

Cricket 166

Chapter 166

The hum of the Adelaide crowd pulsed like a steady heartbeat, a rhythm that had settled into familiarity as Aarav and Mayank crafted a partnership of purpose and poise. Every stroke, every leave, every gentle push into the gaps was part of a carefully woven fabric of resistance. But cricket, like life, often shifts tempo when least expected. The comfort of rhythm is always under threat from the chaos of change.

And then came the change.

Cameron Green was handed the ball. The towering all-rounder, a debutant with nerves hidden behind a stoic face, walked to his mark with determination in his stride. The pink ball in his hand gleamed under the lights, almost crackling with potential.

From the commentary box, Harsha Bhogle's voice cut through the ambient noise with that familiar blend of excitement and insight. "Here we have it, ladies and gentlemen. The young debutant Cameron Green, entrusted with the ball now. Australia searching for a breakthrough—they turn to their newest weapon."

Ricky Ponting chimed in, tone layered with strategy. "This is smart. Australia needs a moment to shift momentum. Green has the bounce, the pace, and a high-arm release that can surprise. With the partnership steadying India, Tim Paine's rolling the dice."

On the field, Tim Paine restructured his setup. Two slips crouched like panthers, eyes gleaming, energy coiled. A short cover moved slightly closer. A man was posted at deep point. The circle tightened. Every fielder was alert, ready for anything. It wasn't just a change of bowler—it was a signal: Australia wasn't backing down.

Mayank Agarwal took the strike. His eyes scanned the field. He tapped his bat gently, finding that space of stillness between thought and reaction.

First ball — short of a length, angling in sharply. Mayank adjusted and played it with soft hands, dropping it just near the crease. A calm dot ball.

Second ball — a little wider, tempting the drive. Mayank wisely let it go. His judgment, so far, had been flawless.

Third ball — quicker, bouncier, rising off a good length. Mayank spotted it late but backed away to free his arms. He went for the uppercut. The sound off the bat was imperfect — a slicing sound instead of a crack. The ball caught the outer half, sailing high into the sky.

It hung there for a heartbeat too long.

Mitchell Starc sprinted in from deep backward point, his strides long, fluid, relentless. The ball dipped. Starc launched forward, slid, and cupped it safely.

Taken.

Mayank gone.

The crowd gasped, then roared. Some rose to their feet. Others just sank back, murmuring in shock. It was a soft dismissal after such discipline.

Cameron Green raised his arms in silent celebration. His teammates rushed toward him, thumping his back. The debutant had made his mark.

Mayank turned back for a second, staring at the sky as if trying to trace the ball's path one more time. Then he walked toward the pavilion, head held high. A gritty 35 was over.

India: 101/2

Aarav: 62*

Mayank: 35 (caught Starc, bowled Green)

As Mayank approached Aarav at the non-striker's end, their gloves met in a solid tap.

"Well played, bhai," Aarav said, his voice steady.

"That partnership mattered," Mayank replied with a nod, a flicker of exhaustion and pride passing through his eyes. "Now carry it. Build bigger."

And then, the atmosphere shifted again.

Virat Kohli walked in.

The ground erupted. A crescendo of cheers swept through the stands like a storm. Flags waved wildly. Cameras clicked in a frenzy. The King had entered.

Kohli walked with that familiar mix of swagger and steel. Every step carried weight. His eyes scanned the field with predatory calm. He took his guard with deliberate focus, then glanced at Aarav.

The two shared a nod. A moment.

The past and the future of Indian cricket stood side by side.

Green, still fizzing with adrenaline from his wicket, charged in for the fourth ball of the over.

First ball to Kohli — full, searching.

Kohli moved forward, perfectly balanced, and dead-batted the ball with a still blade. The sound of bat meeting ball was clean and heavy. No run.

But the message was loud.

Kohli had arrived.

Green went back to his mark. The adrenaline in his veins now met resistance in the form of two calm warriors. He bowled two more balls — one back of a length, one fuller — both blocked, both met with silence from bat and crowd.

The over ended. Just one run off it.

But its impact was greater. A breakthrough. A new chapter beginning. Aarav, still unbeaten on 62, met Kohli mid-pitch.

"Let's play solid!" Kohli said simply.

Aarav nodded. "We don't stop."

Above them, the sky had deepened into a velvet blue, the floodlights now fully in command. The pink ball gleamed ominously. The crowd settled again, not in silence, but in watchful suspense.

Another challenge lay ahead.

But for now, Kohli and Aarav were here.

There was something in the air—pressure, purpose, patience. Ten overs ahead, two top-class bowlers, and a chance to build. And that's exactly what they intended to do.

Over 23-30

The next few deliveries were not about flamboyance. They were about grit. About absorbing pressure and constructing resilience one ball at a time. This was the phase where runs came slowly, but the character was laid bare.

Cameron Green ran in with his trademark long strides. The ball zipped off the pitch with his height and pace. Aarav dug in. Defense. Solid. A forward press. A still head. A textbook.

Aarav's POV:

I wasn't going to let them in. Not an inch. This was about survival. I had scored quickly earlier, but this spell... this demanded something else, as we just have a wicket, so we have to play slow now, so that the

pacers would feel tired and the swing from the bowl would completely vanish. Every delivery was a question, and my job was to answer with calm.

Ball after ball, Lyon teased with his loop and drift. The off-spinner's fingers worked magic, the ball dipping and turning, looking for cracks. Aarav's bat stayed close to the pad. He refused to poke. Refused to prod. He met the ball with soft hands, killing its spin.

Aarav took strike again. Green pitched it back of a length. Aarav rose on his toes, gently fending it into the pitch. No run. Then another—short and fast. Aarav swayed, let it pass. Dot.

Commentary:

Harsha Bhogle, his voice mellow and appreciative, said, "He's showing remarkable discipline here, the young man. Sometimes, it's not about the runs you score, but the balls you survive. And right now, Aarav is playing the long game."

Sunil Gavaskar added, "That's maturity beyond his years. To go from aggressive strokeplay to stoic defense within a session—that's a sign of a Test cricketer in the making."

Meanwhile, Kohli was a contrast in motion and command. The Indian captain didn't let a single opportunity go by.

A short one from Green — Kohli rocked back and punched it through point for two.

Lyon floated one up — Kohli leaned forward, a graceful cover drive that sliced the field like a paintbrush across canvas. It didn't always fetch boundaries, but it built rhythm.

When Lyon bowled slightly too full, Kohli leaned in with the poise of a sculptor and caressed the ball between extra cover and mid-off. He wasn't just surviving — he was thriving within the storm.

Aarav's POV:

Kohli's presence was immense. Just watching him from the other end settled me. He played with an elegance I admired. Every now and then, he'd walk up between overs, tap my pads, and say, "Keep playing straight." Those words were fuel.

The two batsmen stole quick singles, found twos in unlikely places, and turned the strike over with quiet efficiency. They didn't allow Lyon to settle nor gave Green the satisfaction of a reckless shot.

Mini Highlights:

Over 24: Lyon to Aarav — Aarav gets beaten outside off, but doesn't flinch. Kohli walks over and fist bumps him: "Good leave."

Over 26: Green hits the deck hard, hits Aarav's glove—moment of worry. Physio comes out. Aarav shakes it off and continues.

Over 28: Kohli drives Lyon past mid-off — shot of the session. Crowd applauds.

Over 30: Aarav finally gets a single after 14 dot balls. Smiles sheepishly.

Commentator's Box:

Ricky Ponting remarked, "He's putting on a masterclass in patience and pressure release. That's what makes Kohli so special. He knows when to wait and when to strike."

Mark Waugh chimed in, "And let's not forget Aarav here. He's showing the mindset of a veteran. The scoreboard may not reflect it, but this is gold."

Score after 40 overs:

India: 122/2

Aarav: 65* (91 balls, just 3 runs in the last 20 deliveries)

Kohli: 15* (22 balls, 3 exquisite boundaries)

The scoreboard didn't scream, but the dressing room applauded. This was Test cricket. It wasn't just a game of bat and ball — it was chess at 140 km/h.

In those ten overs, a foundation was laid. One block at a time. The rhythm was slow, but the purpose was monumental.

Aarav looked up at the sky as Lyon marked his run-up again. The ball would turn. The tension would rise. But the grind had begun. And he was in it for the long haul.

The storm had passed. But a new one was always around the corner.

Now as the time points to 4:00 pm and completion of 30 overs, Meal break or lunch break is announced of 40 minutes so that all the players could rest and enjoy their meal!

As we got the lunch break, Aarav and Virat Kohli went to pavilion, in between cheers of the fans, while going, I saw one little boy, wearing India jersey on the nets of the stadium, asking for my autograph!

There I waited and took his bat and signed on it and gave him his bat and congratulated him for his future! After that as I entered the Dug-out everyone congratulated me with shoulder-pats and then on the advice of the medics or the medical team, we had a light lunch but full of energies so that we could continue to play properly with no fatigue and with energy in the body!

After the break, a member from umpire's team came to our Dug-out to tell us that match would begin shortly, so me and Kohli bhaiya, started gearing up and went to the field again to play.

Adelaide Oval returned from lunch dressed in golden sunlight, the crowd buzzing with renewed energy. After the morning's gritty resilience from India's young prodigy and their seasoned captain, the scoreboard glared back proudly: India 122/2. Aarav 65*, Kohli 15*. There was a charged pause, just for a breath, before the atmosphere erupted again as the two batters jogged onto the field, their shadows stretching long across the pitch.

Their jog was steady, but exuding purpose. Virat adjusted his helmet mid-run, retightening his gloves with meticulous grace. Aarav, the debutant, showed no sign of nerves now — only a calm, steely focus, like someone who'd done this before in his dreams a hundred times. At the crease, they exchanged a firm fist tap — a warrior's nod — and Aarav marked his guard once again. This was his battlefield.

Pat Cummins, Australia's lethal spearhead, had the ball in hand for the 31st over. He rolled his shoulders, stretched each arm purposefully, then jogged into position. His face bore a look of fierce resolve. He wasn't here to bowl — he was here to test.

Aarav's POV:

The break gave me time to think — to feel the grass beneath my shoes, to taste the lingering salt of sweat, to feel my heartbeat steady. It had been a dream morning, but now was not the time to drift. The scoreboard, the crowd, the occasion — all of it faded. There was only Pat Cummins, the red cherry, and me.

He charged in. That classic run-up, rhythmic and threatening. The ball left his hand with venom.

A bouncer.

I bent low, eyes locked onto the seam. It rose towards me like a hawk, vicious but within range. My body reacted, not with fear of ball hitting me but instinct. I lowered, opened up, and launched an uppercut — clean, crisp, calculated.

The ball soared, cutting through the Adelaide sky, sailing just over Tim Paine's desperate leap. Four runs — a majestic, arrogant statement.

Commentary Box:

Harsha Bhogle (voice rising): "Oh my word! What an uppercut! That's a debutant playing like a prince — nay, a king!"

Isa Guha (grinning): "What poise, what technique! It wasn't just hit — it was placed, timed to absolute perfection. That's how you shut down short-ball intimidation."

The Indian flags in the stands swirled in approval. The crowd roared again.

Back to the Field:

Cummins walked back to his mark, chewing on his lip. But his face betrayed nothing. He stretched his neck, rolled the ball in his palm. He wasn't done yet.

Cummins' POV:

He's good. Damn good. But I smiled. Not because I was amused — because I needed to mask the fire boiling inside. I wasn't angry at him. I was angry that he made it look so easy. So now, let's see how he plays the real test.

This time, I aimed for the ribs.

Fast. Angling in. Cramping him.

But he didn't flinch.

He went deep into the crease, found his balance, and flicked. No — launched. The ball lifted high over square leg, into the second tier. SIX.

Commentary Box:

Ricky Ponting (half-laughing): "That's outrageous. Absolutely outrageous! Who does this kid think he is — Ricky Ponting reborn? 😏😏"

Sunil Gavaskar (in awe): "Now that is a counter-punch. Straight from the Mumbai school of fearlessness. That's not just guts — that's genius."

The crowd erupted, the echo of chants bouncing off every stand.

Back to Cummins:

Enough. Time to bring out my best. I reset. Stared down at the crease. Yorker time.

I took a deep breath. Ran in. Released.

It was perfect. Fast, full, right on the base of middle stump.

But this kid — Aarav — moved. Opened up a fraction. And like poetry in motion, sliced it inside-out through extra cover.

FOUR.

Cummins' POV (cont.):

You've got to be kidding me. I wanted to clap. I really did. But I kept it in. If this is his debut, what the hell will he be in five years? He didn't just play that — he... I don't even have words for this shot!

Virat's POV:

From the non-striker's end, I just froze. The sound off the bat. The trajectory. The audacity. I raised my hands immediately, started clapping. No point hiding what I felt. That shot — it was pure magic. I walked over, gave him a gentle pat on the helmet. That's how you tell a teammate: you're a star now.

He looked back and smiled. Not cocky. Just grateful.

Commentary Box:

Matthew Wade: "You're kidding me..."

Harsha Bhogle: "There's silence in the Aussie camp. And a storm at the crease. Aarav is putting on a masterclass."

Isa Guha: "Composure. Flair. Clarity. This young man has it all. He's not reacting — he's orchestrating."

Ricky Ponting: "If Cummins is your litmus test, then Aarav just passed with flying colours."

Sunil Gavaskar: "That's how great careers begin — with moments like these."

The next three balls were met with calm restraint. Aarav respected them. No rush. No greed. Just a slight nod after every leave. Tim Paine gathered the balls in silence. No sledging. Just... silence.

Score Update:

India: 136/2

Aarav: 79* (97 balls)

Virat Kohli: 15* (40 balls)

The scoreboard ticked, but what mattered more couldn't be measured. The tone had shifted. The Australians knew now: this wasn't just another debut.

This was the arrival of the future king and currently the prince.

To be continued...