

Cricket 155

Chapter 155

The sun dipped low over the skyline of Dubai, casting a golden hue across the vast, gleaming expanse of the Dubai International Stadium. The amber light spilled over the empty stands — once a cauldron of noise, color, and fervor, now a silent amphitheater, waiting patiently for destiny to unfold. Even without a roaring crowd, the stadium pulsed with unseen energy, like a lion waiting to pounce. Every blade of grass on the carefully manicured pitch shimmered under the harsh, white floodlights that made the desert night come alive. It was the grand finale of the Indian Premier League 2020, a night etched in hope, pressure, and the collective dreams of millions glued to screens across the globe.

Cameras zoomed in, producers barked instructions in studio headsets, and around the world, living rooms transformed into cricket-watching temples. In the center of it all, as poised and magnetic as ever, stood Ravi Shastri — commentator, former cricketer, and the charismatic voice of Indian cricket. Dressed in a crisp navy blazer, mic in hand, his salt-and-pepper hair glowing under the lights, he looked every bit the anchor of the moment.

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen on the other side of the screen!" he declared, voice echoing through the still air of the empty stadium. "Tonight, under the lights of the magnificent Dubai International Stadium, history awaits. It's the final of IPL 2020 — Mumbai Indians versus Royal Challengers Bangalore!"

His voice rang with weight and drama, the kind that gave goosebumps even to those far away. A deliberate pause followed, allowing the gravity of his words to sink in.

"With me tonight are the titans themselves — Virat Kohli, the passionate and relentless leader of RCB, and Rohit Sharma, the calm, composed maestro steering the Mumbai Indians. And to officiate this pivotal toss, we have the one and only Mr. Salman Dhawan, our esteemed match referee."

Rohit and Virat stepped into the camera frame, flanked by a composed Salman Dhawan holding the coin. Rohit stood with quiet confidence, his MI jersey fitting him like a second skin, his eyes betraying the mind of a strategist. Beside him, Virat looked fired up — a spark in his gaze, his jaw set, as if already visualizing the game.

The three men stood on a freshly painted white circle in the middle of the pitch. A drone camera hovered above, capturing the moment from the skies.

"Alright, gentlemen," said Ravi, stepping slightly to the side as Salman Dhawan prepared for the toss. The coin was held aloft.

With a swift flick, the coin soared into the air, a flash of silver against the darkening sky.

"Heads," called Rohit, his voice sharp and sure.

The coin hit the pitch and bounced once before settling into the lush green.

"Heads it is!" Ravi confirmed, his voice slicing through the desert stillness with practiced excitement. "Mumbai Indians win the toss!"

Rohit gave a subtle nod, a glimmer of satisfaction flickering in his expression as he stepped forward.

"Rohit," Ravi asked, "what's the decision? What's the strategy going into the biggest match of the season?"

Rohit's voice was composed, but confident. "We'll bat first," he said. "It's a good surface. The ball will come on nicely early in the evening. But later, as the game progresses, we expect some turn, maybe a bit of uneven bounce. Setting a total allows us to control the pace and let our bowlers use the conditions under the lights."

He looked over his shoulder toward the MI dugout, where his teammates nodded and clapped lightly.

"Thank you, and all the best, Rohit," Ravi said with a warm smile.

Then he turned toward Virat, whose expression hadn't shifted — focused, unreadable.

"Virat," Ravi said, "what would have been your call had the coin landed your way?"

Virat smirked slightly, his eyes lighting up. "We would've batted too," he admitted. "The pitch is perfect for batting, and runs on the board in a final always help. But that's the beauty of the game. We're prepared for any challenge. This team is hungry. We've chased big targets before, and we're not backing down tonight."

He glanced at the RCB players standing near the ropes, jerseys pressed, eyes gleaming under the floodlights.

Ravi nodded, the faint smile of someone who knew he was witnessing greatness in the making. "Well, best of luck to you, Virat, and to Royal Challengers Bangalore. Let the best team win."

With a handshake between the skippers and a respectful nod from the match referee, the formalities ended. Both captains turned and walked back toward their respective dugouts, shoulders squared, minds already deep into strategy.

As Virat walked, his fingers subconsciously tapped his thigh — a habit that had developed over the years. Rohit, on the other side, murmured a few quick words into a support staff member's ear. Preparations had already begun. It was a quiet, charged walk back, like warriors returning to their camps before battle.

The camera panned upward, capturing the breathtaking canvas of Dubai's night sky, now streaked with the orange and purple of twilight. The final was upon them.

Back to the stage, Ravi's voice echoed again.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the stage is set. Mumbai will bat first. The players are warming up. The coaches have said their last words. And somewhere in the world, millions of fans are screaming at their screens. This isn't just a cricket match — it's a story of redemption, rivalry, and resolve."

And in the center of the field, the coin — that little piece of metal — lay still, its role fulfilled.

The players took their positions. Floodlights bathed the field in an ethereal glow, and the Dubai International Stadium—though devoid of spectators—felt alive with electricity. From the towering camera rigs to the anxious huddle of teammates at the dugouts, every corner of the venue crackled with anticipation. The IPL 2020 Final had begun.

Rohit Sharma and Quinton de Kock strode out to the center, two seasoned openers whose reputation for explosive starts could break any bowling attack. Clad in the blue and gold of Mumbai Indians, they looked calm, but their eyes betrayed a hint of the storm they were preparing to unleash.

From the opposite dugout, I watched them with razor focus. My heartbeat thundered in my ears. Then, the voice I'd looked up to since I was a teenager cut through the air: "Aarav, take the new ball."

Virat bhaiya.

I met his eyes.

I nodded, almost mechanically, grabbed the shining new white ball, and walked toward the mark.

Together me and bhaiya, we scanned the field, plotting the fields opening moves like seasoned generals. He suggested one slip—Aggressive start. I agreed. Short third man came up. Deep point was left out. The field screamed intent.

I turned the ball in my hand, feeling the seam, letting my fingers memorize the grip. A breeze whispered across the field, and I closed my eyes for a split second. This was it.

The first ball of the IPL Final.

I began my run-up, each stride eating up the ground, adrenaline pumping like rocket fuel. As I approached the crease, my motion was fluid—an orchestration of muscle and mind.

Ball 1:

Good length. Sixth stump. Rohit leaned slightly forward, watched it all the way, and—shoulders relaxed—let it go.

A harmless leave. But that's okay. This was chess, not checkers.

Behind me, ABD clapped his gloves. "Good start, Aarav!" he called out.

Ball 2:

Slightly straighter. On the pads.

Rohit didn't miss this one. A flick of the wrists. Graceful. Surgical. The ball zipped between mid-wicket and square leg. Easy single.

De Kock jogged into view. Now it was the South African maestro's turn.

Ball 3:

I took a breath. Shifted my fingers slightly for the outswinger.

Good length again.

De Kock read it late but adjusted. He opened the face of his bat and carved it up—an upper cut over point. The ball flew over the infield, landed just inside the rope.

Four.

A buzz went through the Mumbai dugout. But I didn't flinch.

"Nice shot, but we're right there," Virat said, clapping, encouraging.

I nodded.

Ball 4:

In-swinger this time. Subtle. Fuller.

De Kock went for a flick—but missed! The ball skidded low and whisked past the off stump by a whisper.

Gasps. Even Ravi Shastri's voice cracked in the commentary box. "Oh, almost! That was magic from the young gun!"

ABD caught it clean behind the stumps and threw it back with a grin.

Ball 5:

Time for a yorker.

I adjusted my grip. Focused on the base of the off-stump.

Run-up. Delivery. Fast and flat.

De Kock read it just in time. Dropped his bat low and dug it out. Textbook defense. The ball rolled to short cover.

A solid contest.

Ball 6:

Outswinger. My signature.

Wrist snap. Seam angled.

De Kock played inside the line. The ball shaped away late, kissed nothing but air, and zipped into AB's gloves.

Dot ball.

Over complete. One run and a boundary. Six balls that told a story.

MI 5/0

As I walked back to my fielding spot, Kohli bhaiya met me halfway.

"Well done," he said. "You've set the tone."

Six runs off the over. The final had begun.

"Beautiful over!" Aakash Chopra's baritone cut through the global broadcast. "That inswinger was a peach! Just inches away from knocking over de Kock. Aarav Pathak, the debutant in an IPL final — bowling like a seasoned pro."

Matthew Hayden chimed in with excitement, "Absolutely, Aakash! That outswinger to finish? Look at the seam presentation — that's textbook stuff. I'm telling ya, the way he's handling pressure — this lad's got steel!"

Ravi Shastri added, voice filled with gravitas, "Gentlemen, cricket is a game of moments — and this over might just be one. It's not about wickets in the first over, it's about intent. And Aarav has shown it loud and clear."

MI settled into their innings with precision. Rohit ticked over the strike, de Kock rotated smartly. A couple of boundaries came from gaps. But the bowlers kept their lines tight. Fielders moved like clockwork.

By the end of the Powerplay, the scoreboard read: 49/0 in 6 overs.

A solid start for Mumbai — no wickets lost, but also minimal fireworks.

Then came Yuzvendra Chahal.

Virat tossed the ball to him like handing over a secret weapon. "Yuzi, time to spin the web."

Chahal smirked, took the ball, and adjusted his wristbands. His eyes locked on Rohit, then de Kock. Calm. Focused. Dangerous.

7.1: Back of a length. Rohit punched it for a single to mid-wicket.

7.2: Floated. Tempting. De Kock came forward — but wisely played it out. no run.

7.3: Magic.

Chahal dropped it just short of a length, cross seam. In that corridor that makes every batter second-guess. De Kock went for the cut. Cramped. The ball kissed the edge.

Snap!

AB de Villiers, to his left — like a panther — dived and caught it clean. Chahal screamed in delight. De Kock stood still for a moment, then nodded, knowing he'd been outclassed.

52/1.

Enter: Suryakumar Yadav.

The man who could build, blast, or blend innings into masterpieces. But something felt... off. His first few balls didn't come onto the bat. Timing was absent. Rhythm misplaced.

Saini came steaming in. Back of a length, sharp seams. SKY poked. Prodded. Left. Missed. One entire over — a maiden.

From the commentary box, Aakash noted, "He's struggling. The ball's not coming on. And you can see it — frustration creeping in."

Hayden added, "All he needs is one release shot. But the RCB attack — they're just not giving him that luxury."

Tenth over. Moeen Ali into the attack.

Off-spin. Looping gently. But there was mischief in that flight.

10.5: Moeen bowled it just outside off, back of a length. SKY rocked back and punched it wide of extra cover. Rohit called, "YES!" loud and firm.

SKY hesitated. His eyes followed the ball.

But Rohit had already committed. The run was on.

Aarav was at extra cover. he dived, got the ball one-handed, and launched it — a bullet throw. It bounced once. Right into AB's gloves.

SKY turned too late.

AB whipped the bails off.

Umpire's finger went up. OUT.

Suryakumar looked over his shoulder — then at Rohit. For a second, Rohit looked devastated.

He knew what had happened.

SKY had sacrificed himself.

No blame. No regret. Just the raw weight of decision.

90/2.

Mumbai's innings had just shifted gears — but not in the way they'd wanted.

As SKY walked off, bat under his arm, the tension on the field rose.

RCB had found their grip.

And we weren't going to let go easily.

We're in the 12th over of the MI innings. They're cruising, yes, but just beneath the surface—tension brews. Mumbai are 123 for 2, and Rohit Sharma is looking... unstoppable. 60 off 36. His bat—no, his will—is dictating this game. But Kohli's tossed the ball to a wildcard.

Aarav.

He's marking his run-up now. Long strides. A slow breath. He's about to bowl to one of the greatest IPL captains of all time.

And here we go...

Ball 1 —

Yorker. First up. Right in the blockhole. Rohit squeezes it out with soft hands. No run.

What precision! Like threading a needle in a hurricane. Kohli applauds from mid-off. AB claps behind the stumps.

Ball 2 —

Another yorker! This time tailing in slightly. Rohit adjusts late. Gets an inside edge onto his pad.

Dot ball.

Two in two. Not just deliveries, but statements. Aarav's control? Unreal.

Ball 3 —

AND AGAIN! A third consecutive yorker. This one's quicker. Rohit tries to open the face—can't get it past point.

Dot ball.

Three dots in a row. Rohit walks away, adjusts his gloves. Looks up. Eyes meet Aarav's.

Challenge accepted.

Ball 4 —

Same length. But this time, just a touch slower. Rohit prods. Blocks. ANOTHER dot.

FOUR BALLS. FOUR DOTS.

Are you kidding me?

In a final? Against Rohit Sharma?

Ball 5 —

Wait. What's this?

Rohit... he's moving across his stumps.

He reverse sweeps a yorker!?

Oh my word! It's gone through backward point!

FOUR runs.

The audacity! The elegance! That's Rohit Sharma, ladies and gentlemen—when composure meets genius.

And just like that, the tension breaks. The MI dugout rises. Rohit lifts his bat, nods at Aarav. A smirk.

But Aarav? Ice cold. No emotion. Just turns around. Walks back. Rewinds. Resets.

Ball 6 —

Final ball. Aarav goes short this time.

BANG!

Rohit swivels—pulls it clean!

High.

Deep.

Six!

Over midwicket. Into the second tier!

Rohit looks skyward. 70 off 42. Mumbai's grip tightens.

But pause. Rewind.

Aarav's first four balls were fire. He blinked once—and Rohit punished him twice.

That's the story of this format. A war of inches. You don't win it by blinking.

End of Over 12: MI 135/2.

Four overs pass. Boundaries rain. Rohit reaches 88 off 51. The ball's flying, the bowlers sweating, and the noise... it's thunder.

But now...

Kohli throws the ball back to Aarav.

16th over. MI 157/2.

This over... could shift the match.

Ball 1 —

short length, punched to the fielder, no run! Rohit shakes his head. He's hunting a hundred. Every ball matters now.

Ball 2 —

Slower one. Short. Outside off.

Rohit sees width.

He swings.

Connects.

It's in the air!

Deep square leg charges in...

Shivam Dube. Long strides. Eyes locked. Time slows. He dives—full stretch!

CAUGHT!

OH MY GOODNESS! HE'S TAKEN IT!

ROHIT SHARMA IS GONE!

88 off 52. The innings of a titan. But it ends—not with a bang—but with brilliance.

And Aarav?

He lets out a quiet breath. No celebration. Just clenched fists and a nod. Business. Done.

The rest of the over?

Calm. Tight. Precise.

Just 4 runs. One wicket.

MI: 161/3 after 16.

Flash forward: Final Over.

The dust has settled. MI have scraped their way to 199/6.

Pollard threw hands. Hardik swung wild. But wickets kept tumbling.

And who was there?

Aarav.

4 overs. 3 wickets. 32 runs.

He took the big ones.

Rohit. Kishan. Hardik Pandya.

Not just scalps. Pillars.

And as the players walk off, camera pans to him. The young man with the calmest face in a stadium full of fire.