

Cricket 195

Chapter 195

The sun dipped behind the sandstone curves of the newly christened Narendra Modi Stadium, the evening sky melting into shades of pink and gold. As floodlights blinked to life, the roar of fifty thousand voices echoed across the coliseum — a sound that vibrated through the chest, pulsing with anticipation. It wasn't just any Test match; it was history in motion — India's second-ever day-night Test, and the grand unveiling of the largest cricket stadium in the world.

Harsha Bhogle's voice rose through the excitement, smooth and electric. "Good evening from Ahmedabad! What a sight — what a moment — fifty thousand fans here, under lights, to witness the start of something special. England versus India. Pink ball. New stadium. New memories waiting to be written."

Beside him, Sunil Gavaskar adjusted his mic, eyes glimmering behind his glasses. "Harsha, this... this is a spectacle. I've seen cricket in some great venues — Melbourne, Lord's, Eden Gardens — but this... this takes your breath away."

Shaun Pollock chuckled, "And I think bowlers might like it here tonight — good grass cover, a bit of shine, pink ball under lights... could be fun for someone like Aarav Pathak."

Aarav's name rolled across the speakers, and the crowd responded in kind — thunderous chants filling the stadium, 'Aarav! Aarav!' Flags waved. Phone flashlights glittered like stars.

Down at the center, Virat Kohli and Joe Root stood on the lush green pitch beside match referee Javagal Srinath.

"Root has called heads..." Bhogle's tone lifted. "...and it is heads! England have won the toss and elected to bat first."

Root smiled, confident. "Looks a good wicket, maybe a touch of grass but we'll back our batsmen to put runs on the board."

Virat grinned, "We'd have bowled first anyway. Excited for the occasion — new stadium, pink ball, and a team ready to go."

Team News:

England: Dom Sibley, Zak Crawley, Jonny Bairstow, Joe Root, Ben Stokes, Ollie Pope, Ben Foakes, Jofra Archer, Stuart Broad James Anderson, Jack Leach.

India: Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Aarav Pathak, Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane, Rishabh Pant, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Ravichandran Ashwin, Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma,

Gavaskar: "Two good bowling changes there for India. Bumrah back in the mix, Ishant for his 100th Test... and Aarav Pathak, the man of the moment. This could be special."

As the national anthems faded, Aarav walked toward his mark. The pink ball gleamed between his fingers. His run-up was smooth, deliberate — a ritual honed by years of repetition. The crowd hushed to a low hum as Gavaskar began reading his stats.

"Let me remind everyone watching," he began with an almost fatherly pride. "In just 6 matches, this young man has scored 1027 runs — five centuries, five fifties, an astonishing average of 128.38 — and taken 32 wickets in 12 innings. Fastest to get to 1000 runs and having the highest average too."

Pollock whistled low. "A genuine all-rounder — that's rare."

Gavaskar continued, voice rising with pride. "And that's not all. Aarav Pathak has just become the fastest batsman in Test history to reach 1,000 runs — in only 12 innings — equalling the great Herbert Sutcliffe and Everton Weekes, and one ahead of Don Bradman!"

A silence, then an explosion from the stands. The crowd erupted as Aarav turned to start his run-up — the pink ball flashing in the light, like a comet.

Bhogle's voice caught the moment. "And here we go — Aarav Pathak, left-arm pace, 148 kilometers per hour on average this series, steaming in with the brand-new pink ball!"

Dom Sibley stood at the crease, eyes narrowing, bat tapping. Aarav thundered in. The first ball pitched on a perfect line, kissing the turf, shaping away just enough — a late outswinger at 148 kmph.

Bhogle: "And it's left alone beautifully by Sibley! That's a teasing start — shape, speed, and that pink ball wobbling a bit under lights."

Second ball — again, full, angling across. Sibley prodded tentatively — missed.

Pollock: "Ooh, that's pace and movement! That ball swung like a ribbon in the wind. You can't be half-forward against Aarav here."

Third and fourth balls — same speed, same angle, forcing respect. The seam stayed upright, the rhythm flawless.

Then came the fifth delivery.

Aarav held it a bit longer in his palm, took a deep breath. The crowd grew silent again. The ball angled in this time, perfect seam presentation. He drove his front arm down and whipped through the crease — 152 kmph, a vicious inswinger.

The sound — tunk — timber flying, stumps cartwheeling, pink ball glowing as it hit the LED bails.

Bhogle shouted, "BOWLED HIM! Aarav Pathak! You beauty! The crowd erupts — Ahmedabad, welcome your hero!"

Gavaskar: "What a delivery! Full, fast, late movement — an absolute peach! Dom Sibley had no chance — that's Test match poetry from the young man!"

Pollock: "That's 152 kilometers an hour with swing. You don't teach that — that's pure instinct."

The roar in the stadium was uncontainable. Aarav, usually calm, raised his arms to the sky. His teammates surged toward him — Kohli leading the way, yelling, "Benstokes! What is this?"

England 0/1.

Cameras zoomed in on Aarav's face as the replay flashed — the seam tilted, the line immaculate, the stump mic catching the fizz of the ball. On commentary, Gavaskar couldn't hold back.

"I've said this before, Harsha, and I'll say it again — Aarav Pathak is India's greatest asset since Kapil Dev. He bats like Kohli when needed, bowls like Dale Steyn with the left arm, and fields like a dream. This boy is going to carry Indian cricket into a new era."

The pink sky darkened into indigo as the floodlights took over. The hum of the crowd became a heartbeat, a living sound pulsing through every frame of the match.

Aarav walked back to his mark, the ball spinning in his hand, eyes locked on Jonny Bairstow — the new man in.

Bhogle whispered like a storyteller at dusk. "The young phenom has already sent one stump cartwheeling. And from the way he's bowling tonight... there could be more to come."

Harsha Bhogle (Commentator's voice): "England trail early after losing Sibley in Aarav Pathak's fiery opening spell. The young man from Mumbai—once again proving why he's the heartbeat of India's pace unit."

The cameras panned to Aarav, standing tall at his mark, hands rubbing the pink ball with focus that bordered on obsession. His eyes—sharp, unflinching—locked onto the batsman at the other end. Ben Stokes, all grit and muscle, marked his guard.

Sunil Gavaskar: "Look at him, Shaun. There's a rhythm in his run-up tonight. Every step is measured. Every breath is timed. Aarav Pathak—this young man is a gift to Indian cricket. We had Kapil Dev, then a generation waited. Now, with Aarav, India has found its balance again—a batsman with elegance, and a bowler who can rattle bones."

Shaun Pollock: "You can sense the confidence, Sunny. A left-armer who can hit 150 clicks and swing it both ways—that's rare. The way he's getting the pink ball to talk under lights—it's artistry."

Aarav ran in. First ball to Stokes.

It pitched on a good length and seamed away viciously—Stokes groped at thin air. Pant, behind the stumps, gave a teasing grin. The next zipped in, nipping off the seam, clattering into Stokes's thigh pad. The crowd gasped.

Manjrekar: "Oh, what a delivery! He's playing with Stokes here, teasing him—one away, one in. He's setting him up perfectly!"

Aarav turned, eyes glinting under the pink hue, and sprinted in again. The third ball—slower through the air, fuller, drawing Stokes forward. The bat came down late...

Edge!

The sound was faint, but unmistakable. The ball flew low to slip—Rohit dived right, soft hands pouching it cleanly.

Harsha Bhogle (voice rising): "Caught at slip! Oh, magnificent bowling! Aarav Pathak strikes again! The trap was set, the bait offered, and Stokes took it. The stadium erupts! Two wickets for Aarav—and England crumble at 45 for 3!"

The giant LED screen flashed AARAV PATHAK 2/13 (6.4 ov, 148 kmph avg).

As Aarav raised his hand slightly in celebration, the roar from fifty thousand throats surged like a wave. Virat came rushing from mid-off, slapping his back. "Perfect setup, champ! That's Test cricket!"

Aarav simply smiled, calm amid chaos, whispering under his breath, "Stay patient, we'll roll them."

Axar Patel, in rhythm as if destiny had rehearsed his every step, began his spell with deceptive flight and length. The pink ball dipped, gripped, and turned like a dream.

Harsha Bhogle: "This is artistry in motion. Look at that drift, look at that dip. Axar Patel—like a sculptor shaping England's collapse with his fingers."

Zak Crawley looked to defend but his bat came down a fraction late. The ball kissed the edge, flew to slip, and Rahane made no mistake.

Pollock: "One more! Crawley departs! England in tatters—Axar Patel joins the party!"

Next over, Jonny Bairstow tried to sweep, misjudged the line, and the ball skidded on to crash into his pads. A cry of Howzat! echoed. The umpire's finger shot up.

Gavaskar (smiling): "He's not reading it, Shaun. They're not reading Axar at all. This pitch is offering just enough for someone who bowls straight, quick, and clever. Bairstow goes early!"

England 52 for 4.

Axar's spell turned lethal. Ollie Pope misread a straighter one—gone. Ben Foakes pushed at one that darted off the surface—caught at short leg. Stuart Broad tried a wild swing and lost his stumps.

Each wicket brought with it an explosion of sound—like thunder rolling through the stands.

Manjrekar: "Five wickets for Axar Patel! A fifer under lights in this grand new arena. What a night for Indian spin!"

The camera caught Axar raising the pink ball, acknowledging the crowd, his face half-shadowed by the glow of the stadium lights. Aarav clapped from fine leg, admiration clear in his eyes. This was teamwork. Pure, pulsating Indian dominance.

But England still had their captain—Joe Root. The English talisman took guard, calm but visibly wary. Ravichandran Ashwin marked his run-up.

Bhogle: "Ashwin versus Root—Test cricket's finest chess match. The master of drift and guile versus England's best player of spin."

The first ball—looped beautifully outside off, tempting Root forward. He defended. The second—drifted in sharply and turned away. Root was beaten. Ashwin's eyes gleamed.

Third ball—flighted fuller. Root leaned in for the drive... the ball dipped, turned late, kissed the edge, and nestled into Aarav's hands at slip.

Gavaskar (with awe): "That is pure genius! Flight, guile, and precision! Ashwin removes Root—and England's last hope!"

The crowd's roar was deafening. India's bowlers had made the pink ball sing.

Ashwin, in his element, continued his spell of destruction. Archer misread a carrom ball and edged to Pant. Jack Leach fell next—trapped on the crease, lbw. England's innings folded like paper.

Harsha Bhogle: "And that's it! England all out for 112! Axar Patel with five, Ashwin with three, and Aarav Pathak with two wickets—this is a demolition, ladies and gentlemen. Under lights, under pressure, India shine brightest!"

The camera zoomed out to the grand view of the stadium—pink ball glinting on the lush green turf, players walking off to applause that seemed endless.

Aarav, walking side by side with Axar and Ashwin, exchanged a quiet smile. "What a night, yaar," Axar said, grinning. "You set the tone. We just followed the rhythm."

Aarav chuckled softly, tossing the pink ball in the air.

Sunil Gavaskar: "This, dear viewers, is why we love this game. A young quick like Aarav Pathak bowling thunderbolts at 150, spinners weaving webs of magic—and all under lights in the largest cricket stadium on Earth. If you ask me, India's future looks brighter than these floodlights."

Harsha Bhogle: "Beautifully said, Sunny. The pink ball, the crowd, the emotion—this is Test cricket at its most poetic."

The camera lingered on Aarav's face—calm, focused, proud. The cheers of the crowd merged with the commentary echo, immortalizing the night.

England all out for 112. India, the architects of brilliance, walk off in glory.

The floodlights glowed magenta across the colossal Narendra Modi Stadium as India's openers, Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill, took guard. The pink ball glimmered under lights like a polished gem, slicing the dusk air with every seam movement.

Commentary: Shaun Pollock, Sunil Gavaskar, Sanjay Manjrekar, Harsha Bhogle

Harsha Bhogle (presenter): "Welcome back to the world's largest cricket stadium — 50% capacity still means over fifty thousand fans under lights, the atmosphere electric! England dismissed for just 112, India beginning their reply. Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill to open the innings against the pink ball."

Pollock: "Conditions perfect for swing. Anderson and Broad will relish this. The pink ball, fresh lacquer, the cool Ahmedabad night — paradise for seamers."

First Over — Anderson to Rohit:

The first delivery whistled past Rohit's outside edge, seaming away late. Rohit smiled, adjusted his gloves, tapped the pitch twice. The crowd chanted: "Ro-hit! Ro-hit!"

By the third over, both openers started to find rhythm — crisp cover drives, nudges off the hip, controlled aggression. The score crept to 21, Gill on 11, when Anderson struck.

Harsha: "Edges — straight to second slip! Gill's gone! India lose their first wicket at 21."

Gill's disappointment showed; a shake of the head, a quiet pat from Rohit. The pink ball jagged late, taking a feather edge. The scoreboard flashed 21/1.

Day 1 drew to a close. The players walked off under glowing floodlights as chants of "India! India!" echoed around the arena.

Day 2

Aarav Pathak walked to the crease alongside Rohit Sharma. The crowd's energy swelled — chants of "Prince Pathak!" thundered. Cameras zoomed in, flashing his batting stats on the giant screen.

Gavaskar: "He's the man of the moment. Look at those numbers! 6 matches, 1,027 runs, average 128.38, 5 hundreds and 5 fifties. That's not a debutant's record, that's a legacy in motion."

Manjrekar: "And don't forget, he's the fastest to 1,000 Test runs — in just 12 innings, equal with Sutcliffe and Weekes, ahead of the great Don Bradman."

Harsha (smiling): "Gavaskar sir, you called him India's greatest all-round asset since Kapil Dev. He's about to show us why."

Gavaskar: "Yes he is and he had shown us time again and again."

Rohit was batting beautifully, leaning into drives and stepping out to loft spinners over mid-off. Aarav took his time, playing himself in, leaving anything not in his zone. But when Anderson pitched one too full, Aarav unfurled a classic on-drive — the ball raced past mid-on to the boundary.

Pollock: "Textbook. High elbow, perfect balance, straight through the line."

Next, a flick to fine leg, then a square cut that rocketed off the middle — the crowd on its feet. Rohit and Aarav rotated strike seamlessly, their partnership blossoming past 80.

Then came the first breakthrough after lunch.

Manjrekar: "And gone! Rohit Sharma departs for a well-made 60. Tried to flick, but straight to midwicket!"

India 108/2. Aarav, composed, tapped Rohit's glove as he walked off. Kohli Enters the ground, but could only score 21 runs.

The pitch started showing hints of movement again. Leach and Moeen found rough patches. Rahane came and went quickly — pinned lbw for 5. Then Rishabh Pant played a cameo of 8 before skying one to long-on.

Through it all, Aarav remained calm, timing his strokes with elegance — late cuts, crisp drives, and one towering six over long-on that made the crowd erupt.

Gavaskar: "Superb! Steps out to Leach, gets to the pitch of it, and sends it soaring. That's confidence. That's control."

His half-century came with a flick to midwicket, crowd rising in applause.

Harsha: "There it is! Another fifty for Aarav Pathak — a player who can do no wrong these days."

Aarav raised his bat, modest smile, a quick glance to the sky — perhaps remembering Shradha. In that moment, cameras caught him mouthing something softly, hidden by his helmet grill.

The innings, however, began to unravel quickly. Anderson, operating from the Adani End, got reverse swing under lights. The pink ball dipped, skidded, and trapped Aarav lbw for 51. Umpire's call — the crowd groaned in unison.

Pollock: "That looked close. No bat, hit in line. And yes, umpire's call. Aarav has to go."

Applause rained down as he walked back, head held high. His contribution — elegant, controlled, crucial.

India eventually folded for 160, a modest lead of 48. The dressing room buzzed with mixed emotions — satisfaction over the lead, but awareness that England could still bite back.

Aarav sat near the window, gazing at the pink glow reflecting off the stadium's upper tiers. He knew the night wasn't done. The ball would swing again, and he'd be the one to unleash it.

Harsha (signing off for the day): "So, India all out for 160, lead by 48 runs. Aarav Pathak with yet another poised fifty under lights, the pink ball doing plenty and don't forget the 60 runs contribution from Rohit Sharma. Day 2 ends with more drama awaiting tomorrow."

This was the final chapter in a dramatic, unforgettable series between India and England. And it ended the only way such a saga could: emphatically, decisively, with the kind of dominance that left no room for doubt. India didn't just win this match—they crushed England by 10 wickets, sealing the series with authority.

The Match Begins – England Falters Early

The final Test saw England win the toss and elect to bat first under clear skies. The pitch had a faint greenish tinge, but with enough cracks to hint at demons waiting beneath the surface. India's bowling attack, confident and calculated, didn't waste a moment in unearthing them.

England's first innings crumbled under India's relentless pressure. They were bundled out for 205 runs, a total that felt 100 runs short the moment the last wicket fell.

Axar Patel, with his beguiling left-arm spin, tore through the English middle order, finishing with figures of 4 for 38. His subtle variations and pinpoint accuracy turned survival into an ordeal for England's batsmen. Aarav Pathak, chipped in with 3 crucial wickets, R Ashwin picked up 2 wickets, ever the master of his craft, and Mohammed Siraj's raw pace delivered the final blow with a solitary, but vital scalp.

The Indian camp was buzzing—not with overconfidence, but with purpose. There was a job to finish. And Aarav Pathak was just getting started.

India's reply was nothing short of a masterclass in patience, precision, and flair. Opening with confidence, the Opener blunted England's pace attack before the real storm arrived.

Aarav Pathak walked in at No. 3, a familiar rhythm in his stride, eyes scanning the field with quiet assurance. The crowd, already chanting his name, seemed to know something magical was about to unfold.

And unfold it did.

With every stroke, Aarav rewrote the script of what composure under pressure looked like. His cover drives were poetry in motion, his footwork against spin a tutorial in technique. But beyond the numbers, it was the way he carried himself—calm, assured, unshakable—that marked him as a man destined for greatness.

By the time he reached his century—his 127 off 221 balls*—the stadium erupted. Not just because of the milestone, but because they knew they were witnessing the birth of a legacy. Alongside him,

Rishabh Pant played a fiery innings, his unbeaten *101 a brilliant counterpoint to Aarav's elegance. Together, they stitched a partnership that broke England's back and the series wide open.

India posted 365 runs, a lead of 160 runs that felt like a mountain.

Under the floodlights on Day 3, England walked out to bat for the second time—shoulders heavy, eyes unsure. They didn't walk back in; they limped.

Axar Patel, once again the destroyer-in-chief, ran through the top order with 6 wickets, his figures now glistening in the record books. Ashwin was clinical, taking the remaining 4 wickets, carving his name even deeper into the story of Indian spin dominance.

England were all out for 87 runs. A score that barely dented the Indian lead. A score that spoke not just of defeat, but submission.

India won the match by an innings and 73 runs. But more than the margin, it was the manner of victory that stunned cricket fans worldwide. Ruthless, clinical, joyful—this was the new India. An India that didn't just win, it performed.

With this, India sealed the Test series victory, 3–1. But the statistics told only half the tale. The emotion, the grit, the resurgence—it was all there, wrapped in the red ball, stitched into every wicket and boundary.

When the post-match presentation began, there was only one name echoing louder than the applause—Aarav Pathak.

Awarded the Player of the Series for his all-round contributions—376 runs (4 -> Match Not Played + Match Not Played + 92+106+51+Not Bat+127+ No Innings => 376) across three matches, including two centuries, two half-centuries and 15 wickets (wickets: Not Played + Not Played + 2 + 4 + 2 + 4+3+0 => 15), Aarav stood tall, visibly overwhelmed but grounded.

The applause that followed was thunderous.

But the real celebration was yet to come.

Back in the dressing room, it was mayhem—but the joyous kind. Jerseys flying, music blasting, and laughter echoing off the walls like fireworks on Diwali night.

Aarav, who had just crossed the fastest 1000 Test runs in Test Cricket, was met with a surprise—a massive cake, three tiers high, iced in chocolate flavour, with "Fastest 1000 Runs – Aarav Pathak" emblazoned across it.

But no one ate the cake.

Because the moment he cut it, Rohit Sharma smeared a chunk across his face, triggering a chain reaction that turned the dressing room into a cake battlefield. Pant chased Siraj with a frosting-covered hand, while Virat bhaiya and Gill took the cake's one tier and bumped it on Aarav's head.

Aarav laughed harder than he had in months, the weight of expectations temporarily lifted by the sheer silliness of the moment. Cake turned into war paint, and the dressing room into a stage of youthful revelry.

The photographs from that night would go viral—a blur of frosting and faces, of men who had fought hard now rejoicing harder.