

Cricket 169

Chapter 169

The heat shimmered above the Adelaide Oval. The sky was a searing yellow, cloudless and cruel, casting a relentless spotlight on the battle unfolding below. The crowd buzzed with anticipation, a blend of hushed awe and spontaneous cheers, as India marched forward steadily in the first innings. The rhythmic crack of leather on willow echoed like a war drum, steady, determined, and fiercely alive.

India was in control but the match was finely balanced, teetering on the edge of greatness and reversal. The scoreboard showed 231 for 2. Kohli, seasoned and stoic, stood at the crease, bat tapping, eyes scanning. The camera caught his intense expression as he tugged his gloves, adjusted his helmet, and took guard.

Hazlewood thundered in.

Dot ball.

Then another.

And another.

Six tight deliveries. All dots. A maiden over. The crowd murmured, shifting in their seats, sensing the quiet before a storm.

But at the non-striker's end, a storm was brewing.

Aarav Pathak.

Just past his maiden century on Australian soil, he wasn't done yet. He stood tall, youthful energy cloaked in calm determination. There was fire in his eyes — not of arrogance, but of purpose. A young man with centuries of tradition behind him, and a new fire ahead.

Then came the 50th over. Nathan Lyon returned, ball in hand, face unreadable. The veteran spinner knew this was a crucial moment. His field was set aggressively — a web of close catchers waiting to pounce. Silly point, gully, point, two slips. The Australians were circling like vultures.

Aarav was on 121 runs and Kohli on 71 runs!

Aarav's POV:

The moment was tense. I felt the sweat trickle behind my ears. My heart thumped in rhythm with the chanting crowd. My bat felt heavier, the air thicker. Every sound was amplified — the scratch of my spikes, the creak of leather, the buzz of a distant drone camera.

I hated how passive I'd been for a few overs. This wasn't me. I needed to shake the hesitation off. I needed to bring back the rhythm. I needed to reclaim the strike — not just physically, but mentally.

I inhaled sharply. Took my stance.

Paused.

Checked the field. Adjusted my gloves again. Dug my toe into the crease.

Lyon was already striding in.

No more time. Reset. Focus.

Ball 1:

It came slower, teasing, dancing just outside off. I stepped to the ball — a graceful, confident leap adjacent towards the ball.

Bat met ball. Pure contact.

CRACK!

Over extra cover, sailing effortlessly. The crowd gasped, then erupted.

"OH, WHAT A SHOT!" came the Gavaskar's thunderous call.

"That's no rookie move — that's a statement! That's a roar in the language of leather and willow!"

I knocked the pitch defiantly with my bat as the ball was returned. I was here to write my story.

Ball 2:

On the pads. A gift.

I drove it back, straight and clean. The ball didn't rise — it soared.

SIX!

"Back-to-back sixes! This kid is toying with Lyon!"

Helmet adjusted. Smile creeping in. Kohli bhaiya met me halfway.

"You're unstoppable today, champ."

We bumped gloves, fire in our eyes. It was more than cricket. It was faith, belief, and pure adrenaline.

Ball 3:

Lyon tried wider, slower. Predictable.

I crouched. Swept.

Another perfect hit.

SIX!

This time it was deep mid-wicket. The stadium roared. I turned, fist in the air, heart pounding.

"Aarav Pathak! Three sixes on the trot — and he's doing it in whites!"

Ball 4:

Lyon came quicker, flatter.

I shuffled. Leaned.

SCOOPED.

Over the keeper. Trickling away.

FOUR!

Gasps from the commentary box.

"That's a T20 shot in a Test arena!" exclaimed Gavaskar.

Ponting laughed in disbelief.

"The boy's fearless. It's a new era, Sunny. And he's bringing the fireworks."

I could feel the energy shift. The Australians were rattled. Lyon's eyes flickered with disbelief, doubt. I could feel the crack in their confidence — and I drove the wedge deeper.

Ball 5:

I felt the breath in my lungs grow heavier. I was at 143. So close.

Kohli bhaiya came over.

"Just 7 more, champ. Bring it home. This moment is yours."

I nodded. Everything went still.

The world narrowed.

Lyon tossed a full toss.

My bat rose.

CRACK!

Long-off was a spectator.

SIX!

Kohli bhaiya charged towards me.

He slapped my helmet gently. "You're something else, champ!"

Commentators were yelling over each other.

"Lyon's unraveling! Pathak is scripting a masterpiece!"

The entire stadium was on its feet, cheering not just for runs, but for revolution.

Final Ball — The Moment.

Crowd on their feet.

149*.

I didn't want to tap it. I didn't want a single. I wanted to announce it. Claim it.

Lyon tossed a googly.

I read it like an open book.

Pulled it. Clean. Flat. Dead straight.

SIX!

I let out a cry, threw my arms wide. Helmet off, I twirled my bat in the air and caught it as it fell back into my hand.

155 not out.

I ran to Kohli bhaiya, hugged him fiercely.

"You've set the world on fire," he whispered.

I stepped away, raised my bat. The applause was thunderous.

Then, I touched the scarf on my right wrist — her scarf.

I kissed it. Held it to my chest.

A moment only I truly understood.

Commentary Booth:

"Unbelievable scenes at Adelaide!"

"This isn't just a debut — it's a declaration!"

"Aarav Pathak, 155 not out! Temperament, style, aggression — he's got it all!"

"He's etched his name in the history books today!"

"He's not the future — he's the present."

Back in Mumbai, the Tendulkar household exploded with cheers.

Shradha clutched the cushion tighter, tears glistening in her eyes. Her voice caught in her throat. Her boy. Her man

Sachin sat silently, pride radiating from his smile. A knowing smile. One that understood centuries of dreams.

-----The crowd murmured, still energized by what they had witnessed — a masterclass from a young man named Aarav Pathak.

155 not out.

He had lit up Adelaide like few before him, bringing the crowd to its feet, evoking gasps, cheers, and even tears. But cricket, like life, rarely allows one to linger in triumph. The next ball always comes. And with it, the next test.

Hazlewood was back.

The towering Aussie pacer marked his run-up again, this time from the Cathedral End. There was a certain precision to his movement — a calm, coiled threat. His eyes narrowed, jaw clenched. He knew what he wanted.

Aarav, meanwhile, stood composed at the crease. His chest still rose and fell from the previous over's chaos and glory. Kohli was with him at the other end, a pillar of calm and command. But the atmosphere had shifted subtly. The crowd could sense it — the air suddenly felt thinner, drier, like a storm just beginning to charge.

Hazlewood thundered in.

The third delivery of the over pitched on a good length. Aarav went to defend, angled bat coming down late. The ball nipped in — just a fraction — but enough.

Thud!

A full-blooded appeal.

The Australians erupted in unison. Arms flailing, voices piercing the air.

"HOWZZAAAAAT!"

The umpire's finger rose almost instantly.

Silence descended like a curtain.

Aarav looked up at the sky, then at the umpire, then down at the pitch.

No shake of the head.

No thought of review.

He just nodded.

He knew.

The crowd stood stunned, and then, like waves rising in sympathy, they applauded appreciating the innings played by Aarav.

Commentator Harsha Bhogle's voice cut through the silence.

"That looks dead in front! No vigour at all in terms of a review from Aarav this time. Good length ball, sliding straight on at an off stump line. Aarav brings down an angled bat and is beaten on the inside

edge by a long way. I wonder if visibility has anything to do with this. Whether it does or not, it's Australia's premier fast bowlers doing the job even late in the day."

Matthew Wade added, "Finally, the Aussies break this incredible partnership. You have to say, though, what an innings from Aarav Pathak — 155 that will be remembered for years."

Isha Guha chimed in, awe in her tone, "He played like he belonged. It looked like it was Aarav's home pitch not Aussies. This wasn't just about runs. This was a coming-of-age moment."

Aarav walked off slowly, bat tucked under one arm, helmet hanging loosely in the other. As he passed Kohli, the senior man clapped his gloves gently.

"Well played, champ."

Aarav nodded, a smile touching his lips, though his eyes betrayed the pang of unfinished business.

As he crossed the boundary, the entire Adelaide Oval rose as one. Not just Indians. Not just fans of cricket. People who had just witnessed something raw, real, and beautiful.

Ajinkya Rahane came in next. Calm as always, shoulders squared, eyes sharp. The scoreboard read 266 for 3. A solid position, but the sudden dismissal had shifted the emotional landscape.

Kohli now had to anchor. With his experience, the situation called for caution, consolidation — and Kohli knew it. His tapping at the crease became more focused. His calls sharper. His eyes never left the bowler's hand.

Together, Rahane and Kohli began the rebuilding. Singles nudged. Occasional boundaries. Adelaide's light began to dim. Long shadows of fielders crept across the grass like spirits of past games.

Then came the moment.

Over 81.3.

A misfield at cover.

"YES!" shouted Kohli.

"NO!" cried Rahane.

Both ran.

Then both stopped.

Then Kohli ran again.

The throw came in fast. Direct hit.

Bails off.

The stadium gasped.

The umpire's finger slowly went up.

Virat Kohli — gone for 94.

Six runs short. Not of a hundred — but of a legacy-making support act for the next generation.

The captain removed his helmet. Exhaled. Turned toward Rahane, gave a curt nod.

"No worries. Happens."

But the pain was there. In the way he walked off. In the heaviness of his shoulders.

Harsha Bhogle's voice turned soft.

"That's a heartbreaker. Miscommunication, the cruellest way to fall short. And on 94. You can feel it, can't you?"

The light faded even further. The umpires came together. A nod between them. Then the announcement:

"Stumps. End of Day 1."

India: 281/4.

Back in the Indian dressing room, silence reigned for a moment. Then applause broke out for Aarav. He sat with a towel around his shoulders, hair damp from the shower, eyes still distant.

Kohli came over. Sat beside him.

"You were magnificent today."

Aarav looked up. "So were you. Sorry about the run out."

Kohli waved it off. "You think I haven't been run out before?" He grinned. "You were the highlight, champ. Now rest. Tomorrow we build again."

In the commentary box, the trio of Harsha, Isha, and Wade wrapped up their day's coverage.

Harsha leaned forward. "Day 1 belonged to India. But more than that, it belonged to an Indian debutant and the international young cricket sensation named Aarav Pathak."

Wade nodded. "The Aussies will have to bring their best tomorrow. This kid just lit a fire in the heart of Indian cricket."

Isha smiled. "And maybe even in the hearts of everyone watching."

Tendulkar POV: -

Far away in Mumbai, the Tendulkar house was quiet again. Shradha can't wipe her smile from her face. Sara stared at the screen long after it went black. Sachin, arms crossed, simply said:

"He walked off like a man who knew he gave everything. That's what makes you great."

The shadows of the day had lengthened. The lights at the Adelaide Oval blazed now, casting halos around every corner of the field.

Aarav's name remained on the lips of the fans filing out.

He had arrived.

But the game had just begun.