

Cricket 182

Chapter 182

The sun had just begun its slow rise over the iconic Gabba stadium in Brisbane, its golden rays filtering through thin patches of clouds, casting long shadows across the pitch. The energy in the air was electric. The hum of anticipation from thousands of fans echoed through the stands like a brewing storm. Today was not just another cricket match—it was history in the making.

Fourth Test. India vs. Australia. The fortress of Gabba. A place where Australia hadn't lost a Test in over three decades.

But today, that fortress was under siege.

Matthew Hayden's deep baritone crackled through the commentary speakers.

"Good morning, everybody! Here we are at the fourth match of India versus Australia at Gabba Stadium, the unshakable fortress of Australian cricket! The Aussies will be desperate to avoid a clean sweep, while India—despite all odds—is hungry to destroy history."

Harsha Bhogle followed with his characteristic warmth and wisdom. "Australia won the toss and chose to bat first, but the story isn't that simple, folks. India's playing eleven is battered—no Virat, no Ashwin, Jadeja or Bumrah. And this morning."

Ricky Ponting added, "This is a young Indian side, barely held together with spirit and tape, but never count them out—especially not when Aarav Pathak in his debut series is in the form of his life. Hundreds

with the bat, wickets with the ball—this boy is on fire! He is playing like he is used to this pitch, and we could the hunger in him for the runs or wickets!"

The players lined up, shaking hands, exchanging glances.

He rolled his shoulders, gave a small nod to Rohit Sharma who patted him on the back, and then to Rahane who simply said, "You start us off."

Umpires on the positions. Aussies Batsman at their position and the field was set.

Three slips crouched low. Gully tight. Fine leg on the edge of the rope. Silhouettes of anticipation.

The umpire called the start of the game."

The stadium roared.

Aarav stepped back. Took his run-up. Every muscle in his legs coiled like a spring. Eyes locked on the bat of David Warner.

Warner. The destroyer. Standing confidently, chewing gum, bat tapping the crease.

Aarav thundered in. His footsteps pounding.

The seam upright. The release—perfection.

A length ball, angling just outside off.

Warner leaned in. Tried to defend it.

Crack!

The faintest of edges. The ball kissed the bat.

Time slowed.

Wriddhiman Saha moved like silk behind the stumps. Hands in the perfect place.

SNAP!

Caught. Clean. Smooth as poetry.

For a second, this time there was no silence—it was full chaos.

Complete chaos.

The Indian fielders erupted. Rahane sprinted forward, fists pumping. Siraj leapt into the air. Rohit screamed. The slips charged in.

Aarav stood tall, arms outstretched, roaring like a lion in front of the stunned Australian crowd.

His teammates collided into him, wrapping him in a whirlwind of celebration, shouts, and slaps on the back.

Matthew Hayden exclaimed, "Gone! Aarav has done it again! First ball of the match, and Warner is walking back. What a sensational start!"

Ricky Ponting: "Unbelievable! What a delivery! What a line and length!"

David Warner stood frozen for a heartbeat. Then slowly, bitterly, turned around. His head down, his steps heavy. He dragged himself back to the dugout.

Threw off his gloves.

Slammed the bat into the turf.

Anger. Frustration. Humiliation.

Gabba—his home ground. And he'd been dismissed on the very first ball.

Harsha Bhogle's voice, with a hint of awe: "There are moments in sport that stay with you forever. This is one of them."

As the crowd's cheers slowly faded into murmurs of disbelief, as the scorecard updated with a solitary '0/1', Aarav looked up at the giant screen.

One wicket down.

With Warner already walking back on the very first ball of the match, caught behind off my delivery, the Indian camp was buzzing like a beehive shaken awake—momentum had shifted. But Australia, proud and battle-hardened, was far from done.

As I, Aarav, retreated to fine leg for the next over, I locked eyes with Siraj. A silent nod passed between us. We were locked in. The mission was clear.

"Keep it tight, bhai," I murmured as we crossed paths. He responded with a firm nod, eyes focused and determined.

Marcus Harris and Marnus Labuschagne took guard, eyes scanning the field, shoulders tense. The crowd, stunned from the early wicket, murmured uncertainly. The next few overs passed with cautious defense, the batsmen poking, prodding, and letting the ball go when needed. The runs trickled in slowly. The Australians were consolidating, not attacking. The Gabba was quieter than usual, unsure whether to cheer or fear what this fiery Indian pace unit had ignited.

Then came the 11th over.

Siraj marked his run-up. His strides were fluid, like poetry set to a war drum. Second ball—fuller length, right on the money. Harris misjudged it, his bat coming down a moment too late. The ball zipped through and crashed into the off stump. Timber!

Commentator Harsha Bhogle's excited voice rang out across the stadium:

"Siraj gets Harris! What a delivery, what a moment for this young attack! Australia now 17 for 2!"

I raced toward him, fists in the air, heart thumping. We collided mid-run, laughing and yelling. The huddle around Siraj was raw, primal, our unity pulsating through our veins.

But the challenge had just begun. Steve Smith walked out to the middle, bat in hand, the crowd rising in reverence. Smith and Marnus Labuschagne at the crease—Australia's most formidable wall. It was the perfect test.

They started steady. Smith's wrists worked like magic wands, flicking deliveries with precision. Labuschagne defended stoically, leaving with discipline. They were rebuilding. Our bowlers kept coming, testing every inch of the pitch, switching angles, varying pace. Still, the scoreboard ticked, slowly but surely.

Then came Washington Sundar. Just 21, on debut, nerves likely boiling beneath his calm demeanor. He was tossed the ball in the 34th over for his second spell.

34.1—his very first delivery in the new spell. Not much flight. Fired full and straight into Smith's pads. The Aussie master tried to flick. It soared—uppishly—and went straight to short midwicket.

Matthew Hayden's voice cracked with emotion:

"And he gets Smith immediately! What a moment! What a player to get for your first wicket in Tests!"

Smith froze for a fraction, then shook his head in disbelief. He stormed off, dragging his bat behind him. Washington stood there, arms stretched wide, a roar on his lips and eyes wide with wonder. Rohit grabbed him first. We all rushed in.

87 for 3.

The Aussies looked rattled. In came Matthew Wade. Brash. Unpredictable. He counter-attacked, trying to put pressure back on us. He and Labuschagne started stitching a partnership. Edges didn't carry. Misfields crept in. Drinks were taken, brows wiped, and strategies whispered.

By the 63rd over, the sun had started to dip slightly, casting long shadows. I was handed the ball for my third spell. My shoulders ached, but there was fire in my lungs.

"One breakthrough," I whispered to myself. "Just one."

63.4—fourth ball. Not too short, not too full—just awkward. Wade, always looking to dominate, went for the pull. But it wasn't there. The ball rose quickly, cramped him, and took the splice. It ballooned into the air.

Gill at mid-off charged in. So did Thakur from mid-on. For a second, my heart stopped. Collision imminent. But at the last moment, Gill veered off. Thakur held his ground, eyes on the ball. And then—thwack—he caught it clean!

Ricky Ponting exploded on-air:

"Gone! That's a big one for India! Wade gifts it away and Aarav gets his second! That was sheer pressure building over time."

Our celebration was unfiltered. Raw. Wade walked off, shaking his head. Australia 200 for 4.

As Wade walked off, Cameron Green walked in.

Then came the big fish. Marnus Labuschagne. 117 runs. Unbreakable. Steady as a rock. I had studied him. Every twitch, every leave, every shuffle.

I started my 69th over with outswingers. Two of them. He left both.

Then I changed the angle. 69.5—inswinger. Seam tilted. Pitched on a good length.

The ball curved in, kissed the pitch, and jagged back.

Labuschagne went to defend. Too late.

Crash. Middle stump cartwheeling.

The Gabba fell silent in awe.

Harsha Bhogle was breathless:

"He's done it! Aarav Pathak, the magician with the ball! That's Marnus Labuschagne—clean bowled!"

I didn't even realize I had dropped to my knees due to not balancing myself. Rohit leapt on my back. Siraj wrapped me in a bear hug. Sundar looked at me like I was a superhero.

220 for 5.

Now came Tim Paine and Cameron Green—Australia's final bastion of experience and resolve. They knew the game was slipping. They dug in, buried their egos, and played percentage cricket. Ball after ball, they defended. Left deliveries. Dead-batted everything.

We rotated bowlers. Tried bouncers, inswingers, off-cutters. Nothing gave.

The shadows stretched further as the sun dipped. The air had turned cooler, the early evening breeze rustling flags above the stands.

The umpires finally called for stumps. The score: 274 for 5.

Day 2 awaited. Our fire hadn't dimmed.

It was only getting started.

The golden light of the Brisbane morning spilled across the Gabba, painting the pitch in hues of determination. It was Day 2, and while Day 1 had set the tone, today was about finishing what we started. We walked into the field with our minds honed on one goal: wrapping up the Australian innings.

Cameron Green and Tim Paine stood at the crease—two walls of resistance. They had frustrated us last evening, digging in and grinding out the last few overs with calm determination. The pitch still had life, but their resolve was unshaken. Yet, we knew that if we could just break through one of them early, the dominoes would fall.

Shardul Thakur, India's workhorse with an uncanny gift for clutch moments, steamed in just after the new session began. The energy in his run-up was different—focused, lethal. He was bowling his heart out, every delivery an arrow shot from the bow.

Then came the 101th over. Shardul angled one in, just short of a good length. Green misjudged. He pushed forward, thinking it would hold its line. But it jagged in sharply. The inside edge, a flick against the pads, and the sound of timber echoed. The off stump went cartwheeling.

A roar broke out from the Indian camp. Shardul leapt in the air, fists clenched, eyes wide with fire. Australia: 321 for 6.

It was the breakthrough we had prayed for.

With Green gone, we smelt more wickets.

Wade came next in the line of wickets. But he was on a tightrope, and Saini was about to cut it. His first few deliveries were hostile—short, rising, making Wade uncomfortable. Then, Saini delivered the knockout punch. A short ball that rose awkwardly; Wade pulled, but it was mistimed. The ball climbed higher than expected and went straight to midwicket.

Washington Sundar didn't flinch. He settled under it, pouching it with calm assurance. Wade gone for 45. The scoreboard read: 339 for 7.

From there, the Aussie tail began to crumble. Cummins tried to counter-attack, striking two boundaries that raised some noise in the stands. But he too fell—an ambitious slog straight into Rahane's safe hands at cover. Lyon, Hazlewood, and Starc followed, unable to resist the pressure. Siraj and Sundar cleaned them up with precise, unrelenting bowling.

Final score: 369 all out.

We huddled together, bumping fists, high on adrenaline. The first innings was done.

Back in the dressing room, Coach Ravi Shastri was full of energy. "Good job boys! Now get that lead. Control the game from here. Don't let go."

After a brief rest and hydration break, our innings was about to begin. Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill walked out with bats in hand, sun above, and pressure behind.

Mitchell Starc had the new ball. The leather gleamed under the afternoon sun. He was bowling with heat, pace, and purpose. Rohit and Gill played cautiously. The first few overs were tight. Australia had placed their slips and gully with precision, sniffing for an early wicket.

And they got it.

6th over. Pat Cummins into the attack.

6.2—A good length delivery, just outside off. Gill hesitated, caught in two minds. Should I play it? Should I leave? Too late. Thick edge. The ball flew. Steve Smith at second slip made no mistake.

Commentator Harsha Bhogle roared through the mic:

"Edged! And taken! Cummins strikes! That length again—awkward, uncertain, and Gill pays the price."

11 for 1.

The Aussie crowd roared, but there were chants rising even above them.

"Aarav! Aarav! Aarav!"

Indian fans. Australian fans. My name echoed around the Gabba. I swallowed hard, tightened my pads, and walked onto the field.

The sun bore down as I took guard. I looked at Rohit, who was standing at the other end, smiling reassuringly. He came over and whispered, "Play your game, champ."

And build we did.

What followed was a partnership stitched with grit, timing, and patience. Rohit was fluent—those lazy pulls and timed flicks. I found my rhythm after the first few nervy balls. The Australians bowled with venom, but we responded with class. A couple of well-run twos, some beautiful drives, and the scoreboard began to tick again.

The crowd was a strange blend of tension and admiration. Every boundary we hit was greeted with a mix of applause and gasps. It felt like walking a tightrope—one mistake, and the balance would topple.

Then came the 20th over. Nathan Lyon into the attack.

19.5—Lyon tossed it up, dipping wickedly, landing on a middle and leg line. Rohit, dancing down the track, misread the dip. He reached for the ball but was nowhere near the pitch of it. He still went through with the shot.

It ballooned up.

Long-on was running in.

Hands cupped.

Caught.

Commentator Ricky Ponting:

"And that's the end of Rohit Sharma! Holes out to long-on! Lyon's dip and drift does the trick. What a bowler."

Rohit gone for 44. India: 60 for 2.

A hush settled for a moment. Then Rahane walked out. He checked his guard, tapped the pitch, and nodded to me.

"Let's play session, as the day ends with this!" he said. "No need to rush."

We built slowly. In the next four overs, I played two of the most elegant shots of my life.

First, against Pat Cummins. He pitched one full and straight. I leaned into it, weight forward, and drove. The bat met the ball with a perfect click. It rocketed down the ground, past the bowler, past mid-off, straight as an arrow.

The crowd gasped. Ricky Ponting, on-air, chuckled and said:

"That's vintage. That's straight from Sachin's textbook. What a shot by Aarav."

Next over. Josh Hazlewood angled one across, full and inviting. I stepped into it and carved a cover drive that sliced through the gap like a blade. The ball raced to the boundary.

Matthew Hayden, now on commentary:

"Aarav Pathak this man. The poise, the balance—that's class."

As we moved toward the close of play, the shadows grew longer. The floodlights flickered to life. I looked at the scoreboard. India: 69 for 2.

The umpires pulled the bails. Day 2 had ended.

We walked off, exhausted but proud. In the dressing room, Coach Shastri smiled at me and Rahane. "Well played, both of you. We're right in this."

I sat down, bat resting on my knees, sweat still clinging to my forehead. I looked back out at the Gabba—its history, its tension, its glory.

The battle was far from over. Day 3 awaited.

But for now, we had held our ground. And we had done it with heart, grit, and the will to fight.

The roar of cricket was alive—and so were we.