

KING OF CRICKET

Chapter 3: The Grind Begins

Aarav Pathak awoke with the first rays of dawn streaming through the window of his room. The early morning stillness of the farmhouse, surrounded by lush greenery, whispered a promise of something great. It was the beginning of his 20-day training holiday, a period he had been anticipating ever since the system's revelation. Determination surged in his veins, and with a deep breath, he pushed the covers aside, feeling the weight of purpose settle over him.

He jogged out to the spacious garden, where the dewy grass crunched softly beneath his feet. His muscles, though still stiff from sleep, gradually woke up as he moved through his morning exercises—lunges, push-ups, and stretches that tested his limits. The garden was his makeshift training ground, with its rolling expanse perfect for practicing sprinting and agility drills. By the time he finished his hour-long routine, his body felt alive and sharp, ready for what lay ahead.

For the next four hours, Aarav immersed himself in batting practice. The large nets were set up at the far end of the garden, surrounded by neatly stacked cricket balls and the hum of the bowling machine ready to launch them at him. With each delivery, Aarav focused on perfecting his technique, working to channel the finesse and timing of KL Rahul's batting style. The system's training module, which Aria had provided, pushed him to experiment with footwork, angle adjustments, and precise shot placement. He let the sounds of the ball striking the bat reverberate in his ears, a rhythm that fueled him forward.

After a quick breakfast, accompanied by light chatter with his parents, Aarav took a moment to reflect. His father, Mr. Pathak, sat at the table with a warm smile, knowing how driven his son was. "Good practice, Aarav?" he asked, looking at the sweat glistening on his son's forehead.

Aarav nodded, grabbing a glass of fresh orange juice. "Every day, Dad. I'm making progress, and I can feel it."

His mother, Mrs. Pathak, brought a plate of parathas and eggs. "Just remember to pace yourself, dear," she said, her eyes full of concern but shining with pride.

"I will, Maa. Don't worry." Aarav's voice carried a note of confidence that made his parents exchange a knowing look.

By early afternoon, the training shifted to left-arm bowling. Aarav stood at the bowling net, the ball in his hand, feeling the power of his new skill. The equipment was all set: the bowling machine aimed perfectly to help him practice his line and length, and the empty nets stretched before him, a challenge awaiting his best. The system had gifted him a natural talent for this skill, and Aarav relished each time he hit the mark, testing variations and finding his rhythm.

The afternoon sun cast long shadows, and his arms grew heavy with each bowl. Yet, he didn't stop. Each throw was a step toward mastery, a promise to fulfill the goals he had set. He kept his focus on the image of himself dominating the trials at Shivaji Park Gymkhana, every drop of sweat a silent pledge to succeed.

As the sun began its descent, Aarav finished his practice and went inside for dinner. His parents were already at the table, talking about their day. His mother shared a story about a neighbor who had managed to turn a garden patch into a vegetable haven, while his father spoke of a new supplier for the family store chain. Aarav listened, savoring the warmth of family moments before heading back to his room to study and complete his mental training.

He followed Aria's instructions religiously, using the system's modules to train his mind. This part of his regimen was just as demanding as the physical training. Aarav would close his eyes, visualize high-pressure game situations, and practice breathing exercises that focused his mind. He thought about strategies, his father's store chain and its potential bankruptcy, and how he could possibly help with his newfound insights.

School arrived, and with it, the familiar sight of sun-dappled hallways and the chatter of his classmates. Aarav stood at the entrance of his school, feeling a wave of nostalgia wash over him. Memories of past practices, late-night homework sessions, and shared victories flooded back as he walked through the corridors.

"Hey, Aarav!" shouted one of his closest friends, Raj. Raj, with his ever-present grin, jogged over, high-fived him, and clapped him on the back. "Did you forget how to call me? The summer's over, and we missed you, man!"

Aarav laughed, feeling a familiar comfort. "Missed you too, Raj. The training's been rough, but it's worth it."

They exchanged stories about the vacation and caught up on school gossip before heading to class. As Aarav settled back into the rhythm of school life, his eyes scanned the classroom, spotting faces he knew and friends who had always been there.

The next day, Aarav ran into his sports teacher, Mr. Sharma, who had coached the school cricket team for years. Mr. Sharma, a man with a sharp eye for talent and a booming voice that could command the attention of an entire auditorium, called him over.

"Pathak!" Mr. Sharma said, a smile forming on his face. "Glad to see you back. I've got exciting news. The winter Gurukul Cricket Tournament is coming up, and all the schools in this zone will be competing. It's a month-long tournament, and the winners get a cash prize of 21,000 rupees and free books until the 12th grade."

Aarav's heart leaped. This was exactly the kind of challenge he needed. The tournament would have elimination rounds where eight matches had to be won to reach the top four. From there, the qualifiers would lead to the final. It was the perfect stage to showcase his growth and put his training to the test.

"That sounds amazing, sir," Aarav said, eyes shining with excitement.

Mr. Sharma patted him on the back. "We're going to assemble the team soon. I need you to help lead the selection process. You've been our captain, and I trust you'll guide the team well."

Aarav's smile grew wider as he nodded. "I won't let you down, sir. I'm ready to get started."

The following days were filled with intense trials. Aarav worked alongside his vice-captain, Vikram, to evaluate potential team members, assessing their skills and fitness levels. From the seasoned players who had impressed in past seasons to the new faces who showed raw talent, the selection process was rigorous.

When the team was finally chosen, Aarav felt a surge of pride. This was more than just a tournament—it was his stage to shine, to display his newfound left-arm bowling, improved batting, and sharpened mental resilience.

"Ready, captain?" Vikram asked, a grin spreading across his face as the team gathered around, ready for their first practice.

Aarav looked at his teammates, seeing the hope and trust in their eyes.

"Ready," he said, his voice steady. "Let's make this season one to remember."

Author Note:- Another Chapter with more than 1100+ words, so show some love!!