

## Cricket 200

### Chapter 200

The morning sky over London was draped in soft grey, a chill breeze floating across the hallowed turf of Lord's. The cathedral of cricket—the Mecca itself—was alive once again. Even with only sixty percent of the seats filled due to COVID protocols, the noise was something else: a low hum of excitement, of reverence, of pure love for the game. Flags fluttered, chants rose in pockets, and the sound of a thousand conversations melted into one shared heartbeat.

Aarav Pathak sat quietly in the stands, his India jersey zipped halfway, a cup of hot coffee warming his palms. His eyes scanned the ground slowly—the green so lush it looked painted, the white boundary ropes gleaming, and beyond that, the members' pavilion, steeped in a century of stories. This was Lord's. This was where history breathed through brick and grass.

He took a deep breath, feeling the weight of it all. The smell of damp grass mixed with fresh polish from the dressing rooms; the faint echo of a leather ball hitting a practice net somewhere in the distance. For a long moment, he said nothing, just letting his eyes absorb everything. The slope of the ground, the shadows of clouds sweeping across it, the quiet buzz before a storm.

"This is something, huh?" came a familiar voice.

Aarav turned to find Virat Kohli walking up the steps, a faint smile under his beard, cap tilted back. Kohli sat beside him, elbows resting on his knees, eyes too drifting toward the pitch.

Aarav smiled. "You've played here before, haven't you? What's it like... once you're out there?"

Virat chuckled softly. "Lord's doesn't let you feel like you're bigger than the game. The ground humbles you. The first few balls—you'll feel your heart in your throat. But then, it all settles. It's just bat and ball, you, and the sound of your heartbeat."

Aarav nodded, his fingers tightening around the cup. "It feels... surreal. I've dreamed about this since I was a kid. Watching replays of Dravid sir and Dada lifting their bats here. And now... I'm here."

Virat looked at him, a grin stretching across his face. "And you've earned every bit of it, champ. Don't forget that. You're not here by luck. You're here because every team that's faced you knows your name now. Because you've made them remember it."

He stood, giving Aarav a solid pat on the back. "Alright, come on. Time to do what we came here for."

Aarav smiled faintly, stood up, and followed Virat down the stairs toward the dressing room. His spikes clicked softly against the stone steps, echoing through the tunnel. The deeper they went, the louder the noise above grew, until finally, as they stepped onto the turf, the roar greeted them like a tidal wave.

The cameras panned across the field as Nasser Hussain's voice echoed through the broadcast.

"Good morning, everyone! Welcome to the historic Lord's Cricket Ground for the ICC World Test Championship Final—India versus New Zealand! The stands might not be packed to full capacity, but you can feel the electricity here today. Two teams, one dream—to lift that glittering Test mace."

Sunil Gavaskar chuckled beside him. "And what a contest it promises to be, Nasser. India—the No. 1 Test team—and New Zealand, the most consistent side in the past two years. Both teams filled with quality players, and both hungry for that elusive ICC crown."

Kumar Sangakkara's smooth tone joined in, "And what a stage for it. Lord's. Every cricketer's dream. And I must say, one young man in particular will be feeling that today—Aarav Pathak. Just 21, and already with numbers that seem unreal for someone so young."

The camera zoomed in on Aarav, standing beside Rohit and Gill, casually tossing a red ball in his palm, smile calm and chatting with them.

"Let's take a look at his stats," Nasser continued, voice rising with admiration. "Eight matches, fourteen innings, 1,205 runs, seven centuries, seven fifties, and an average of 120.5. Oh, and forty-one wickets! He's already got the cricketing world talking."

Sunil Gavaskar added with pride, "He's not just India's future—he's India's present. The composure of Dravid, the flair of Kohli, and the aggression of young Tendulkar. And remember, this lad was the orange and purple cap holder in the IPL just a few months ago."

Sangakkara laughed softly. "Yes, and he's carried that form into international cricket. The scary part? He's only just begun."

At the center of the field, Kohli and Kane Williamson shook hands, both smiling—the calm before the storm. The coin went up, spinning under the London sky. The camera zoomed in as match referee Martin Broad caught it, looked at Kohli, and nodded.

"India has won the toss and elected to field first!"

A cheer rolled through the stands like thunder.

Kohli spoke confidently into the mic. "We'll bowl first. The pitch looks fresh, bit of moisture on top, and we'd like to use that early on. We back our batting unit to chase anything down."

The camera turned to Williamson, smiling with typical humility. "It's an honor to play this final here at Lord's. We would've bowled first as well, but we'll look to put runs on the board and create pressure."

Nasser Hussain smiled as he turned to Kane. "One quick question, Kane—any particular Indian player your side is planning to focus on?"

Kane grinned, eyes twinkling. "Ah, that's a tough one, Nasser. I'd say my buddy Virat for sure—he's class—but also Aarav Pathak. The guy's in ridiculous form. He's been bashing every team at home and away. And the scary thing? He bowls and bats both exceptionally. So yes, we'll keep an eye on him too."

The crowd roared as the camera panned to Aarav, laughing with Rohit near the boundary line, unaware his name was on everyone's lips.

#### Commentary Box

Sangakkara: "I think both captains know each other's strengths too well. But this Indian side—look at that depth. Rohit, Gill, Aarav, Kohli, Rahane, Pant(†), Jadeja, Ashwin—it's a dream lineup."

Gavaskar: "And that bowling attack—Shami, Bumrah, Ishant, Ashwin, Jadeja and Aarav. Every one of them can win you a session on their own."

Nasser: "And Aarav Pathak with the new ball—it's been a revelation for India in the past few months. He swings it late, hits that awkward length, and of course, he has that knack for picking wickets in clusters."

The players walked to their positions. The Indian flag waved high above the grandstand, the white jerseys shimmering in the London light. Aarav jogged to his mark, loosening his shoulders, ball in hand. Shami handed him the new red cherry.

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New Zealand Playing 11: Tom Latham, Devon Conway, Kane Williamson (c), Ross Taylor, Henry Nicholls, BJ Watling (†), Colin de Grandhomme, Kyle Jamieson, Tim Southee, Neil Wagner, Trent Boult.

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The scoreboard glowed: NZ 0/0. Latham and Conway to open. Bumrah to start.

First Over – Bumrah vs Latham

The first ball whistled past Latham's outside edge, swinging late. A collective gasp from the crowd. "Play and a miss!" shouted Dinesh Karthik from the commentary box. "Bumrah's on the money straight away!"

Aarav, fielding at mid-on, flexed his fingers around the ball he'd be holding soon. The wind tugged at his hair, carrying the faint echo of the crowd's murmur — that beautiful, restless energy that only Lord's can produce.

Next over, another play-and-miss. The tension built. The new ball hissed off the seam like a live wire. Every blade of grass felt alive.

Kohli turned, motioning. "Aarav — next over."

Aarav nodded, jogging back to his mark. His heart thumped like a drum in his chest.

4th Over – Aarav Pathak to Devon Conway

He rubbed the red cherry against his thigh, feeling the seam under his fingers. The noise faded. Just him, the ball, and the batsman.

First ball — hissss. Late outswinger, Conway beaten all ends up. The crowd roared. Kohli clapped from mid-off. "That's it! Keep him there!"

Sunil Gavaskar: "Lovely seam position from Aarav Pathak. The ball leaving Conway beautifully — that's artistry at work."

Second ball — good length, held its line. Conway defended, stiff wrists.

Third — tighter. Dots building pressure.

Fifth ball — nipped in off the seam, Conway inside edge between slip and gully for four. The ball raced away. The crowd sighed.

Nasser Hussain: "That's the risk when you're searching for movement — fine margins!"

Sixth ball — bouncer. Sharp. Conway ducked, the ball whizzing over the helmet. Pant's glove clapped around it. The Indian fielders applauded. Aarav exhaled. He was in rhythm.

8th Over – Bumrah Strikes!

A loud appeal! Bumrah's yorker trapped Latham plumb in front. The umpire's finger shot up. Kohli's roar pierced through the murmur — primal, fierce. Lord's erupted into a sea of blue and tricolor. Aarav ran in, hugging Bumrah mid-pitch. Pant jumped onto both of them yelling, "LETS GOOOOO!"

Sunil Gavaskar: "That's a massive early wicket. Latham's gone for 10. Kohli's faith in his bowlers paying off."

Nasser Hussain: "Look at that intensity! India's seamers are feeding off their captain's fire."

Score: NZ 23/1 (8 overs)

#### 11th Over – Aarav's Magic Over

Conway still fighting, 18 off 38. Kohli tossed the ball to Aarav again. "This is your time, champ. Make it swing."

First ball — leave outside off. Aarav smiled. He liked that.

Second ball — fuller, swinging away. Another leave.

Third — on the stumps, Conway defends.

Fourth — beauty. Seam upright, kissed the edge, flew low to Rahane at second slip — taken! Lord's exploded in sound and color. Aarav raised his arms, fists clenched, eyes shut for a heartbeat — he could hear his pulse louder than the crowd then he screamed in aggression for his nation and for his captain.

Dinesh Karthik shouted over commentary: "Perfect seam position, perfect length! Aarav Pathak has struck at Lord's!"

Gavaskar: "That's what you dream of as a young pacer — first wicket at the home of cricket. Remember this day, Aarav Pathak."

Kohli ran over, slapping Aarav's back. "THAT'S MY BOY!" The slip cordon swarmed him. The tricolor flags fluttered like fire in the stands.

Score: NZ 35/2 (11.4 overs)

17th Over –

Kohli called Aarav back for his second spell. The ball now slightly older, the swing subtler. The pitch still helping. Williamson, calm as always, on 9 off 25. The duel of temperament vs fire.

Aarav ran in — rhythm perfect, heart steady. First ball: length, defended. Second: short, fended off. Third: fuller, hint of swing away. Williamson studied.

Fourth ball — Aarav adjusted the seam. He whispered to himself: one in, late.

He ran in. Wrist cocked. Seam tilted. The ball jagged in, sharp. Williamson's bat came down a fraction late — click! The off stump cartwheeled. The red cherry spun away, stump light flashing against grey clouds.

Lord's erupted.

Kohli leaped, chest-bumped Aarav. "YESSSS! THAT'S IT! THAT'S BLOODY IT!" The entire Indian team surged toward them.

Commentary went wild:

Dinesh Karthik: "You can't write a better script! Aarav Pathak — young, fearless, and sending down fire!"

Nasser Hussain: "That's Kohli's aggression embodied in his young all-rounder! Brilliant bowling!"

Sunil Gavaskar: "Williamson rarely falls that early — that's a dream delivery. Seam, swing, and control — vintage fast bowling from the young man."

Aarav looked at the sky, the ball gripped tight in his hand. He didn't shout. He just smiled — the kind of smile that comes when you realize your dream has touched reality.

Lunch Break – NZ 55/3

Ross Taylor and Nicholls tried to stabilize, scraping runs cautiously. Kohli rotated his bowlers. Aarav finished his spell: 6 overs, 2 maidens, 2 wickets for 10 runs. The crowd stood as he walked off — even the English fans clapped. The echo followed him up the stairs.

From the commentary box:

Dinesh Karthik: "What a morning for India. Aarav Pathak has arrived — and Lord's knows his name now."

The camera followed Aarav as he reached the dressing room. Kohli handed him a towel and grinned, "That's how you make Lord's remember you, champ."

Aarav sat quietly, still hearing the crowd's chant lingering in his mind — Aarav! Aarav! The sound of belonging. The sound of destiny.