

Cricket 46

Chapter 46

The dressing room was heavy with silence, the kind that made every creak of a chair or shuffle of a shoe sound deafening. The usual banter and laughter that filled the room after games, whether won or lost, was absent. Instead, everyone sat with their heads bowed, lost in their thoughts, processing the bitter sting of defeat. The atmosphere was suffocating, and no one dared to break the quiet.

In the middle of the room, Aarav sat on the bench, hunched over, staring at the floor. His usually sharp and commanding presence was muted, his face a mask of disappointment. It was clear that he was replaying the match in his mind, searching for answers and solutions, or perhaps just berating himself for his own performance.

No one approached him. They knew better than to interrupt their captain when he was like this. Aarav was not one to lash out at his teammates, but he valued introspection in moments like these. And so, the team left him alone with his thoughts.

The door to the dressing room opened, and Coach Rahul Dravid walked in. His calm demeanor had a way of commanding attention without the need for words. Everyone instinctively straightened up a little, their eyes shifting toward him.

Coach looked around, taking in the somber expressions on his players' faces. He knew the sting of defeat well and the toll it took on a young team. Walking to the center of the room, he stood near Aarav, his voice cutting through the silence with the kind of authority that came from decades of experience.

"It's a game," Coach began, his voice steady yet gentle. "Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. That's cricket. That's life. The same way you celebrated your victory in the first match, you must also accept this defeat. What matters is how you respond to it."

He paused, looking at each player in turn. "Riyan, I know you're disappointed about not picking up more wickets today. But cricket is a game of opportunities. You'll get another chance to shine. Trust me, I've seen you in practice; you're capable of much more than what the scoreboard reflected today."

Riyan nodded, his lips pressed into a thin line.

"Kartik, you started strong in your first two overs but then lost control in the death. Why?" Dravid asked.

Kartik looked up, his voice hesitant. "I think I got too caught up in the previous match's win and became overconfident, thinking I could bowl Yorkers every time, but I ended up missing my line."

Dravid nodded. "Exactly. Keep it simple. Stick to your strengths. You've got the pace, but you need to learn to adapt under pressure. This loss is an opportunity to grow. Use it."

He turned his attention to Tilak. "Tilak, your fifty in the first match was crucial for us, and I truly appreciate that. But today, you didn't adapt to the conditions. As soon as you hit 50, you went for a reverse sweep against a fast bowler. That's not the shot we expect from you. You've got the skill, and I know you can do better. You just need to read the game more wisely. Don't let this one failure define your tournament—learn from it and bounce back stronger.."

Tilak muttered a quiet, "Yes, sir," his head dipping slightly.

Coach continued, addressing the rest of the team. "This is how cricket works. You'll have good days, and you'll have bad days. But what defines a player, what defines a team, is how you bounce back. Losing

isn't the end. It's just another step in the journey. And let me remind you all, this is a young team with immense potential. Don't let one match take away your belief in yourselves."

The room was silent again, but this time, it wasn't the oppressive silence of despair. It was a silence filled with reflection, with resolve. Aarav shifted slightly, his eyes moving up for the first time to meet the coach's gaze. There was a spark of life there, a flicker of the determination that had carried him to the captaincy.

Minutes passed, and Aarav stood up. The team watched him, sensing that something was coming. When he spoke, his voice carried a hint of spirit, of fire.

"We won the first game because we played better than them," Aarav began, his tone steady but rising with every word. "But we lost today because we played worse than we did in the first match. It's as simple as that. This isn't about them being better than us. It's about us not playing to our potential."

He looked around the room, making eye contact with each of his teammates. "From now on, we win every match. Not because we hope to win, but because we will make it happen. We give 200% in every game, every over, every ball. And even if we lose, we'll know we gave our all and came up short. But next time, we'll give more than 200%."

He paused, letting his words sink in before continuing. "Look at today's match. We batted first. Prithvi got out for a duck. I came in, and we managed to stabilize a little, but then Jaiswal got out in the 14th over. The score was 51 for 2. And then I... I didn't play the captain's knock I should have. I got out trying to play an aggressive shot when what we needed was stability. I didn't think about balancing the innings, and that was my mistake."

The room was silent, the weight of Aarav's self-criticism hanging heavy.

"Our bowling wasn't good enough either," Aarav continued. "Yes, we took wickets and bowled some maiden. I got 3 and Riyan got 1 and no one else could break through. We let them settle, and that cost us the match."

He straightened up, his voice growing firmer. "But that's in the past now. We can't change what happened. What we can do is learn from it. And we will. This loss will make us stronger. From now on, we play as a team that learns from its mistakes, a team that fights for every run, every wicket, every ball."

The team nodded, a collective sense of determination building. Aarav's words had reignited the fire within them.

"We are not just eleven players on a field," Aarav said, his voice rising. "We are Team India. And when we walk onto that field, we carry the hopes of a billion people. Let's not forget that. Let's make them proud."

There was a moment of silence, followed by a ripple of agreement. Aarav's words had done what they always did—they had inspired, they had motivated, and they had united the team.

Coach Dravid watched from the side, a small smile on his face. He knew this team had the potential to do great things, and today's loss was just a stepping stone on their journey. Then with a smile on his face he exit the room.

The players began to talk among themselves, analyzing the match, discussing strategies for the next game. The dressing room, once heavy with despair, was now alive with energy and resolve.

After a minute or two, Aarav continued with his words.

As he stood before them, his gaze unwavering, his voice carried the weight of responsibility and the promise of redemption. His teammates sat in stunned silence, absorbing the gravity of his words.

"From now on," Aarav said, his voice firm, "we're playing to dominate. Every match in England will be ours. Not just a win but a statement—a message that this team represents India with pride, passion, and power."

He paused, scanning the room. His sharp eyes met each player's, challenging them, inspiring them. "No one," he continued, his tone leaving no room for argument, "and I mean no one, will slack off during training. It doesn't matter if you're in the playing eleven or not. If anyone is late or skips a session without a valid reason, they're out. I have the authority as captain to enforce this."

The room remained silent. Aarav's words had cut through the earlier gloom like a blade. No one dared to speak, not even Abhishek, who usually had a quip ready for any situation. Aarav's declaration wasn't just a rule; it was a challenge, a call to action.

"Representing India isn't child's play," Aarav continued, his voice rising slightly. "This is a dream—a privilege. Do you know how many players would give everything just for the chance to be in your place? Starting tomorrow morning, training will be strict. Proper diet, disciplined schedules, and 200% effort. We're here to bring glory to the nation, and nothing less will be accepted."

Aarav exhaled deeply, letting his words sink in. His teammates exchanged glances, each seeing the determination reflected in the others' eyes. They weren't just teammates now; they were warriors ready for battle.

As Aarav finished speaking, he stepped back and added, "This isn't just about the World Cup. It's about what we stand for. If you're with me, show it on the ground. Show it in every ball, every run, every dive. This team isn't going to fall again."

With that, Aarav gave a curt nod, signaling the end of the meeting. He walked out of the room, leaving his teammates in silence. Not a single person moved, not even Abhishek. Aarav's words had left a heavy impression, and everyone was processing the shift in their captain's demeanor. Abhishek, Aarav's closest friend, couldn't shake the thought: This wasn't the Aarav I knew. He looks like someone possessed.

The stillness lingered until Abhishek finally broke the silence. "Guys," he said, his voice low, "I've never seen Aarav like this before. He's serious—dead serious. We've got to step up."

Jaiswal nodded. "He's right. Aarav's words weren't just talk. If he can push himself this hard, we have no excuse not to do the same."

As the players slowly left the room, each carried a newfound resolve. The fire that Aarav had ignited within them burned brightly. They weren't just a team anymore; they were a unit, united by their captain's vision and their shared dream of victory.

When Aarav reached his room, he shut the door and leaned against it, letting out a deep breath. His mind raced with thoughts, strategies, and plans for the matches ahead. But as he stood there, he heard a familiar voice in his head—a voice he hadn't heard in months.

"Congratulations, Master," the voice said. "The system update is complete."

Aarav's eyes widened. The system, his secret advantage since his entry into professional cricket, had finally updated. He remembered the last time it happened—it had taken six months, and the rewards were life-changing. This time, he hoped for something even greater.

"What's new?" Aarav asked, his voice steady despite the excitement bubbling within him.

The system replied, "Based on your performance and growth, rewards will now be tailored to your current needs and potential. Rewards may be related to cricket or other areas of life. Additionally, the templates you had received of the legendary players, these templates will not exceed 80% of the original player's capabilities. This limitation ensures you develop unique qualities alongside the borrowed talents."

Aarav nodded, understanding the logic. He didn't want to be a copy of someone else; he wanted to carve his own legacy.

"Display my profile," he commanded.

The system complied, and a detailed profile appeared before his eyes:

Name: Aarav Pathak

Age: 16 years (Birthday: 31 August 2000) Year 2017(Birthday Soon)

Talent Level: SS (Rare)

Skills: Low injury risk, fast recovery, sleep fatigue healing

Bowling Type: Left-arm fast bowler

Fielding Skill: Best fielder (80.00%) + Training Module

Height: 5'10"

Talent Development:

KL Rahul Talent: 80% (Completed)

Cheteshwar Pujara Test Match Technique: 73.075%

Dale Steyn Bowling Style: 61% + Training Module

"Interesting," Aarav muttered. His talent levels were improving steadily, but there was still room for growth. The inclusion of Dale Steyn's bowling style was new, and he was eager to see how it would enhance his game.

"What about missions?" Aarav asked.

The system responded, "Main missions will unlock significant rewards upon completion, while side missions will provide performance-based rewards. Complete missions to unlock hidden potential and exclusive skills."

Aarav's mind buzzed with possibilities. The system had been instrumental in shaping his cricketing journey, and now, with its update, he felt more prepared than ever to tackle the challenges ahead.

The next morning, Aarav was the first to arrive at the training ground. The sun had barely risen, but he was already warming up, his mind focused on the task at hand. One by one, his teammates trickled in, each carrying the same fire Aarav had seen in their eyes the night before.

Abhishek approached him, a smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "You're really taking this seriously, huh?"

Aarav glanced at him, his expression unwavering. "I meant every word, Abhi. This isn't just about us—it's about the millions of cricket supporters back home. We can't let them down."

Abhishek nodded, his smile fading as he realized the weight of Aarav's words. "I'm with you, man. We all are."

As the team began their drills, Aarav kept a watchful eye on each player. He pushed them harder, encouraging them when they faltered and praising them when they excelled. By the end of the session, the team was exhausted but invigorated.

"This is just the beginning," Aarav said as they gathered around him. "We're going to get better every day. Remember, we're not just playing for ourselves—we're playing for India."

The team erupted in cheers, their voices echoing across the field.