

## Cricket 179

### Chapter 179

The afternoon sun blazed down upon the Melbourne Cricket Ground, casting golden hues across the historic pitch. The smell of cut grass mixed with the distant aroma of street food from outside the stadium. Every seat in the stadium was taken, and millions around the world had their eyes glued to the screen. The scoreboard read 218/5. India needed 96 more runs to win. It was tense but hopeful, and as Aarav and Ravindra Jadeja stood tall in the center, something shifted.

There was a new rhythm in the Indian innings.

Jadeja assumed the role of anchor. Calmly he absorbed pressure like a sponge. His blade met the ball with precision. Good deliveries were blocked; loose ones nudged into the gaps for singles. But more importantly, he ensured Aarav remained on strike. Aarav—still glowing with adrenaline from his brutal encounter with Pat Cummins—was a storm about to unleash.

The first of the onslaught came against Lyon. A flighted delivery, seemingly innocent. Aarav stepped out like a panther, timed his swing, and BOOM! The ball launched into the blue Melbourne sky, spinning furiously. It descended like a meteor into the Indian dugout. SMASH! It collided with the team refrigerator, shattering its glass panel. The players inside ducked and then burst into laughter.

"Oh my word! That's a monstrous hit!" cried Harsha Bhogle. "He's literally knocked the cool out of the fridge! That shot was a statement."

Two balls later, Cameron Green bowled a teasing good-length delivery on middle stump. Aarav shifted his weight with the grace of a ballet dancer, flicked his wrists, and sent the ball racing through midwicket. It traveled low, like a predator in pursuit, piercing the gap with surgical precision.

"That was like lightning through a forest," Isha Guha gasped. "It split the gap before the fielders even blinked!"

In the very next over, Lyon tried to get clever. He bowled a flatter delivery outside off. Aarav dropped to one knee, eyes fierce, and reverse-swept the ball. It shot past the point fielder like a missile.

"Silence at the 'G'," murmured Sunil Gavaskar. "You don't see shots like that every day. That's a man telling the world he could play all format cricket and the prince title he had received after white ball game should also be there in red ball too, because he could play the all 3 formats of the game."

In just 14 balls, Aarav had hammered 39 runs. The Australians looked rattled. Fielders exchanged uncertain glances. Bowlers stared down the pitch in disbelief.

But the fireworks didn't stop with the bat.

The running between the wickets was a masterclass.

Morne Morkel leaned in, barely able to contain his admiration. "Watch these two. It's almost like they have an invisible thread between them. Their calls are so sharp, so instinctive. One push into the covers, and suddenly it's two runs. They're stealing runs, defying fielders, rewriting what's possible."

Again and again, a gentle push would become a blur of motion. Jadeja would call, Aarav would respond, and the fielders would be left chasing shadows. Their trust in each other was complete—no hesitations, no misunderstandings. Even the crowd noticed it.

Bhogle added, "This isn't just running. This is urgency, precision, and teamwork. This is how champions play."

With every run, the scoreboard climbed and so did the crowd's energy. Indian flags turned into a sea of saffron, white, and green. The chants grew deafening—"Aarav! Aarav!" and "Jeetega India!" filled the Melbourne air.

Australia threw everything they had. Starc resorted to short-pitched deliveries that whistled past helmets. Lyon spun web after web. Cummins returned with fury, but nothing worked. Aarav and Jadeja danced through the storm.

When the score touched 290, Starc bowled short. Jadeja anticipated it, got on top of the bounce, and pulled it to the square leg boundary. The crowd erupted. That was his fifty.

Jadeja didn't raise his bat much. He took out his sword and celebrated like a true Rajput warrior. He then nodded toward Aarav. "Your turn to finish it now," he said with a grin.

Few overs Later,

Aarav, now on 141\*, adjusted his gloves. Took guard. The stadium held its breath.

Cameron Green approached, the ball gripped tight. He charged in. Full. Straight.

Aarav stepped forward. Eyes narrowed, muscles loaded. He brought his bat down with a thundering crack. The ball rocketed down the ground, straight as an arrow.

It split the field and slammed into the advertisement board.

FOUR.

The scoreboard flashed: 314/5.

India had won.

The MCG, silent moments earlier, now erupted in noise that could be heard across continents. The Indian section of the crowd exploded in celebration. Fans jumped, hugged, cried.

But in the middle of it all, Aarav stood still.

He didn't leap. He didn't pump his fists.

He removed his helmet, ran a hand through his sweat-drenched hair, and turned in a slow circle to take it all in. The noise. The joy. The triumph.

He raised his bat.

Jadeja reached him, arms wide. He pulled Aarav into a tight embrace. Then Mayank arrived, followed by Gill, Rahane, Vihari—all sprinting onto the ground, shouting, laughing, patting Aarav on the back. They hoisted him up, and he grinned for the first time.

The Australians walked over. Pat Cummins led the handshake line, his face hard to read, but the nod he gave Aarav was unmistakable: respect.

Lyon followed. "Well played, mate," he muttered.

The Indian team gathered near the boundary rope, arms around each other, smiling for the cameras. Reporters shouted questions, fans waved flags, and the MCG trembled with life.

Aarav stood slightly apart for a moment, watching his teammates. He closed his eyes.

Not for the crowd. Not for the cameras.

But for himself.

A moment to remember. A moment to feel.

He had stood tall when it mattered most. Taken hits. Fought through fire. And led his nation to victory.

And in that golden Australian evening, with the shadows long and history rewritten, Aarav had become more than a cricketer.

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The echoes of celebration still hung in the Melbourne air as the Indian team made their way back into the dressing room after the win. The buzz from the crowd lingered faintly, a background hum to the laughter and backslaps reverberating through the Indian camp.

Coach Ravi Shastri stood at the center, hands clasped behind his back, surveying the jubilant faces of his players. His voice, deep and resolute, cut through the room.

"Boys," he began, a wide grin spreading across his face, "what we've done here today is not just a win on paper. It's a great win for us morally, in absence of our Captain Virat, Rahane leads the team amazingly, and even for a second didn't feel left out and maintained the intensity in the game throughout all the 4 innings."

He turned to Ashwin, who was seated on the massage table, toweling off sweat. "Ash, that spell in the first innings—those sharp turns on a flat pitch—you changed the tide. That was champion stuff."

Ashwin gave a humble nod, a small smile breaking across his face.

Shastri's gaze shifted to Gill. "And Shubman, your innings set the tone. Debut series, then that 50 wasn't just about runs; it was about showing them you're not here to be pushed around, showed amazing courage champ! well done."

Gill, flushed from the appreciation, chuckled softly and gave a thumb-up.

"And Jaddu," Shastri continued, turning to Ravindra Jadeja, who was seated beside Aarav, "you anchored the innings when it mattered, fielded like a tiger, and picked crucial wickets. That's what I call a complete cricketer."

Jadeja raised an imaginary sword in jest, drawing laughter from the room. Someone threw a towel at him playfully, which he dodged with a grin.

Then Shastri paused, his eyes settling on Aarav.

"Aarav," he said, his tone shifting to reverence. "You stood tall. Not just as a batsman, not just as a bowler, but as a complete cricketer. You steadied the ship when it was rocking. You fought back when it mattered most. That century—unreal. That spell in first innings—match-changing."

Aarav, seated silently, ran his fingers through his damp hair and offered a modest smile. The applause that followed was thunderous. Rahane slapped his back. Bumrah tossed him a cold water bottle with a grin.

Rahane stepped forward. "Every man here played a role in this win. But when the game looked like it might slip, Aarav held the line. We all felt that belief grow inside us because he stood at the crease like a wall. He defended the ball to steady the innings and even played aggressively to increases pressure on Aussies. Great Work Aarav!"

After the celebration calmed, gear was packed, and the team boarded the bus back to their hotel. The ride was quieter than usual—not out of dullness, but exhaustion. The adrenaline that had carried them through the day had begun to wear off, replaced by a peaceful satisfaction.

Aarav sat by the window, forehead resting against the cool glass, watching Melbourne blur past. His body ached—every muscle sore, every joint reminding him of the battle—but his heart was full. He watched the passing city, the trams clanging down lit streets, the neon signs of bars and diners, and people going about their lives, unaware that they'd just been witnesses to a cricketing epic.

Jadeja nudged him from the aisle seat. "You awake?"

"Barely," Aarav mumbled with a tired grin.

"You didn't even do your celebration after the hundred, yaar. What was that stare about?"

Aarav chuckled. "Just wanted to make sure Cummins remembers me."

Both laughed softly, then sank into silence as the city lights danced on the windowpane. Their conversation trailed off into stories from old tours, pranks in the dressing room, dreams of World Cup finals and future series. For a few moments, they weren't athletes, just friends.

Back at the hotel, the team dispersed into their rooms. Some headed for the dinner buffet, others for recovery baths and massages. The team physio moved room to room like a ghost, checking on tight calves, bruised shoulders, and sore backs.

Aarav barely managed to take off his shoes. He dropped his kit bag, peeled off his shirt, and collapsed face-first onto the bed. The sheets were cool against his flushed skin, the air conditioning humming a gentle lullaby.

His phone buzzed on the nightstand. A message from Shradha:

"You better not be ignoring me after THE MATCH 😊❤️"

Aarav smiled, fingers hovering over the screen. He wanted to call her, to hear her voice, to bask in her excitement. But sleep was already dragging him under like an ocean current pulling him to its depths.

He typed back:

"I'm alive, I promise. Just... completely dead inside. Talk tomorrow? Love you."

Her reply came almost instantly:

"Okay superstar 😊 Get some rest. Dream of me, not of Cummins throwing bouncers 😊"

He grinned at the screen, chuckled softly, and then placed the phone down. His last thought was of her laugh—light and golden—echoing through his drowsy mind.

The room was cool, the sheets freshly pressed, the silence comforting. Outside, a gentle breeze stirred the curtains. The moonlight spilled softly through the window, casting silver streaks across the carpet.

As Aarav closed his eyes, the moments of the day replayed in his mind—the roar of the crowd, the thud of the ball off his bat, the stunned look on Cummins' face, the crash of the fridge in the dugout, the cheer of his teammates, the hug from Jadeja.

Victory. Sweat. Pain. Glory. Brotherhood.

Sleep took him in seconds. And for the first time in days, his dreams were light and full of color. No tension, no bouncers, just laughter, warmth, and peace.

Outside, the streets of Melbourne glowed softly under lamplight, unaware of the history just written within its walls.

And in a quiet hotel room above the city, one young man slept like a warrior after battle—with peace, purpose, and pride. A new chapter of his legend had just begun.

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The golden hues of the Melbourne sunrise seeped gently through the window blinds, casting long shadows on the crisp, white bedsheets of Aarav's hotel room. Aarav stirred slowly, groaning softly as he reached over to the bedside table. The phone buzzed softly under his fingertips as the screen came alive.

7:00 AM.

For a moment, he lay there, still half-lost in the sounds of a roaring crowd and the adrenaline from the game. A soft smile curled on his lips as his mind wandered to Shradha. She had stayed awake to watch him bat, he knew. Because after this she would have online classes of her Study! As he opened the dialer and scrolled to her name, a quick mental calculation made him pause. India would be 5 hours and 30 minutes behind—2:30 AM. She would be fast asleep.

He sighed gently and locked the phone again, placing it back on the nightstand. After a long, steamy shower that eased the stiffness in his shoulders and calves, he dressed casually in a fresh T-shirt and shorts. The mirror reflected a young man with tired eyes but a proud spirit. He gave himself a subtle nod before heading down to the breakfast lounge.

The scent of sizzling food, buttered toast, masala omelets, and fresh-cut fruits hit him before he even stepped through the doors. Laughter echoed across the dining space—there was a lightness in the air, a relief and enjoyment.

At one of the larger tables near the window, Rishabh Pant, Shubman Gill, Prithvi Shaw, and Mohammed Siraj were engrossed in their own chaotic brand of morning chatter. Their plates were a mess of half-eaten croissants, cereal bowls, and an unhealthy stack of pancakes.

"Aarav! Oye, Pathak!" Pant's voice boomed across the lounge, mouth still full of food as he waved at him with exaggerated enthusiasm.

Aarav couldn't help but laugh. He made his way over, shaking his head. Just as he approached, Pant awkwardly shoved something behind his back like a mischievous child caught red-handed.

"Guess what's on the front page of The Australian, the country's biggest newspaper?" Pant asked with a twinkle in his eyes.

Aarav narrowed his gaze. "How would I know when you're hiding it like it's a secret dossier?"

The table exploded in laughter.

"Okay okay," Pant grinned. "Behold, your highness!"

With an exaggerated flair, Pant pulled out the paper and slapped it down on the table. Aarav blinked.

A full front-page spread. Bold, vivid, and impossible to miss. On the left side stood Virat Kohli, draped in regal imagery, a crown added to his photo through clever editing. And beside him—Aarav, mid-celebration with his bat raised and a determined fire in his eyes, also wearing a princely crown.

"King & Prince: India's New Cricketing Royalty Rules Their Favourite Kingdom" read the headline.

The article beneath was a full-page praise piece. It chronicled Kohli's leadership legacy and Aarav's rise as India's new cricketing prodigy. Quotes from Australian legends, including Allan Border and Ricky Ponting, labeled Aarav as "the next big thing" and "a cricketer made for the big stage." They described his blistering innings, his calm demeanor, and how he had captivated the nation.

Pant couldn't resist. "Well? Say something, prince!"

Aarav shrugged, the edges of his lips curling upward. "Just another attention-seeking headline. Media loves drama."

"Hah! Look at him trying to act like this is no big deal!" Gill teased.

Shaw leaned forward. "Bro, even my mom sent me a screenshot. She said, 'Aarav is on the front page in Australia. What are you doing?'"

Everyone laughed. Even Aarav couldn't help but chuckle.

"Well, if I'm going to be a prince, I might as well take a photo for my royal archives," he joked, pulling out his phone. He snapped a picture of the paper and sent it to Shradha with a cheeky caption:

"Guess who's royalty now? 📸✨"

Pant leaned over and said, "Bro, imagine Kohli bhaiya's reaction. He'll say 'I don't need a prince. I need runs from you in the next match.'"

Shaw laughed, "Or he'll make you carry his royal kit bag. That's what princes are for."

Aarav rolled his eyes. "Y'all are just jealous the press didn't crown you."

"Oh please, if anyone deserves a crown, it's me—for putting up with Siraj's snoring all the way in the bus!" Pant shouted, turning the table's attention to a fresh round of roasting.

Siraj groaned. "I don't even snore that loud!"

Gill jumped in. "Dude, last night I thought there was a truck reversing in our hallway. Turns out it was Siraj breathing."

Laughter erupted again.

The banter flowed freely. They debated over who made the worst hairstyle choices—Pant's bleach-blonde era won by unanimous vote—and argued about the best biryani in India. For a good half-hour, cricket wasn't even mentioned. It was just young men enjoying breakfast and being silly.

Amid the clatter of cutlery and occasional food fights, Aarav took a deep breath. This, right here, was what made it worth it. The wins, the press, the expectations—all secondary to moments like these.

Gill raised his juice glass. "To the Prince—but more importantly, to brothers who keep him grounded."

They clinked glasses. "Cheers!"

And as he stepped out of the breakfast lounge, his steps were light, his heart full, and his purpose sharper than ever.

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Later he went on a morning walk and enjoyed the scene of Melbourne and saw people walking and jogging. some even recognized him and praised him and took selfies with him.

Later when he was just lying on his bed, working on his laptop, he received a text, although he didn't notice the text, but it was from Shradha:

"Prince Charming with a bat 😊 Now that makes me your princess!"