, his eyes focused, heart lighter. He was ready now. Not just to face Delhi, but to chase something more. Victory, yes—but also a story only the two of them were silently writing.