

Cricket 170

Chapter 170

The Adelaide sun had begun its slow descent at the second day of India vs Australia in Border Gavaskar Trophy, casting long, golden shadows over the pitch. The scoreboard read 376 all out. The first innings of the match, Indian innings, fierce and resilient, had come to a halt at the 122nd over. Rahane and Vihari's partnership had offered calm after the storm, their combined grit pushing India to a respectable total. They stitched together a stand that anchored the innings to the end after terrific knock of debutant Aarav and Captain Virat Kohli. Rahane and Vihari with a blend of elegance and resistance, their bats flowing and blocking in perfect harmony. The crowd, though largely in Aussie colours, had applauded them for their resolve. But once they fell, it was open season for Hazlewood and Starc. The Australian pace duo returned with renewed venom, dismantling the lower order and sweeping away the tail like autumn leaves in a desert wind. The last few wickets fell quickly — one after the other — and just like that, India's innings came to a close.

Inside the Indian dressing room, the atmosphere buzzed—not with anxiety, but with raw, simmering anticipation. There was a strange stillness, like the calm before a storm. Sweat-soaked shirts clung to bodies, physios moved quickly to replenish fluids, and whispers of game plans floated through the air.

Virat Kohli stood before them, a force of nature in human form. He radiated an intensity that could ignite a fire in the coldest of hearts.

He looked around at the squad—faces etched with resolve and exhaustion. Some were still toweling off, others gulping water, but every pair of eyes was on him. Then, he spoke.

"Thirty minutes. That's all we've got before we walk out again. But that's all we need."

The room went still. A hush fell like a curtain.

"We didn't just come here to bat well," Kohli said, his voice tightening, rising. "We came here to dominate. And that means stopping them early. That means setting the tone with the ball. Not tomorrow, not next session — now. we have won previously and we would win now too."

He paused, letting his words settle deep.

"We've got Jassi," he continued, motioning toward Bumrah, who sat tying his boots, quiet and focused, his head bobbing slightly with every knot.

"Umesh, Shami, Ashwin — you've been here before, you know what to do. This pitch isn't offering much, but you don't wait for the pitch to give — you make it happen."

Then Kohli's voice shifted, softer now, almost teasing.

"And we've got a debutant who bats like experienced player and balls like steyn, he laughed saying this."

Heads turned to Aarav, who sat silently, towel draped over his shoulders. He cracked a smile, but his eyes burned with focus. The adrenaline was pumping. He was excited to bowl then bat, remembering the reels he had seen in his previous life, the action and intensity between players on the ground. The butterflies in his stomach had flown off. What remained was hunger — pure and clean.

"You've got this," Kohli said, pointing directly at him. "You've already set the stage with bat. Now, let's set it ablaze."

A roar erupted. Fists pumped. The air turned electric, humming with energy. Laughter mixed with grit, excitement tangled with warlike determination. This was not just cricket. This was battle.

They dispersed briefly — for stretches, hydration, and mental reset. Ashwin was in deep conversation with the bowling coach. Shami tested his wrist flick with a red ball. Rahane helped Aarav adjust his wrist guards. The smell of eucalyptus rub, and sports drink filled the space.

Then, like soldiers summoned to war, the men in whites gathered once more, this time on the field.

The Adelaide Oval shimmered under the golden-hour glow. A gentle breeze rustled the flags atop the stadium. The crowd returned from their breaks, snacks in hand, cameras clicking. Spectators leaned forward, the murmur of thousands building into a low, anxious hum.

Team India huddled near the boundary line. Virat took the center, voice lower now, steady, calculated.

"Keep the energy tight," he instructed. "Keep the field sharp. Every ball matters. Show them we aren't here to wait — we're here to take."

Rahane stepped in beside him, as calm and assured as ever.

"Discipline," he added. "No freebies. Make them earn every single run. This is Day 2, yes. But let's make them feel like it's Day 5 already. We control the clock, not them."

The huddle broke. Each man jogged into position with purpose. The warmup tosses were sharp, the eyes sharper.

The pink ball was placed into Jasprit Bumrah's hand. A new ball. A fresh chapter. A blank page that only they would write on.

Standing at the top of his mark, Bumrah exhaled. He rubbed the ball against his thigh, fingers finding rhythm. His short run-up, always deceptive, always explosive, looked almost meditative.

Umesh Yadav took his place at mid-on, bouncing on his toes, scanning the field.

Matthew Wade and Joe Burns walked in, their bats tapping gently on the sun-dried pitch. Sunglasses on, faces stone cold. No words exchanged — only thoughts sharpened like knives.

The umpires signaled. The field adjusted. And the first over began.

Over 1: Bumrah to Wade

Ball 1: Good length, nips in. Beats the edge. Aarav at point claps instantly.

Ball 2: Outside off. Left alone, to keeper Saha behind the wickets

Ball 3: Yorker! Wade digs it out just in time. Kohli claps, his voice ringing out: "Perfect, Jassi!"

Ball 4: Short of a length. Wade fends awkwardly. Ball pops but lands safe.

Ball 5: Fuller delivery. Wade punches to mid-off. No run. Pressure building.

Ball 6: Bouncer! Wade ducks. Umpire calls it one for the over.

A maiden. A statement. Pressure applied.

Over 2: Umesh to Burns

Umesh steamed in with that signature heavy stride. The ball hissed through the air, whistling past ears.

Ball 1: Too straight. Clipped to square leg. Easy single. Australia off the mark.

Ball 2: To Wade. Angled in. Defended solidly.

Ball 3: Wide outside off. No shot offered. Aarav slid across, collecting neatly.

Ball 4: Length ball. Wade drives! But straight to Ashwin at mid-off.

Ball 5: In the corridor. Wade pokes, misses. Close. Kohli yells encouragement.

Ball 6: Back of a length. Tucked to leg. Dot ball. Quiet but potent.

One off the over.

Australia 1/0.

The golden hue of Adelaide had barely settled when Jasprit Bumrah began his devastating dance. From one end, for 13 relentless overs, he and Umesh Yadav charged in, over after over, never giving an inch. But it was Bumrah—calm, lethal, silent as a shadow—who split the game open like thunder cracking a summer sky.

Australia was 16 for no loss.

13th Over - Bumrah to Wade

Ball 3.

Wade was deep in the crease, legs twitching, eyes darting. Bumrah angled around the wicket, slinging the ball into the left-hander with late seam movement. It thudded into Wade's pad as he shuffled across off stump. A deafening appeal followed. The umpire raised his finger slowly, almost regrettably.

Wade reviewed. Harsha Bhogle's voice filled the airwaves.

"That looked mighty close. Let's see... he's deep, walking across... yes, it's hitting middle. Umpire's call. Wade has to go!"

Allan Border leaned in, arms crossed. "Classic trap. Bumrah's coming around the wicket, and Wade just didn't cover that angle."

"It's the kind of delivery you can't do much about if you misread it for even half a second," Mike Hussey added.

Michael Vaughan laughed dryly, "Well, Wade won't enjoy watching that replay in the dressing room."

Wade walked back, shoulders stiff, helmet tucked under one arm. His departure brought in Marnus Labuschagne, Australia's defiant number three. He was greeted by booming cheers and rhythmic claps from the crowd, but also by Bumrah, now a lion mid-hunt.

Ball 6.

Joe Burns had survived with quiet defiance, scratching and scraping his way forward. But Bumrah had other ideas.

Yorker.

A vicious, angling spear aimed at the base of middle and leg. Burns moved across too much, front pad obstructing, bat lagging behind. It struck his boot. A loud, confident shout. The finger went up.

Burns reviewed.

"Looks flush," Harsha Bhogle murmured. "He's hit the toe—wait, that bat's nowhere near. Clear gap on UltraEdge. Now it's about whether it's hitting leg."

Vaughan squinted. "Just brushing... still, umpire's call. He has to go!"

"Oh, he's not going to like that," Border said. "But that's top-class fast bowling. Bumrah is on a roll."

"This is world-class cricket," Hussey added. "He's changed the rhythm of the game."

Burns trudged off, helmet still on, eyes hidden behind the grille. The silence from the Australian fans said it all.

Australia: 17/2.

Steven Smith entered to a mix of anticipation and apprehension. The crowd buzzed again, this time unsure. The Indians were huddled near point. Kohli looked at the scoreboard, then toward his pacers. Umesh stood ready, sweat streaming down his temple, chest heaving.

Virat walked up to him, placed a hand on his back. "Take a breather."

Then he turned, scanning his options. Shami was warming up. An obvious pick. But something tugged at him. A gut instinct.

He turned to the slips, where Aarav stood next to Rahane, exchanging a quick word about field placements.

Kohli called, "Aarav!"

The youngster looked over, startled for just a second. He jogged up ball tucked into his palm.

Kohli placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Come on, champ. Go for it. The ball is new. You've got the swing. Use it. This is your moment."

Aarav nodded. No words. Only fire.

He walked to the top of his mark. His first over in Test cricket. The roar of the Adelaide crowd became a low murmur in his ears. Only one thing mattered: the next ball.

The commentary box buzzed again.

"So Kohli opts for a change," Harsha Bhogle noted. "And it's the debutant, Aarav Pathak. What a moment for this young man."

"You know," said Mike Hussey, "this might just be genius. Ball's swinging, and he moves it both ways."

"Bold call," Vaughan nodded. "Shami's the tried weapon. But Kohli's going with the blade still in its sheath. Let's see."

Aarav breathed in, eyes fixed on Marnus. Then, he ran in.

Aarav's heart thumped in rhythm with the rising roar of the Oval crowd. The moment felt surreal. As he stood at the top of his mark, ball in hand, the lush green of the pitch spread before him like a canvas of opportunity. The pink ball, gleaming under the mid-day sun, was slightly rough on one side, freshly handed over by the umpire. He rubbed it methodically, a ritual repeated by thousands before him, but now it was his turn.

Virat Bhaiya stood beside him, animated and alert. "Field set, champ. Let's go," he said, patting Aarav's back. Then, he jogged back to his slip position beside Rahane Bhaiya, forming a twin wall of expectation behind the stumps.

Aarav exhaled deeply. Marnus Labuschagne was on strike, a core batsman of this Gen Australian team. But this was Aarav's moment.

Aarav's POV:

The sun was hot, the pressure immense, but I felt strangely calm. I looked at Marnus, bat raised, focused. I took a deep breath, visualized the ball pitching just outside off and swinging back in viciously. My fingers held the seam upright. Run-up. Gather. Release.

The ball landed on a good length, outside off. It looked like it would hold its line. But then, almost magically, it jagged in. A late in-swinger. Sharp. Furious. Marnus was caught on the crease, bat still rising. The ball whizzed past the inside edge, and—BANG! Off-stump cartwheeled.

Silence. Then chaos.

Rahane's POV:

I stood in the slips, hands on knees. I had my doubts. Shami could've continued the pressure. But then—

What a ball.

146 kmph. Maybe more. And that swing! From a debutant? It felt like I was watching a young Zaheer Khan or Dale Steyn. The sound of the stumps rattling was pure music. I instinctively threw my arms up, then clapped hard. I looked at Virat, and he was already sprinting toward Aarav like a kid who just saw a firework.

It was joy. Pure, unfiltered, team joy.

Aarav's POV (Continued):

My arms rose instinctively, my mouth let out a roar I didn't know was inside me. The team was sprinting toward me, but all I saw was the stump, crooked and rolling away. My first ball in Test cricket. My first wicket. Marnus Labuschagne. Bowled. I'll never forget that.

Virat bhaiya leapt on me, arms around my shoulders. "What a ball! What a ball!" he shouted, his energy infectious. The team huddled around, patting my back, ruffling my hair. I felt like I was floating.

Commentary Box:

Harsha Bhogle: "Ladies and gentlemen, remember the name—Aarav. First ball in Test cricket, and he's sent Marnus Labuschagne's off-stump on a journey of its own. What a delivery! What a debut!"

Michael Vaughan: "That's as good as you'll see. Late swing, high pace, and the accuracy to match. He's landed it right in the corridor and it's jagged in like a bullet. Incredible from the debutant."

Mike Hussey: "As an Australian, I'm gutted to see Marnus go like that, but as a cricket fan—wow. That was sensational. Full credit to the young man. You couldn't script a better start."

Allan Border: "The kid's got fire. To come in after Bumrah's double strike and bowl that—it shows serious temperament. India's got a gem here."

The scoreboard read 17/3.

Australia in tatters.

The Indian fielders regrouped, forming a circle around Aarav. Even Bumrah clapped from the deep, nodding in approval.

Kohli, wiping sweat from his brow, grinned at Rahane. "Good thing I didn't listen to you, huh?"

Rahane smirked. "He proved us both right."

Back in the dressing room, the coaching staff rose in applause. Ravi Shastri raised his glass of water in toast. "First ball. Bowled him. Kid's got it."