

Cricket 173

Chapter 173

The afternoon of Day 4 at the Oval Cricket Ground began with a quiet buzz, like a storm waiting to announce itself. The soft rustle of seat cushions, the crackle of morning snacks, and the unmistakable hum of Indian flags fluttering in the stands were all indicators — something special was underway.

The scoreboard showed 139/2. The overnight pair — Aarav Pathak and Virat Kohli — strode back onto the pitch under a golden sun. Aarav, 71, eyes calm yet focused. Kohli, 53, bat twirling in hand like a sword waiting to strike.

And then the commentary box came alive.

Harsha Bhogle:

"Ah, what a setting for the young and the experienced to create something unforgettable. The pitch looks good, the sky is clear, and India, well... they are on the brink of scripting a Test masterpiece."

Isha Guha:

"It's been a joy to watch these two — Kohli guiding from experience, and Aarav, just 20 years old, playing with a blend of patience and even some unorthodox shots with an amazing defense and elegance that you rarely see from a debutant."

Ricky Ponting:

"I've played a lot of cricket in this ground. Let me tell you — this isn't a pitch you walk on and dominate. But Aarav... this kid is playing as if he's in his backyard that too in both of the innings, and with bat and ball both. He's got something special."

The first session saw India move methodically. Kohli was all finesse — the wristy flicks, the off-drives, the soft nudges that turned singles into doubles. Aarav, however, looked like he was possessed by the spirit of greatness. He refused to chase wide balls, punished anything full, and pierced the field with laser precision.

In the 82nd over, the crowd reached fever pitch.

Pat Cummins bowled a full one just outside off. Aarav leaned forward, eyes still, and caressed the ball through the covers.

Four.

He raised his bat.

Michael Clarke:

"A hundred again! Two centuries in his debut match — are we witnessing the rise of the next great Indian batsman? That's a mark of temperament and talent."

Harsha Bhogle:

"Oh, you don't just arrive at Test level like this — you announce yourself. Aarav Pathak has made the Oval his own stage."

Virat followed not long after. In the 90th over, he danced down and drove Lyon elegantly past mid-off. The ball rolled past the ropes, and Kohli punched the air.

Century.

Another feather in his already gilded cap.

But even legends must fall.

In the 94th over, just after reaching his milestone, Kohli edged Starc to Paine behind the stumps.

The Oval stood in collective applause.

Isha Guha:

"An innings of grace from Kohli. And look at Aarav — walking up to him, sharing a moment. That's the torch being passed right there."

Hanuma Vihari walked in and offered the perfect balance — compact in defense, clever with rotation. The two slowly built on the foundation, grinding the bowlers into the Oval turf.

Aarav reached 120. Then 135.

Then... the magic happened.

In the 119th over, Starc steamed in. Aarav, as if reading the bowler's thoughts, stepped slightly across and whipped a scorching drive through midwicket.

The crowd erupted. Flags waved like flames. Banners went up — "AARAV, THE FUTURE OF INDIA".

Harsha Bhogle:

"150! I repeat — one hundred and fifty runs for a player in just his first match! He's not just building an innings — he's building a legacy!"

"This man has hit 300 runs in just a single test match and entered in a list of legends in his first match that too."

Ricky Ponting:

"I said it yesterday, and I'll say it again — this lad has the technique of a classical batsman and the mind of a veteran. This knock? One for the ages and I would say, this man would be the next king, after Kohli."

Isha Guha:

"The should we call him Young King or Prince!"

Lunch came and went. Vihari continued to frustrate the Australians, adding a solid 80 before chipping one to mid-off.

Wriddhiman Saha played a feisty little cameo of 28, showing intent with sweeps and drives. Ashwin followed with 22, keeping things ticking.

Meanwhile, Aarav... just kept batting. Even as wickets fell around him, his focus never wavered. His shirt now clung to his back with sweat, his bat blade smudged with red, but his poise? Immaculate.

In the 145th over, the final decision came.

Michael Clarke:

"India's declared! 402 on the board, and they've set Australia a target of 521 runs. That's Mount Everest... without oxygen."

Isha Guha:

"And at the heart of that climb is Aarav Pathak — unbeaten on 168. This is one of the greatest debut performances in the history of the game."

Harsha Bhogle:

"Oh, we've had Gavaskar, Tendulkar, Dravid... and now, maybe, we're watching the next name in Indian batting greatness being etched right in front of us."

As the Indian team walked off, the camera followed Aarav. Helmet in hand, sweat trickling down his temple, but his eyes... his eyes sparkled with quiet pride.

He looked toward the crowd. The tricolour waved like fire in the wind. Fans chanted his name.

"AARAV! AARAV! AARAV!"

From the commentary box window, Harsha Bhogle stood in awe.

"A debut like this doesn't just earn runs... it earns the respect of the cricketing world."

In the dressing room, Kohli walked over, patted Aarav's shoulder.

And as Aarav entered the pavilion, every player, coach and support staff stood from their seat and started to clap for me. I just nodded toward them and went to get freshen up.

Ravi Shastri, standing in the background, gave a rare smile — a knowing smile — the kind a mentor wears when he knows he's just seen the dawn of a new era.

Back in the stadium, as the lights started to dim for dinner break, and Australia prepared to bat, the scoreboard shone bright and bold:

Today's Highlights

India → 402/8 declared

Target for Australia: 521

Aarav Pathak: 168*

Virat Kohli: 101

Hanuma Vihari: 80

The stage was set.

The chase of a lifetime was about to begin.

The sun dipped lower over the Adelaide Oval, casting long shadows across the perfectly trimmed outfield. The crowd buzzed with anticipation as India took the field again after a dominating performance with the bat. With a commanding lead of 521 runs, Virat Kohli's men had declared at 402/8, giving their bowlers a full day and a half to hunt for ten Australian wickets. Aarav Pathak's majestic 168 had not just stunned the home crowd, but ignited global cricketing chatter. Paired with Kohli's classic 101 and Hanuma Vihari's gritty 80, it had been a masterclass in Test batting. Now, the ball was in India's hand, and the stage was set.

Harsha Bhogle's voice crackled over the commentary box, filled with excitement, "Aarav Pathak has been the revelation of this match—his 168 was not just runs on paper, it was an assertion of dominance. The way he handled Starc and Lyon... oh, just majestic! And now, here he is, taking the new ball alongside Jasprit Bumrah. What a moment in this young man's debut!"

Aarav's run-up was smooth, rhythmic. The ball kissed the seam and zipped through just past Wade's outside edge. The Australians, knowing the mountain they had to climb, started cautiously. Matthew Wade and Joe Burns looked composed, content to bide their time.

Isha Guha added, "They're not going for anything flashy. Wade and Burns are playing with soft hands, respecting the line and length. Smart cricket from the Aussies, but India won't mind this. They have the luxury of time."

By the 15th over, the scorecard read a stubborn 58/0. The Indian bowlers had tested the edges, bowled probing lines, but no breakthrough. Kohli made the change.

In came Umesh Yadav, raw pace replacing Bumrah. And at the other end, the magician—Ravichandran Ashwin replacing Aarav Pathak.

The ball had aged just enough to allow grip, and Ashwin began to whisper to it.

"Here comes Ashwin," noted Ricky Ponting, "This is where India's real threat begins. He has that uncanny knack to strike early in his spells."

The moment arrived.

17.2: Wade dances down the pitch. Ashwin, ever alert, sees it early. He darts the ball in at Wade's feet. A sharp deflection off Shaw's leg at short leg. The ball rolls to Wriddhiman Saha, who reacts in a flash. A backhanded flick—almost instinctive—without even turning around. Direct hit. Wade is caught way outside the crease. A gasp erupts from the crowd.

Harsha Bhogle almost shouted, "Oh what have we witnessed! That's not just a run-out, that's a work of reflex genius from Saha. Shaw's leg, Saha's flick—it's all chaos and art in one frame! Australia 70 for 1!"

Ashwin didn't even celebrate wildly. Just a calm nod, as if to say, It begins now.

Labuschagne walked in. Aggressive by nature, Marnus wasn't one to be bogged down. But Ashwin had seen this movie before.

19.5: Marnus, getting restless, stepped out again. Ashwin slowed it up, tossed it teasingly outside off. Labuschagne aimed to launch it over midwicket. The ball dipped, turned, and ballooned straight to mid-on.

"Gone! Labuschagne falls for the bait," exclaimed Michael Clarke, "Ashwin had him on a string there. That's pure spin bowling craft—set him up and pulled the trapdoor!"

The Indian players huddled, spirits lifted. But they knew what came next.

Steve Smith.

There was an eerie shift in atmosphere as Smith walked in. The murmurs of the crowd fell to a hum. Smith scratched his guard with fastidious care and looked ready for battle.

Kohli rotated his bowlers—Ashwin, Umesh, and then Mohammed Shami. They bowled in tight lines, consistently testing the patience of the Aussie duo. Smith and Burns, however, showed grit. Every dot ball was like a small skirmish, every run a defiance.

As the shadows stretched longer, the scoreboard moved slowly but surely. 100 came up. Then 110. Burns looked increasingly assured. Smith, the great wall of Australian batting, absorbed every challenge with unnerving composure.

The final session of Day 4 played out like a chess game. India attacked, probing every weakness. Australia defended, inching through the overs. No further wickets fell.

123/2.

The players walked off the field under a night sky, the crowd applauding a day of gritty Test cricket. India still held the upper hand, but Australia had dug in.

Back in the commentary box, Ricky Ponting summarized the day, "India threw everything at them today. That run-out—my word, we'll be seeing that in highlight reels for years. Ashwin has been outstanding, but full credit to Smith and Burns. They've built a platform. Tomorrow's first hour could decide the match."

Harsha Bhogle chimed in, "And let's not forget the story of this match—Aarav Pathak. His 168 his second hundred in just his debut Test... The poise, the elegance, the composure under pressure. He didn't just play a good knock—he stamped his arrival in Test cricket."

Isha Guha smiled, "The beauty of Test cricket, isn't it? A debutant shining, a legend like Smith defending his turf, and a classic India vs Australia battle unfolding under the Adelaide sun."

As the stadium lights flickered on and the crowd trickled out, one could feel the electricity in the air. The stage was set for a pulsating final day. Would India carve their win? Or would Australia script a heroic resistance?

The game hung delicately in the balance. But one thing was certain: Aarav Pathak had already become the heartbeat of this epic encounter.

The sun had already kissed the edges of the Oval when Team India gathered in a tight, resolute huddle. The air was thick with tension, yet there was an undercurrent of confidence—fueled by momentum, driven by belief. Day 5 had arrived, and with it, the final opportunity to dismantle the Australian resistance.

Virat Kohli stood at the center of the circle, his voice calm but commanding. "We play for the win. Let's finish this. We have huge total on the board, we just need 8 more wickets and we are going for it. We need Win."

With a quick rub of the ball against his trousers, he looked toward Aarav and tossed it with a nod. Aarav Pathak caught it mid-air, his eyes narrowing with focus. After a restful night, he looked fresh—shoulders relaxed, stride confident, mind clear. He adjusted his wristband, turned toward the pitch, and began marking his run-up. The field spread out behind him like an army aligning for war.

Steven Smith, one of the game's most revered technicians, stood at the crease. He tapped his bat, eyeing the young bowler with growing interest.

"Harsha Bhogle: Welcome to Day 5, folks. The weather's perfect, the crowd's brimming with anticipation, and look at this—Virat has thrown the ball to the young sensation, Aarav Pathak. What a moment this could be!"

"Isha Guha: He's got that energy today, Harsha. And he's starting with three slips in place. That's Vihari at third, Kohli at second, and Rahane at first. All eyes on this young gun."

First ball. Aarav bowled a probing good-length delivery. Smith, cautious as ever, let it go with a watchful eye.

Second ball. Slight inward seam movement. Smith decided to shoulder arms once more—but too late. The ball took the inside edge, brushed the top of the bat and flew quickly toward second slip. Kohli dived forward, low and fast, and wrapped his hands around it.

"Ricky Ponting: That's out! That's gone! And what a breakthrough! Smith's edge carries to Kohli and it's a brilliant low take. The link breaks, the spine of this Aussie innings is snapped!"

"Michael Clarke: You could feel that coming. That was clever bowling—baiting the leave, then getting it to seam back. Aarav has done it again!"

Smith was gone for 32. The Indian team erupted in celebration, a roar echoing through the stadium.

Next walked in Travis Head.

Aarav adjusted his field, keeping the aggression on. Head took guard. The crowd settled into anxious silence.

First ball—full pace, angled in. A toe-crushing yorker. Head's bat came down late. Too late. The stumps were shattered.

"Isha Guha: Oh my word! What a delivery! A dream yorker! Travis Head doesn't know what hit him! That's two in two for Aarav Pathak!"

"Harsha Bhogle: Can you believe this kid? First Smith, now Head—this is sensational!"

Australia: 123/4.

Cameron Green entered, towering, calm, but wary. India smelt blood.

While Green and Burns tried rebuilding, India's pressure never let up. Bumrah bowled a tight line, keeping the batsmen honest. Shami pounded the pitch with raw pace. But it was Aarav again who cracked the partnership.

With a ball in the later over as Aarav came for new spell, Aarav angled one across Burns. It was full, tempting. Burns went for the drive—but it was a setup. The ball swung late and took a thick outside edge, flying to Rahane who held it like a hawk.

"Michael Clarke: Oh no, Joe! He fell right into the trap. That's three for the debutant. What a game this lad is having!"

Aarav celebrated with arms wide, his teammates mobbing him. Joe walked off disappointed, knowing he'd been outfoxed.

Tim Paine was next. He tried to resist but Aarav had entered a rhythm few bowlers ever found.

A rising back-of-length delivery caught Paine's glove awkwardly as he tried to fend it away. The ball ballooned toward short leg. Shaw dived and took a low catch.

"Harsha Bhogle: That's number four! This is becoming the Aarav Pathak show!"

The Oval, a fortress for Australia, now echoed with chants of "India! India!"

Cameron Green tried holding one end but eventually succumbed. Aarav pitched one on off, straightened just enough, and took the edge to Saha.

Five wickets. His maiden fifer. In his debut match. More than 300 runs and till now 8 wickets.

"Ricky Ponting: This boy is a star in the making. He's outbowled everyone. Skill, pace, control—he's ticking all the boxes."

"Michael Clarke: Absolutely, Ricky. To get a fifer in a final innings on Day 5, at the Oval—that's elite stuff."

Shami cleaned up the tail with two thunderbolts. Bumrah took one, dismissing Lyon with a sharp bouncer.

Australia all out for 311.

India won by 209 runs.

Kohli hugged Aarav tightly, lifting him off the ground.

"Isha Guha: What a Test match. What a debut. Aarav Pathak—you've just announced yourself on the world stage."

As the team walked off the field, the crowd gave a standing ovation. Cameras zoomed in on the young All-rounder, his shirt soaked in sweat, his smile full of joy.

Somewhere in the stands, a young boy with an Indian flag shouted, "Aarav is our new hero!"

And on that day, starry sky, a star was born. The next king of cricket. The Next to rule world cricket after Virat Kohli!