

## Cricket 31

### Chapter 31

The sun had just set, and the Pathak household was brimming with celebration. Aarav, now the hero of Mumbai cricket, sat with his family around the dining table. Plates filled with delicious food, glasses clinking, and laughter echoing through the room created a perfect atmosphere of joy. Aarav's father, Mr. Ramesh Pathak, raised his glass of juice and said, "To Aarav, who brought the Vijay Merchant Trophy home after six long years. We're proud of you, son."

Aarav, a humble smile lighting up his face, responded, "Thank you, Dad. But this victory wasn't mine alone. It was the team's effort."

His mother, Meera, patted his hand gently. "You've worked so hard, beta. The sleepless nights, the hours at the nets—it's all paying off now."

Aarav's father added with a grin, "And don't forget, we're going for the temple visit tomorrow. This success deserves a proper thanksgiving."

The next morning, Aarav, dressed in a simple white kurta, accompanied his family to the temple. They performed a small puja, thanking the gods for the blessings and guidance that led to his success. The priest tied a sacred thread around Aarav's wrist, offering blessings for his continued journey.

After the prayers, the family moved to a nearby shelter where they had organized food for the poor. Aarav personally helped distribute meals, his actions drawing smiles and blessings from the beneficiaries. His mother looked on with pride as Aarav interacted warmly with the children and elderly, embodying humility and compassion.

A week later, the Pathak farmhouse in Mumbai buzzed with activity. Aarav and his best friend Abhishek were on the lush green practice pitch, taking turns to bat and bowl. Aarav adjusted his helmet and stepped onto the makeshift crease as Abhishek, with a mischievous grin, prepared to bowl a fast one.

"Come on, Abhi, show me what you've got," Aarav teased.

"Don't blame me if this ball knocks your stumps out," Abhishek retorted, delivering a sharp spin that Aarav skillfully deflected.

As the two friends laughed and prepared for another round, Aarav's phone rang. He dropped his bat and helmet, jogging to pick it up. The screen flashed "Coach Rao," and Aarav answered, "Hello, Coach! What's up?"

"Aarav!" Coach Rao's voice was brimming with excitement. "Get to the MCA office immediately. There's big news for you."

"What's going on, Coach?" Aarav asked, curiosity piqued.

"No time for questions now. Bring Abhishek along. There's something for him too. And bring your parents," Coach Rao instructed.

Aarav glanced at Abhishek, who was already listening intently. "Abhi's with me right now. We'll be there in about an hour."

"Good, good. Hurry!" Coach Rao replied, ending the call.

Aarav relayed the message to Abhishek. "We need to get to the MCA office. Something big is waiting for us. Coach specifically mentioned your name too."

"Now I'm curious," Abhishek said, calling his mother to inform her. Aarav did the same, gathering his family for the trip to the MCA.

Upon arriving at the MCA office, Aarav, his family, and Abhishek's mother were guided to the conference room. The atmosphere was formal, with several high-ranking officials, including the MCA chief, waiting for them. Coach Rao greeted Aarav with a broad smile, patting his shoulder.

As our parents and we entered the conference room, several officials from the MCA rose to their feet, greeting us warmly. They paid particular attention to my mother and me, aware of our wealth and political connections.

"Well done, champ," Coach Rao said. "You've got something special coming your way."

As everyone settled into their seats, the MCA chief stood up. "Good afternoon, everyone. It's an honor to have you all here today. We have some incredible news for two of Mumbai's brightest young cricketers."

Aarav and Abhishek exchanged glances, their curiosity mounting.

"Aarav," the chief continued, "you've been directly selected for the U19 Indian team. This is not just an acknowledgment of your exceptional performance but also a testament to your potential. Rahul Dravid himself has sent an invitation for you to join the squad as during Vijay Merchant Trophy final he was there and saw you play and later saw your other matches clips too."

Aarav's face lit up with disbelief and joy. "Thank you, sir. This means the world to me."

The chief smiled warmly and turned to Abhishek. "And Abhishek, you've been selected to join the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru. The selectors see great potential in you, and this training will prepare you for your U19 debut."

Abhishek, momentarily stunned, finally managed to say, "Thank you, sir. I won't let you down."

The room was filled with applause as the families of both boys beamed with pride. The MCA chief continued, "There are conditions, of course. Aarav, you will be under the BCCI's guidance in Bengaluru, with your education and training managed by them. Your schedule will be rigorous but designed to balance academics and cricket."

Meera Pathak asked, "What about his further studies? We don't want his academics to suffer."

The chief reassured her, "The BCCI is very particular about academics. They will provide tutors and all necessary resources to ensure Aarav excels both in cricket and his studies. Additionally, he will need to go to Bengaluru in two months, after his Class 10 board exams."

Abhishek's mother chimed in, "This is a huge opportunity for both boys. We are grateful."

Coach Rao added, "These boys have worked hard for this. It's just the beginning of their journey."

After more discussions about logistics and expectations, the families thanked the officials and left. Aarav's mother turned to him as they exited the building. "Beta, this is just the start. Now you have bigger stage to showcase your talent."

Back home, the Pathak family sat together, discussing the next steps. Aarav's father, now home from work, listened intently as they explained the news.

"This is incredible," Mr. Pathak said, his voice filled with pride. "Aarav, your hard work is paying off. But remember, discipline is key. Follow the BCCI's schedule and make the most of this opportunity."

"I will, Dad. I promise," Aarav replied confidently.

The conversation turned to the conditions outlined by the MCA chief. Aarav would live in Bengaluru under the BCCI's guidance, adhering to a strict schedule of training, diet, and academics. His parents expressed some concern about him living away from home, but Aarav reassured them, "I've got this. It's just another challenge to overcome."

That night, as Aarav lay in bed, his mind raced with thoughts about the future. The idea of balancing cricket with his studies didn't intimidate him, thanks to his previous life's knowledge and experience. He smiled to himself, feeling a deep sense of satisfaction and excitement for the road ahead.

And as for boards he knew he would get very good marks, due to his double degree and mature mind due to systems gift and time travel

Two months later, the journey to Bengaluru would begin. But for now, Aarav allowed himself to bask in the moment, surrounded by his family's love and support. This was his moment, and he was determined to make it count.