

## Cricket 53

### Chapter 53

The atmosphere in the team meeting room of the Hyatt Hotel was electric. We were seated in a semicircle, chatting and laughing, the joy of our victorious England tour still fresh in everyone's minds. The ODI series win was satisfying, but the T20I whitewash was something else entirely. It was domination, pure and simple, and every single one of us had contributed to that.

I sat there grinning, the two shiny trophies placed on the table in front of me. The ODI trophy was polished to perfection, its silver gleaming under the warm lights of the room. Beside it stood the T20 trophy, smaller but no less significant, its golden accents catching everyone's attention.

Tilak leaned back in his chair, stretching his arms. "Man, England must hate us by now. ODI series, and then the T20 clean sweep? They're probably dreading the next time we show up."

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India Playing 11 in T20I: -

Yashashvi Jaiswal

Abhishek sharma

Aarav(captain)

Shubman Gill (VC)

Tilak Verma

Dhruv Jurel (WK)

Riyan Parag

Kartik Tyagi

Arshdeep Singh

Shivam Mavi

Ravi Bishnoi

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"Especially after that last T20," added Kartik Tyagi, a wide grin on his face. "Abhishek just obliterated them. That 83 in just 24 balls was insane."

Abhishek, seated a few chairs down, shook his head modestly. "It was a team effort. Gill's support was crucial."

Gill, our vice-captain, smirked. "Don't be so humble, man. You smashed their bowlers all over the park. I think one of your sixes still hasn't landed."

The room burst into laughter, and Abhishek scratched the back of his head, clearly flattered but trying not to show it.

"Speaking of smashing," Jaiswal chimed in, "Captain Aarav over here didn't do too bad himself. What was it? Sixty-one, forty, and fifty-six? Not to mention eight wickets. That's some all-round magic."

I waved him off, chuckling. "Alright, alright. Let's not make this the Aarav appreciation show. Everyone here did their part. Bishnoi was a menace with the ball—nine wickets, man!"

Bishnoi raised his hand in mock acknowledgment. "Thank you, thank you. What can I say? England just couldn't handle my googlies."

"Googlies or not," said Arshdeep, leaning forward, "you made life miserable for their batsmen. I think even their top order is having nightmares about you."

The playful banter continued, with everyone recalling key moments from the series. Dhruv Jurel recounted his lightning-fast stumpings, while Shivam Mavi talked about his fiery opening spells. Riyan Parag, always the joker of the group, mimicked one of England's bowlers' frustrated reactions, sending the room into fits of laughter.

As I sat there, surrounded by my teammates, I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of pride. It wasn't just about the trophies or the wins—it was about the bond we'd built, the way we'd supported each other through every challenge.

Suddenly, the room quieted as the door opened, and Rahul Dravid stepped in. His presence commanded respect, and everyone immediately straightened up. He entered with a warm smile, his calm demeanor putting us at ease despite the formal air.

"Gentlemen," he began, his voice steady, "what a tour this has been. First, the ODI series victory, and then the T20 whitewash. You've not only defeated England in their own backyard but have done so with flair and determination."

He paused, looking around the room, making eye contact with each of us. "Every single one of you contributed. That's what makes this team special. It's not just about individual performances, but how we come together as a unit."

He gestured toward the trophies on the table. "These represent more than just wins. They represent hard work, teamwork, and the belief that you can achieve anything when you put your mind to it."

A ripple of pride swept through the room, and I could see everyone sitting a little taller.

"Abhishek," Dravid continued, turning toward him, "your performance in the T20s was outstanding. You proved why you belong on this team."

Abhishek nodded, his face a mix of humility and gratitude. "Thank you, sir. It means a lot coming from you."

"And Aarav," he said, turning to me, "leading a team is never easy, especially on a tour like this. But you did it with grace and confidence. Eight wickets, over 150 runs, in T20s 3 Matches and total two trophies—truly commendable."

"Thank you, sir," I said, my voice steady despite the warmth spreading through me.

Dravid addressed the rest of the team, praising everyone's contributions, from Gill's consistent performances to Bishnoi's brilliant bowling and Dhruv's sharp work behind the stumps.

"And remember," he concluded, "this is just the beginning. There are bigger challenges ahead, but I have no doubt that this team can face them head-on."

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The meeting room, once filled with laughter and excitement, now took on a quieter, more contemplative air. Rahul Dravid's tone shifted, and we instinctively knew something serious was coming. He straightened his stance and looked at all of us.

"Young man," he began, "while we're celebrating our success here, the main Indian team i.e. our International Team—our Test squad—is currently playing against England. Unfortunately, things haven't been going well. They've lost two matches back-to-back, and to make matters worse, both Shami and Bumrah, two of our main bowlers, are injured."

The room grew tense. Even in the afterglow of our victory, the struggles of the Test team hit us hard. Dravid continued, his tone measured but firm.

"Although they would be fit before match, but for practice at nets they need bowlers, especially fast bowlers as in this tour India didn't go with reserve pace bowler."

"Under normal circumstances, we would call bowlers from India, but the logistics—clearing visas, booking flights, and adjusting to conditions—make it nearly impossible to have anyone arrive in time. That's where you come in."

He paused, scanning the room, his gaze landing on Arshdeep and me.

"Aarav, Arshdeep," he said, his voice steady, "the BCCI has asked for fast bowlers to join the Test squad's nets practice sessions and provide support. I've recommended both of you."

There was a collective intake of breath. The weight of his words settled heavily in the room.

"If you agree to this," Dravid continued, "you'll stay here to train with Team India. But it also means you'll miss the first ODI against South Africa. I understand this is a difficult decision, so I'm leaving it up to you."

[Aarav POV]

The smile that had been plastered on my face moments ago faded. I glanced at Arshdeep, who looked equally stunned. Missing the first ODI felt like a blow. This was our team, our series, and the thought of not being there stung.

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Before I could fully process my emotions, Shubman Gill, seated beside me, leaned closer and placed a reassuring hand on my shoulder. "Captain," he said, his voice calm and steady, "I know you want to stay here and practice with Team India. Don't worry about us. As your vice-captain, I'll make sure the team is in good hands. We won't lose that first ODI in your absence. You've got my word."

His confidence and sincerity were infectious. Before I could respond, Tilak Verma spoke up from across the room. "He's right, Aarav. You and Arshdeep have earned this opportunity. Don't let us hold you back. We'll manage."

Dhruv Jurel, always the voice of encouragement, chimed in. "And let's be honest, Captain. You're the one always telling us to grab every opportunity that comes our way. Isn't it time you took your own advice?"

The room erupted into a chorus of agreement. Kartik Tyagi added, "Yeah, Captain. Go show them what you're made of. Same for you, Arshdeep."

Even Riyan Parag, who usually couldn't resist cracking a joke, spoke with surprising sincerity. "We've got this, man. You two go make us proud."

I looked around the room, taking in their faces—my teammates, my friends. Their unwavering support and belief in me were overwhelming. I glanced at Arshdeep, who gave me a small nod, a mix of determination and gratitude in his eyes.

Finally, I turned back to Dravid, a sincere smile spreading across my face. "We would love to be part of the Indian team's training camp, sir."

Arshdeep echoed my sentiment, his voice steady and confident. "Absolutely, Coach. It's an honor."

Dravid's expression softened, and for the first time since the conversation began, he smiled. "That's what I expected from both of you. This is a big opportunity—not just for you, but for the team as well. Make the most of it."

The room erupted in applause, with my teammates cheering us on. Gill leaned over and whispered, "Don't worry, Captain. I'll take care of everything."

"Thanks, Gill," I replied, clapping him on the back.

Tilak called out, "Alright, Aarav, Arshdeep—you better come back with some stories. And maybe a few Test autographs while you're at it."

Laughter rippled through the room, breaking the tension. For the first time since Dravid's announcement, I felt lighter. I looked at Arshdeep, and we shared a knowing smile. This was our chance to step up, to prove ourselves at the highest level, and we were ready to take it.

As the meeting wrapped up, I felt a renewed sense of purpose. The road ahead wouldn't be easy, but with the support of my team and the opportunity before me, I knew we were on the brink of something incredible.

As the meeting came to an end with final words of coach congratulating us again for our victory against England. With that, he stepped back, signaling the end of the meeting. A round of applause erupted, everyone clapping for each other and for the memories we'd created on this tour.

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That night, as I sat in my hotel room, I picked up my phone and dialed my parents. I couldn't wait to share the incredible news with them. The line rang twice before my mother's warm voice answered.

"Hello, Aarav! How are you, beta?"

"Hi, Ma! I'm great. Where's Dad? I have something big to tell you both," I said, barely containing my excitement.

"He's right here," she replied. I heard her calling out to him, and within seconds, my father was on the line too.

"Alright, what's the big news?" Dad asked, his voice filled with curiosity.

I took a deep breath and began, "So, you know how we just finished our T20 series against England? Well, I've been selected to join the Indian Test team's training camp!"

For a moment, there was silence, and then I heard my mother gasp.

"That's amazing, Aarav!" she exclaimed. "Oh, beta, we're so proud of you!"

Dad chimed in, his voice booming with pride. "This is the first step towards your dream. Training with the Indian Test squad—this is huge!"

"It is, Dad. I'm so excited, but also a bit nervous," I admitted.

"Don't be," Mom reassured me. "You've worked so hard for this. Just give it your best, like you always do."

"Your mother's right," Dad added. "This is your time to shine. And remember, we're always here for you, cheering you on."

We continued talking for a while, their encouragement washing away any lingering doubts. Before ending the call, my mother said, "Promise me you'll take care of yourself and eat well."

"I promise, Ma," I said, smiling.

"Good. Now go get some rest. You've got a big day tomorrow," she said.

"Goodnight, beta," Dad added.

"Goodnight, Ma, Dad," I replied, ending the call with a heart full of gratitude.

The next morning, I woke up at 5 a.m., feeling refreshed and ready for the day. After a quick stretch, I headed to the hotel gym for my usual workout. Two hours later, drenched in sweat but energized, I returned to my room, took a refreshing shower, and got dressed. By 8 a.m., I was ready and made my way to the breakfast area.

As I entered, I saw my teammates already gathered there, their bags packed and ready to leave. A wave of mixed emotions hit me—happiness for them and a tinge of sadness knowing I wouldn't be joining them for the South Africa tour.

"Look who finally decided to show up!" Shubman called out, grinning.

"Guess he's already living the Test squad life," Riyan teased, prompting laughter from the group.

I walked over to them, smiling. "Don't miss me too much," I said playfully.

"Miss you? Please," Tilak said, rolling his eyes dramatically. "We'll be too busy winning."

"Don't worry, Captain," Dhruv added, his tone more sincere. "We'll take care of the team."

"Just make sure you impress the big boys at the camp," Abhishek chimed in.

"Good luck, Aarav," Shubman said, extending a hand.

"Thanks, Gill," I said, shaking his hand firmly.

We exchanged goodbyes, their playful jabs and words of encouragement easing the heaviness in my chest.

After they left, I grabbed a bowl of cereals, some mango juice, and a bowl of salad for breakfast. As I was finishing up, a man approached Arshdeep and me.

"Mr. Aarav and Mr. Arshdeep?" he asked.

"Yes, that's us," I replied.

He handed us an envelope. "This contains details about your stay and accommodations arranged by the BCCI. Please follow me to the car; I'll take you to the training nets."

We nodded, gathered our kits, and followed him. The car ride to the training facility took two hours, during which Arshdeep and I chatted about our excitement and what we hoped to learn from this experience.

As we arrived, we were greeted by a buzz of activity. The training session was open to the public, and a large crowd had gathered to watch the Indian team in action. Cameras clicked, fans cheered, and the atmosphere was electric.

We were escorted to the dressing room, where we were handed our practice kits and asked to get ready. As I was tying my shoelaces, the door burst open, and in walked Coach Ravi Shastri, exuding his trademark energy.

"Ah, there they are! The young guns!" he boomed, clapping his hands together. "Welcome to the big league, boys!"

Arshdeep and I stood up, slightly taken aback by his larger-than-life presence.

"Thank you, sir," we said in unison.

"No need for the formalities," Shastri said, waving a hand. "We're here to work hard, learn, and have some fun along the way. Got it?"

"Yes, sir," we replied, nodding.

"Good," he said, his gaze sharp but encouraging. "Now, get out there and show me why you were picked. Let's go!"

With that, he turned and marched out, leaving us both feeling a mix of nerves and excitement. We exchanged a glance, nodded, and headed out to the nets, ready to give it our all.