

## Cricket 178

### Chapter 178

The sun dipped low over the MCG, casting a warm golden hue across the outfield. The air buzzed with anticipation, and Day 4 slowly faded into the memory books, but what it left behind was far from ordinary. India had ended the day at 196/3, needing just 118 runs to script a historic victory. England, on the other hand, needed seven wickets. It was a battle of nerves now. A final stretch where every run, every ball, every glance between batsmen could tip the balance of fate.

In the commentary box, the legends buzzed with excitement.

"What a day it's been, folks," Harsha Bhogle's voice rang with reverence. "Aarav, the youngster, is holding the innings like an experienced player. 88 not out. Just twelve short of what could be one of another century by this young lad."

"Absolutely, Harsha," Isha Guha chimed in. "His temperament, especially against the second new ball, has been extraordinary. He's looked calm, composed, and completely in control. And let's not forget Hanuma Vihari—46 not out. This partnership is turning into something special."

Morne Morkel added, "You've got to give it to the Indian batters. The pitch is wearing, Lyon is getting bounce and turn, but they've dug deep. This is proper Test cricket—gritty, emotional, and filled with heart. Tomorrow's morning session is going to be electrifying."

Sunil Gavaskar nodded thoughtfully, "It's the mental strength that matters now. They've batted through the storm. Now, they need to walk through fire. But this pair has given India a real chance."

As the players walked off the pitch to the sound of a standing ovation, Aarav's bat swung low in his hand. Sweat streaked down his temple, but his eyes were sharp, focused. He and Hanuma shared a fist bump as they walked off.

In the dressing room, there were congratulatory nods, quiet words from the team and coaches. Rahane patted Aarav on the back.

Dinner was a hushed affair. Plates clinked softly. The thought of victory was there in everyone's mind as we have 7 wickets and very few runs to score, compare to wickets left.

When he finally returned to his hotel room, the city lights blinked through the half-open window. The world outside was loud, alive. Inside, silence wrapped around him like a warm blanket. He collapsed onto his bed, the ache in his legs fading beneath the softness of the mattress. His phone buzzed. One name lit up the screen: Shraddha.

He smiled, instantly warmer.

[Video Call Connecting...]

Shraddha appeared, her face illuminated in the soft glow of her fairy lights. She was in her pajamas, hair tied up, cheeks flushed with sleepiness. She looked cozy and breathtaking all at once.

"Hey, superstar," she whispered, grinning like the happiest fan in the world.

Aarav chuckled. "You watched?"

"Watched? Aarav, I screamed so loud when you hit that cover drive for your fifty, my mom thought I stepped on a nail. I've never been so nervous and proud in the same breath."

He laughed softly, rubbing his eyes. "I wish you were here. Sitting in the stands. Just... here."

She grew quiet for a second, her expression softening. "Me too. I miss you so much it's annoying. I even started talking to your photo this morning. That's how bad it is."

He sighed. "Tomorrow... just 12 more runs to a hundred. But that's not even the goal. I want to finish this. For Virat bhaiya."

"You're going to do it," she said, her voice soft and sure. "Because you're you. And I've never believed in anything more than I believe in you right now."

Their silence stretched gently, like a hug across the screen. Then she asked, teasingly, "So what are you going to do after you hit that hundred? Take off your helmet, raise the bat, kiss the pitch? Or just run toward the stands like an idiot looking for me in the crowd?"

He smiled. "Maybe I'll point the bat to the camera. So you know it's for you."

She smiled back, warmth blooming in her eyes. "I'll know. I'll always know."

He rubbed the back of his neck, eyes trailing off momentarily. "I should sleep. Big day. But I don't want to end this call. Not just yet."

"Then don't. Just leave it on. I'll fall asleep watching you snore."

He laughed again, the kind of laugh that makes your chest lighter, soul brighter.

"Shraddha... if I get out early tomorrow—"

"You won't."

"Ok OK" {Author:- He he, he won't get out before 100.... he he he he 😊😊}

She leaned close to the screen. "I'm already proud. Not because of how many runs you score. But because of how you've carried yourself. You made the whole world pause today. And even if tomorrow doesn't go to plan, I'll still be right here. Always."

His throat tightened, emotion knotting in his chest. "You make it hard not to fall in love with you all over again."

She blushed, smiling through misty eyes. "Good. That's the point."

Later, as the call stayed on, they didn't talk much. Just watched each other. Her eyelids began to droop. His breath grew steady. The night stretched on, peaceful and sacred.

She whispered one last thing before sleep took her. "Love you babe! Hope I was there to cheer you!"

And somewhere between whispered dreams and silent screens, love held them both like a promise waiting to be fulfilled.

Outside, the stars shimmered like a thousand curious eyes over Melbourne.

Inside, destiny waited for morning

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The early morning sun had just begun to cast its golden beams across the MCG, brushing the worn pitch in hues of amber and gold. A soft breeze rustled through the gum trees surrounding the ground. The pitch, dry and cracked from four days of relentless heat, shimmered ominously under the sunlight, promising unpredictable bounce and treacherous spin. The stands buzzed with the hum of thousands of eager voices, their energy building like a rising tide. It was Day 5—the final day—and the weight of a nation's hope hung heavily in the crisp morning air. India needed 118 runs to chase down the target,

while Australia stood just five wickets away from crushing dreams. It was not just a match anymore—it was a battlefield of nerves.

The commentators could barely contain their excitement.

"Here we go, folks! This is what Test cricket is all about," Harsha Bhogle announced, his voice laced with anticipation. "Two teams, one epic final day. Aarav is batting on 88\*, and Hanuma Vihari stands firm at 46\*. The question is—who wants it more?"

"The first session will be everything," Isha Guha chimed in, her tone sharp. "Starc's got the ball, and in these early conditions, he's lethal. The ball will swing, and the pressure is immense."

"Exactly," added Sunil Gavaskar, leaning into his mic. "Aarav's been a revelation, but now he must carry the weight. A calm mind, tight technique. Let's see how he holds up."

Morne Morkel offered a bowler's insight. "With that crack running across the good length area, don't be surprised if we see something nasty early on. Starc and Cummins will test them to the limit."

As Aarav and Vihari walked down the pavilion steps, the stadium erupted. Flags waved, chants echoed. The Indian supporters rose to their feet in unison, creating a wave of blue and orange. Aarav's bat tapped against his pad rhythmically. He looked focused—eyes narrowed, jaw set. Vihari mirrored the energy, rotating his shoulders and adjusting his helmet strap.

They took their positions at the crease. Aarav marked his guard with careful precision, and Vihari readied himself to face the first ball.

Mitchell Starc, tall and menacing, ran in. His first delivery was wide outside off-stump. Vihari left it alone, coolly.

Starc turned, polished the ball on his thigh, and charged in again. This time, the ball swung late, darting into the pads. Vihari tried to shuffle across and defend, but missed. The ball crashed into his pads.

The Aussies went up instantly. "Howzzat!" they screamed in chorus.

The umpire didn't hesitate. The finger went up.

Gasps rippled through the crowd. The tension was suffocating. Vihari looked stunned. He walked over to Aarav.

"What about pitching? Should we review?"

Aarav shook his head after a split-second calculation. "No. It's hitting leg, no doubt. Don't waste the review."

Vihari sighed, nodded slowly, and turned to walk off. His steps were heavy, but dignified. As he crossed the boundary, the Aussie fielders clapped and patted each other on the back.

"That's the dream start for Australia!" exclaimed Morne Morkel. "two ball and already a breakthrough. Vihari's gone."

"Big setback for India," Isha added. "The pressure just doubled."

In walked Rishabh Pant—swashbuckling, energetic, and utterly fearless. Aarav gave him a firm fist bump.

"Let's show them what we're made of," Aarav said with quiet determination.

Pant smiled cheekily. "Time for some fireworks."

Starc charged in for the next ball. A wide yorker. Pant lunged, losing his footing, and sliced the ball into the air. He stumbled onto the ground, but the ball flew over third man and landed beyond the boundary.

"Six runs!" Harsha yelled. "Pant was on the ground, but still found the boundary. That's outrageous!"

"What audacity," Gavaskar muttered. "Only Pant could do that."

Starc, now visibly frustrated, steamed in again. This time he went short. Pant rose to the challenge, executing a textbook upper cut that sliced over the slips and trickled to the boundary.



"Back-to-back! Pant is counter-punching!" Isha called. "India needed this aggression."

The crowd responded in a deafening roar.

Starc pulled his length back for the next ball. Pant stood tall and defended solidly.

Last ball of the over. Starc delivered a fast, angling ball into the body. Pant, off-balance, swung one-handed. The ball ballooned high into the Adelaide sky.

Time slowed.

Joe Burns ran in from deep midwicket, eyes glued to the swirling ball. He dived, slid on his knees, and cupped his hands.

"TAKEN!" cried Gavaskar. "Pant has perished!"

Pant lay on the pitch, staring up at the sky. He pushed himself up slowly, dusted his pads, and began the long walk back.

"That's a huge blow," Harsha said, voice heavy. "India 206 for 5. Two wickets in the very first over. The momentum has completely shifted."

Aarav watched Pant go, a deep breath rising and falling in his chest. He stepped away from the crease for a moment, gathering himself.

Pant gave him a look, a half-smile. "Go finish it. Don't let this slip."

Aarav nodded. "I've got this."

Ravindra Jadeja was the new man in. Calm yet aggressive, experienced in crisis. He gave Aarav a reassuring nod.

"Let's rebuild," Jadeja said quietly.

Aarav tapped his bat on the ground. The noise around him faded into white. Just him, the ball, and destiny. India needed 108 runs. Australia, five wickets.

The day had only just begun.

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Morne Morkel's voice echoed through the commentary box, charged with urgency. "What a fiery start to the day! Two wickets in the very first over—Vihari and Pant gone. The pressure is now crushing India. But one man stands tall—Aarav. He's unbeaten on 88, and if there's any hope for India, it lies in his hands."

Pat Cummins was handed the ball for the second over of the day. The Australian vice-captain's eyes were narrowed, his breathing measured. With every muscle primed, he launched into his run-up. The first delivery was a classic test of patience—full on the pads. Aarav met it with a perfect, almost meditative forward defense.

"Elegant. Poised. That's a man in the zone," Isha Guha observed. "Aarav's technique is a joy to watch."

But Cummins was not looking for admiration—he wanted dominance. The next ball was quick, almost a yorker, aimed at Aarav's toes. Aarav adjusted with ease and pushed it back straight. The ball ricocheted off Cummins' fingers. And in a split-second decision—possibly premeditated—Cummins grabbed the ball and hurled it back toward Aarav, head-high.

There was no time to react.

The ball struck Aarav's helmet with a sickening crack, and he collapsed to the ground.

A stunned silence descended upon the MCG. For a heartbeat, time seemed to stand still.

The physio dashed out with his kit. Teammates rushed over. Jadeja was already kneeling beside Aarav. Cummins raised his hand as if to signal apology, but a smirk lingered too long on his lips. The Indian crowd, now fully awake to the provocation, erupted in boos. Yet the Australian fans—relentless and loud—cheered on.

"That's appalling," Sunil Gavaskar fumed. "Completely uncalled for. This isn't backyard cricket. That was deliberate."

Harsha Bhogle's voice lowered. "This game is heating up in a way we didn't expect. But right now, we just hope Aarav's okay."

After a tense five minutes, Aarav sat up. His gaze was sharp, burning with quiet rage. He nodded off the physio's concerns and stood up. He didn't speak. He didn't look at Cummins. But the crowd knew—something inside him had shifted.

Back on strike, Aarav faced a nasty outswinger. Still rattled, he chased the ball outside off, attempting his trademark cover drive. The bat edge caught it, and the ball flew toward the slips.

Travis Head dived, both hands outstretched—and dropped it.

"Oh no!" shouted Morne. "That's a sitter! You don't drop Aarav on a day like this. That could haunt them."

Cummins gritted his teeth. His jaw locked in frustration.

Aarav took a moment to compose himself. Then came the fourth ball—full on the pads. Aarav's wrists flicked naturally, the ball soared beyond deep square leg for a towering six.

"Magnificent shot!" Isha Guha exclaimed. "Aarav's not just surviving—he's counterattacking."

On 94 now, the MCG buzzed with excitement.

Next ball, Cummins tried a yorker, his stock weapon. But Aarav was ready. With fast reflexes, he stepped aside and created space. A stunning, flat-batted shot followed—lifting the ball straight past the bowler's head. It soared over the ropes for another six.

"One of the most audacious shots of the series!" Harsha Bhogle cried. "You can't coach this. You either have it or you don't. And Aarav has it in spades!"

Morne Morkel added, "That's AB de Villiers territory. Just jaw-dropping. Aarav brings up his hundred in the most dramatic fashion!"

But there was no extravagant celebration.

Aarav simply leaned forward, one hand resting on the bat, and stared coldly at Cummins. The entire stadium felt the weight of that gaze. It wasn't a celebration—it was a declaration. He had taken their best shots and was still standing.

The crowd exploded in applause. Flags waved. Trumpets sounded. The tension cracked open, and hope came pouring out.

Jadeja jogged over and gave Aarav a slap on the back. "That was epic," he grinned. "Absolutely cinema."

Aarav finally allowed a brief nod. "We're not done yet."

At 218/5, the scoreboard no longer looked like a noose. It looked like a challenge—a mountain still high, but now climbable. The partnership of grit and flair was at the crease. Aarav had reignited the fire. Now, it was time to turn the tide.