

Cricket 201

Chapter 201

The air over Lord's had changed.

The morning's mist had lifted, replaced by a pale glow that shimmered across the historic ground. The clock at the pavilion struck two, and the faint echo of the Lord's bell rang again — crisp, timeless, ceremonial. As the Indian players jogged back onto the field, the crowd murmured with a restless anticipation. The stage was set not for play, but for war.

Kohli led the way, his face fierce, jaw tight. His voice carried like a whip through the outfield: "Come on, boys! Right here, right now!"

Aarav followed behind, ball in hand, sweat drying to salt on his sleeve. His heartbeat matched the pulse of the crowd — fast, irregular, alive. The smell of damp grass and leather mixed with the faint aroma of coffee drifting from the stands. He took a deep breath, his fingers curling around the seam.

Sangakkara (commentary): "Welcome back, everyone. Post-lunch here at Lord's, New Zealand 55 for 3. The conditions still overcast, though the light has improved. The ball — still new enough to talk."

Doull: "And look who's continuing. Aarav Pathak. Four overs of pure fire this morning. He's looked like he's been bowling here for years."

Aakash Chopra: "You know, Sangakkara, you can feel it in the air. Kohli's not waiting for things to happen. He's making them happen."

Ross Taylor stood at the crease, shoulders broad, eyes sharp. Henry Nicholls tapped his bat at the non-striker's end. Kohli adjusted his field — three slips, gully, short midwicket, and a man prowling at short square leg.

The game resumed.

Aarav ran in, the ball glinting under the muted sun. His first delivery — full, angling across. Taylor let it pass with a lazy leave. The next — pitched up, straightening. The ball hissed past the edge. A murmur from the crowd.

Kohli clapped hard. "Perfect! Just keep hunting, Aarav!"

Then came a drive. Taylor, confident, stepped forward and caressed one through cover. The ball raced across the lush outfield, finding the rope. A rare cheer from the Kiwi section.

Doull: "Beautiful shot. Ross Taylor doesn't miss those. He's all about timing."

Aakash: "Hmm, but every time he drives, he's giving Aarav a chance. That seam's wobbling — one mistake, and boom!"

The next ball — short of a length, jaggling back in. Taylor fended awkwardly. It brushed his glove — Pant leapt — fingertips! The ball popped out, falling just short of slip.

The gasp around the ground was audible.

Aarav turned away, lips pressed, eyes dark with focus. He wiped his face with his sleeve, looked toward Kohli. The captain just smiled — the kind of smile that said, keep going, you're close.

And then, in his next over, Aarav roared in. A length ball, shaping in. Taylor shuffled across — thick inside edge. THUD! — timber flying.

Lord's exploded.

Aakash (almost shouting): "Cleaned him up! Taylor gone! Aarav strikes again!"

Kohli charged, fists pumping, veins bulging. His roar drowned everything else. The slips swarmed. Pant jumped on Aarav's back.

The chant rose: "KO-HLI! KO-HLI!"

Sangakkara: "The captain's passion... it's spilling onto every blade of grass. New Zealand 90 for 4, and India have the scent of blood."

Later

The leather was now slightly older, the seam darker, the swing subtler — but there was a whisper of reverse. Aarav sniffed it like a predator catching wind of prey.

He ran in. His stride was smooth, almost too smooth for the violence that followed.

The first ball to de Grandhomme — full, swinging in. The Kiwi all-rounder jammed it out. Aarav followed with another — shorter, angled away. Then came the setup — a perfect in-dipping delivery that landed fuller. It tailed late, kissing the pad.

Aarav exploded into an appeal — arms stretched, voice hoarse: "How's that!"

The umpire's finger went up.

Lord's erupted again. De Grandhomme stood frozen then the DRS sign appeared.

Sangakkara: "Oh, this is close. Very close. Let's look at ball-tracking..."

The replay filled the giant screen. Pitching in line. Impact — umpire's call. OUT stays!

Aakash: "He's got it! He's got it! Aarav Pathak again!"

Kohli ran to him, grabbed his shoulders with both hands, forehead against his. "Don't stop now, Pathak!" he shouted, laughing wildly.

Aarav just nodded, chest heaving. His mind was a blur of adrenaline and rhythm. The world shrank — him, the pitch, the stumps.

Sangakkara: "He's bending the ball both ways now. This isn't just fast bowling — this is artistry."

Nicholls tried to counter, nudging singles, avoiding the full balls. But pressure was building. Ashwin joined from the other end, looping in the old ball with surgical precision.

Ashwin's over — and Nicholls gone.

New Zealand: 121 for 6.

Doull: "You can feel it. The atmosphere — it's crushing. Kohli's men have turned Lord's into a cauldron."

Sangakkara: "Aarav Pathak... four wickets now. Every delivery feels like it's pulling destiny closer."

BJ Watling and Jamieson came together. Two men, one mission — survival.

The pitch had quieted, but its soul still hissed. The grass looked bruised, the seam marks etched like battle scars.

Aarav continued, sweat soaking his collar, arms heavy but heart still pounding. His shoes thudded rhythmically as he ran in again and again. Each ball was a bullet, each over a promise.

He beat Watling's edge twice. Then Jamieson shouldered arms to one that nipped in — just missing the off stump. The gasp from Pant said it all.

Aakash: "He's tired, but look at the fire! Aarav Pathak is not done yet!"

The next ball — full, angling in. Watling defended stoutly. Aarav walked back slowly, hand on his hips, chest rising and falling. His head buzzed with Kohli's words: Be the spark.

His eyes drifted to the crowd. The Indian tricolor waved from every corner. Somewhere, a kid held up a poster: 'Pathak = Passion.'

When the over ended, Kohli walked up, patted his helmet. "You've changed the game, champ."

Aarav managed a tired grin. "Just doing my job."

He walked to fine leg, grabbed a towel, and covered his head. The wind brushed against his damp hair. The ball — still glinting faintly — swung in the air like it had its own soul. Aarav stared at it, eyes burning.

"One more spell," he thought. "I'll finish them."

Ashwin and Jadeja tightened the noose from both ends, slowing things down. Watling and Jamieson managed to survive. The energy simmered rather than roared.

As the umpires checked their watches, the crowd stood, clapping. Tea was called.

✂ Final Scene

The scoreboard flashed: 140 for 6

The applause rolled like a tide. The players walked off. Kohli, eyes blazing, wrapped his arm around Aarav's shoulders.

"We're not done," Kohli muttered, his voice low but fierce.

The golden hour over Lord's had a glow unlike any other. As the sun began to dip behind the Pavilion, its rays painted the hallowed ground in molten amber. The hum of the crowd was restless — alive, impatient, as if the air itself knew that something monumental was about to happen.

Scoreboard: New Zealand 140 for 6.

Watling stood firm, gloves tapping the pitch between deliveries. Jamieson shadow-practiced a forward defense beside him, his bat slicing through the fading light. India, gathered in a tight huddle, seemed to breathe as one organism. Virat Kohli's voice cut through the fading noise, raw and commanding:

"Alright boys, one session left! All out today. Aarav — you take the ball."

as Aarav walked to the top of his run-up. The crowd's chant began to build, like the distant rumble of thunder: AARAV... AARAV... AARAV...

Isa Guha's voice floated through commentary boxes across the world:

"There's a golden haze over Lord's... and a young Indian all-rounder standing right in its middle, scripting his own dream."

The camera followed Aarav's every move — the rugged ball, the short glance at Kohli, the deep breath before the sprint. He ran in from the Pavilion End, the seam gleaming red against the twilight. The first delivery hissed past Watling's tentative push, swerving late. Pant's gloves clapped like thunder.

"Beautiful shape away," murmured Sanjay Bangar. "That's reverse swing beginning to talk. And Kohli knows it."

The captain moved a man into short leg. Two slips, a gully, leg slip — an attacking web closing in.

Second ball — a touch fuller. Watling drove, half-hearted. The seam kissed the outside edge, teasing but not taking. Aarav turned mid-pitch, exhaling a mist of focus.

Ian Bishop's voice carried that signature rumble:

"Every delivery from Aarav feels like a heartbeat of this final. You can almost feel the crowd breathing with him."

The third ball. Aarav adjusted his grip — a subtle wobble seam. He ran in faster this time, the rhythm of spikes on turf syncing with his pulse. The ball pitched just short of a length, jagged away — Watling poked. Edge! Pant dove full stretch to his right — and it stuck!

"YESSS!" Kohli screamed, arms slicing through the air. Pant leapt up, roaring like an untamed animal.

The crowd erupted, a living wall of sound. Aarav stood frozen for a split second, then raised his arms to the sky. The scoreboard flickered — Watling c Pant b Pathak 18 (45).

Isa Guha's voice trembled with awe:

"Aarav Pathak at Lord's... a five-for on debut in a WTC Final — this is unreal!"

The entire Lord's crowd rose. Even neutrals clapped. The dressing room balcony glowed with smiles — Kohli, Rohit, and Ashwin applauding in unison. Aarav raised the ball high. For a moment, time stilled.

Five wickets. His name was now echoing across the home of cricket.

Kohli tossed the ball to Bumrah from the Nursery End. "Finish this off, Jassi," he growled.

The Indian captain's eyes were aflame with that familiar, predatory gleam. Every fielder crouched, expectant. Bumrah's unique run-up began — stuttering steps, coiled energy. The first ball seared in, angling at Jamieson's pads. Blocked. Second — a sharp bouncer. Jamieson swayed. Third — an in-cutter that jagged in like a whispering assassin.

Clatter! The stumps exploded.

Jamieson blinked, then stared back at the wreckage. The Indian fielders surged together in a storm of joy. Kohli's roar pierced through the soundscape of the evening.

Ian Bishop couldn't contain himself:

"Look at Kohli's eyes — that's not a captain, that's a commander at war!"

The scoreboard shifted: NZ 152/8.

Aarav walked over to Kohli between overs, sweat dripping down his forehead.

"One more for the evening, skip," he whispered.

Kohli grinned, fierce and sharp. "Take two. Break them."

The shadows lengthened across Lord's. The old pavilion's clock ticked toward the close of play. The crowd's chants refused to die down — the name "Aarav" pulsed through the ground like a heartbeat.

Southee came swinging. The first ball from Aarav — short of a length, extra bounce. The bat flashed, missed. The second — a yorker, just dug out. Aarav turned, eyes narrow. The third — slower, deceptive, disguised perfectly.

Southee lofted, misjudged — straight to mid-on! Shami took it clean.

NZ 160/9.

Aarav clenched his fist, teeth gritted. The energy in the air felt electric.

"Six wickets?" murmured Isa Guha. "This man is doing miracles here in this ground for the team."

Boult walked out, bat angled like a sword. Kohli brought everyone in. Pant shouted, "Come on, Aaru! One more, baby!"

The next Ishant sharma for the over, he rubbed the ball one against his trousers, feeling its seam, the grain of leather warm against his palm. He ran in, smooth and furious. The delivery rose sharply — Boult fended awkwardly. The edge flew—Gill at slip dived, both hands outstretched—and held!

Lord's erupted.

Ian Bishop's voice thundered:

"Gone!, nice delivery for tail enders, Finished the innings for New Zealand. Let's talk about Aarav, he conquered the home of cricket! — six wickets at Lord's! What a story this is turning out to be!"

Kohli sprinted towards him, arms open. The embrace was fierce — more than celebration, it was affirmation. Bumrah clapped him on the back. Jadeja waved toward the stands, spinning his cap. Pant yelled something unprintable in joy.

Aarav looked up toward the Lord's balcony. The Indian team stood applauding, every pair of eyes beaming with pride. He closed his own eyes for a heartbeat and whispered: "For India."

The scoreboard glowed in the twilight: New Zealand 163 all out (43.2 overs).

Aarav Pathak: 14-4-43-6.

The sun melted into orange clouds behind the pavilion. The players began to walk off the field, each stride heavy with satisfaction. Kohli led the way, chest out, chin high. Behind him, Aarav carried the ball in his right hand — his first match ball at Lord's.

The crowd rose once more. The chant rolled like waves:

"AARAV! AARAV! AARAV!"

Ian Bishop's final words echoed around the stadium and across a million screens:

"If there was ever a day to fall in love with Test cricket again... it's this one."

Aarav turned once, just before stepping into the pavilion. The honours board above the staircase gleamed faintly in the fading light — empty spaces waiting to be filled. His eyes lingered.

He smiled softly.

End of Day 1 — India trail by 163 runs. Aarav Pathak's spell etched into the folklore of Lord's.