

Cricket 60

Chapter 60

The day had finally arrived. I was sitting in my living room, scrolling through my phone, but my mind was preoccupied. The BCCI press release for the World Cup team was set to be announced any moment now, and though I was confident about my selection, a sense of nervous anticipation filled the air. Abhishek was with me, sitting on the couch and munching on a packet of chips, far more relaxed than I was.

"Why are you so tense, Aarav?" he teased, throwing a chip into his mouth. "It's not like you're going to be left out."

I gave him a weak smile, my eyes flickering toward the television. "Still, there's something about hearing it officially that makes it real, you know?"

He nodded, leaning back as the program began. On the screen, the selection committee head, Karan Anand, walked into the room alongside head coach Rahul Dravid. Both of them looked calm and composed, smiling as they took their seats behind the microphones.

"Good afternoon, everyone," Karan Anand began, his voice steady and confident. "We are here to announce the Indian squad for the upcoming World Cup. This selection has been one of the most challenging tasks we've faced, given the immense talent pool we have. But after extensive deliberations, we believe we've picked the best squad to represent India on the biggest stage."

Rahul Dravid, sitting beside him, nodded in agreement, his trademark smile lighting up the room. "This team has the potential to bring the trophy home. Each player has proven themselves time and again, and we're confident in their abilities."

My heart began to race as Karan Anand picked up the list in front of him. Abhishek noticed and nudged me playfully. "Relax, man. They'll probably call your name first."

I shot him a glare, but before I could respond, Karan Anand started announcing the names.

"The captain of Team India for the World Cup..." he began, pausing for effect. My breath hitched.

"Aarav Pathak."

Abhishek jumped up, punching the air. "I told you, Aarav! I told you!"

I couldn't help but smile, a wave of relief washing over me as I heard my name. Karan Anand continued.

"The vice-captain of the team... Shubman Gill."

I nodded, happy to see Shubman take the vice-captaincy role. His consistency and leadership had been outstanding.

"Yashasvi Jaiswal," Karan Anand announced next, and Abhishek clapped loudly. "Good pick," he said, grinning.

"Prithvi Shaw."

Another solid choice. Prithvi's aggressive batting style would be crucial for setting the tone at the top of the order.

"Tilak Varma."

"Dhruv Jurel, as the wicketkeeper."

The names kept coming, each one bringing more clarity to the team's makeup.

"Riyan Parag."

"Kartik Tyagi."

"Arshdeep Singh."

When Abhishek's name hadn't been called yet, I noticed him sitting up a little straighter, his usual nonchalance replaced by a hint of nervousness.

"Shivam Mavi."

"Ravi Bishnoi."

"Abhishek Sharma."

As soon as his name was called, Abhishek let out a breath he'd been holding and gave me a triumphant grin. "There we go!" he said, clapping my back.

"Umran Malik."

"N. Jagadeesan second wicketkeeper."

"And finally," Karan Anand concluded, "Devdutt Padikkal."

The announcement was met with applause in the press room, and Karan Anand and Rahul Dravid both looked pleased with the team they had assembled. "We are confident this squad will make the country proud," Karan said.

Abhishek turned to me, grinning. "Well, Captain, how does it feel to lead the World Cup squad?"

I leaned back, a smile spreading across my face. "It feels like a dream, Abhishek. But the real work starts now."

Interview Time: -

Question 1 (Reporter 1): Mr. Karan Anand, the names have just been announced. Could you please walk us through the selection process for this team? What were the key criteria you focused on?

Karan Anand (Selection Committee Head): Thank you. The selection process was rigorous, and we had a lot of talent to choose from. Our primary criteria were performance consistency, mental toughness, and adaptability in various conditions. We also focused on players' ability to handle pressure, as the World Cup is a big stage. Our aim was to pick a balanced team with the right mix of experience and youth, and a combination of batting depth, bowling variety, and fielding prowess. We also took into consideration how players performed in domestic and age-group tournaments, and how they fit into our team strategy.

Question 2 (Reporter 2): Coach Rahul Dravid, with the team now finalised, can you share your thoughts on the balance of the squad? Are there any particular strengths you see in this group?

Rahul Dravid (Head Coach): Yes, absolutely. We've got a really well-rounded squad. We've got players like Aarav Pathak and Shubman Gill, who have shown leadership qualities, and they will bring calm and clarity under pressure. The batting line-up has depth with players like Yashasvi Jaiswal, Prithvi Shaw, and Tilak Varma, all of whom can anchor innings or accelerate when required. From a bowling perspective, we've got a mix of pace and spin, with pacers like Kartik Tyagi, Arshdeep Singh, and Umran Malik, who can bowl at high speeds and take crucial wickets. Our spinners, Ravi Bishnoi and Riyam Parag, bring great variety and control. We're really confident about this squad's potential.

Question 3 (Reporter 5): Coach Dravid, given your vast experience in international cricket, what kind of mental preparation do you think is required for this young team to succeed at the World Cup?

Rahul Dravid (Head Coach): Mental toughness is critical, especially for young players in a high-stakes tournament like the World Cup. Our primary focus will be on helping the players deal with pressure and stay focused on the task at hand. We'll be working on building their resilience, helping them understand that setbacks are part of the game, and it's how you respond to them that matters. We've also emphasized the importance of staying calm under pressure, managing expectations, and maintaining a positive mindset. We want the players to enjoy the experience, learn from every match, and stay committed to the team's goals.

Question 4 (Reporter 7): Karan, with a squad full of young talent, do you think this team is ready to compete for the title, or is there still some development needed?

Karan Anand (Selection Committee Head): Every team, especially one with a lot of young talent, will always have areas to develop. But I firmly believe this squad has the potential to compete for the title. The players have shown maturity in their game and have performed exceptionally well in domestic and International tournaments. While there will always be room for improvement, I believe that the blend of experience, talent, and a hunger to win will give us a strong chance. The focus now is on the final preparations and fine-tuning ahead of the tournament.

Question 5 (Reporter 8): Finally, Coach Rahul, what message do you have for the fans of Indian cricket who are eagerly waiting for this World Cup?

Rahul Dravid (Head Coach): To all the fans, we are as excited as you are. The boys are ready to give their best and represent the country with pride. We understand the support and the passion of the Indian fans, and we're going to do everything we can to make them proud. We're focusing on the process, taking one game at a time, and ensuring that the team is well-prepared. Your support means a lot to us, and we're looking forward to making you all proud with our performances on the field.

Moderator: Thank you, Mr. Karan Anand and Coach Rahul Dravid, for your valuable insights. We wish Team India all the best in the upcoming U-19 Cricket World Cup!

As the press conference ended and the television screen faded to a commercial, I couldn't help but feel a swell of pride. This wasn't just about me—it was about representing a billion dreams and aspirations on the grandest stage of all.

With this I checked My Phone for the fixtures of the U19 World Cup Held in Australia,

Group A: India, Australia, England, Afghanistan

Group B: Pakistan, South Africa, West Indies, Scotland

Group C: New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, UAE

Group D: Zimbabwe, Ireland, Namibia, Nepal

Indian Matches: -

India vs England in Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG)

India vs Afghanistan in Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG)

India vs Australia in The Gabba Brisbane

Knockouts

Semifinals

Semifinal 1: Winner QF1 vs Winner QF4

Venue: Sydney, New South Wales Stadium: Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG)City: Sydney

Semifinal 2: Winner QF2 vs Winner QF3

Venue: Melbourne, Victoria Stadium: Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG)City: MelbourneFinal

Final Match: Winner SF1 vs Winner SF2

Venue: Melbourne, Victoria Stadium: Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG)City: Melbourne