

Cricket 71

Chapter 71

The post-auction atmosphere was electric, and Aarav's house was alive with joy and celebration. After a day of nerve-wracking bids and monumental wins, it was time to unwind and cherish the moment with loved ones. Aarav's parents had thrown a party at their grand farmhouse, with Abhishek's family to join in the celebrations.

The evening began with a warm welcome. Aarav's mother, dressed in a vibrant saree, greeted Abhishek's parents at the door. "Come in, come in! This day calls for a proper celebration," she exclaimed, ushering them into the warmly lit living room, where an array of snacks and drinks awaited.

Abhishek, still buzzing from being picked by Delhi Daredevils, walked in with a wide grin. "Aarav, can you believe it? This feels surreal!" he said, clapping his friend on the back.

Aarav chuckled, holding a glass of juice. "It's crazy, isn't it? And you were so calm during the whole thing!"

Abhishek's father joined in the banter, his voice full of pride. "You boys have made us so proud today. Watching both your names being called in that auction room was a moment we'll never forget."

Aarav's father nodded in agreement, raising his glass. "It's a testament to your hard work. You've both earned every bit of this success."

As the evening progressed, the house was filled with laughter, music, and the aroma of delicious food. Aarav's mother had gone all out, preparing an elaborate spread that included Aarav's favorite dishes—paneer butter masala, biryani, and crispy samosas.

The two families sat together around the dining table, sharing stories from the auction day.

"I was so nervous when your name was called, Aarav," his mother confessed. "I could barely breathe until the bidding ended!"

Abhishek's mother laughed. "Same here! I thought my heart would stop when Delhi made that first bid for Abhishek."

Aarav leaned back in his chair, smiling. "You both should have seen Dad, though. He was the calmest person in the room!"

His father shrugged modestly. "Someone had to keep it together."

Later in the evening, Aarav and Abhishek stepped outside onto the farmhouse's sprawling lawn. The cool breeze carried the faint sound of music from inside as the two friends stood under the starlit sky.

"Abhishek," Aarav said, breaking the silence, "this is just the beginning for us. IPL is going to be a whole new level."

Abhishek nodded, his expression turning serious. "Yeah, but I think we're ready for it. We've got each other's backs, right?"

"Always," Aarav replied, extending his fist for a bump.

The two friends rejoined their families, who were now in full celebration mode, dancing to a playlist of upbeat Bollywood tracks. Aarav's father even surprised everyone by taking the dance floor with a lively performance that left everyone in splits.

As the party drew to a close, Aarav's mother raised a toast. "To Aarav and Abhishek—for their hard work, their friendship, and the incredible journey that lies ahead!"

The families clinked their glasses, united in their pride and excitement for the future. That night, as Aarav lay in bed, he felt a deep sense of gratitude—not just for the success of the day, but for the love and support of the people around him. The journey was just beginning, and he couldn't wait to see where it would lead.

Just as Aarav was about to drift off to sleep, his phone buzzed with an incoming group video call. Groggily, he picked it up, only to be greeted by the lively faces of his friends: Abhishek, Shubhman, Yashasvi, Ravi Bishnoi, Prithvi Shaw, and Arshdeep Singh.

"Aarav! Finally, you picked up!" Abhishek exclaimed, grinning ear to ear.

"Bro, what's up with you ignoring our call? Already acting like a big IPL star?" teased Prithvi, his voice dripping with mock annoyance.

"Relax, I wasn't ignoring anyone! Just going to sleep," Aarav defended, laughing as he adjusted the camera angle.

The energy on the call was electric, with everyone beaming from ear to ear.

Yashasvi chimed in, "Man, can you believe it? We're all playing in the IPL! Like, this is actually happening!"

"I know, right?" Ravi added. "Feels like yesterday we were just practicing on local grounds, and now we're here."

Shubhman, sitting in his family's living room with the faint hum of background chatter, said, "You guys don't understand, my parents are still celebrating. 1.8 crores, bro! I feel like I need to pinch myself."

Abhishek grinned. "Forget 1.8 crores—look at Aarav here. 4 crores! MI, CSK and RCB were fighting over you like crazy!"

"Hey, don't make it sound like that!" Aarav said, pretending to be modest but unable to hide his smile. "I'm just glad to be part of it all."

Arshdeep, who was quieter than the others but just as excited, spoke up, "You guys are all hyped about the money. I'm just happy to represent Punjab again. It's going to be amazing playing for my home state."

"True," Yashasvi said, nodding. "I feel the same about Rajasthan. This is an opportunity to make my mark, not just for me, but for my family."

The mood shifted slightly as everyone reflected on their individual journeys. Prithvi, ever the joker, broke the silence. "Okay, okay, enough emotional talk. Let's not forget—this means we're officially rivals now!"

Everyone burst out laughing. Aarav pointed at the screen. "Yeah, except when we face each other, I'm definitely taking you down, Prithvi."

"Oh, is that so?" Prithvi shot back, leaning into the camera. "Let's see how your 3.8 crore skills hold up against my batting."

"Boys, boys," Shubhman intervened, laughing. "Save the trash talk for the field."

"Agreed," Ravi said, grinning. "Because when we face off, I'll be the one getting you all out."

The group continued chatting, sharing their plans for the upcoming season and teasing each other about potential matchups. The camaraderie was palpable, with everyone equally excited and slightly nervous about stepping onto the big stage.

Before they ended the call, Yashasvi raised a virtual toast, holding up a glass of water. "To us, guys. To chasing our dreams and making them a reality. Let's make this season unforgettable."

"To us!" everyone echoed, raising whatever was in their hands—water, juice, or even bread.

As the call ended and Aarav placed his phone on the bedside table, he couldn't help but smile. This wasn't just about cricket or the IPL anymore. It was about friendship, shared dreams, and the incredible journey that lay ahead for all of them.

The morning sun streamed through the windows as Aarav woke up, feeling refreshed and energized after the previous night's celebration. He went through his usual routine with an added spring in his step. After a rigorous exercise session followed by a gym workout, he returned home, his muscles pleasantly aching. A quick shower later, he was ready to take on the day.

As he was about to settle down for breakfast, his phone rang, displaying an unknown number. Aarav hesitated for a moment but decided to answer.

"Hello?" Aarav said cautiously.

"Good morning, Aarav!" came a cheerful voice. "This is Siddharth Sharma from the Royal Challengers Bangalore management team. Congratulations on being picked up in the IPL auction!"

Aarav's face lit up instantly. "Thank you so much! It's such an honor to be part of the RCB family."

"We're thrilled to have you onboard," Siddharth continued. "Your performance in the World Cup was outstanding, and we have high expectations for you this season. By the way, the management and players have scheduled a video conference this afternoon. It's an introductory session, and we'd love for you to join."

Aarav's excitement soared. "Absolutely, I'll be there. What time should I log in?"

"The meeting is scheduled for 1 PM. I'll send you the link and all the details via email shortly. It's a casual session to meet the team, share some insights, and discuss the season ahead."

"That sounds amazing. Thank you again for this opportunity. I won't let you down," Aarav said with genuine determination in his voice.

"We're confident you won't," Siddharth replied warmly. "See you at 1 PM. Have a great morning, Aarav!"

"You too. Thanks again!" Aarav ended the call and placed his phone on the table, feeling an overwhelming sense of pride and excitement.

He couldn't wait to meet his new teammates and management. As he thought about the video conference, Aarav realized this was just the beginning of a new chapter—one that promised to be filled with challenges, growth, and unforgettable memories.

At precisely 1 PM, Aarav logged into the video conference link shared by the RCB management. His laptop screen displayed a lively virtual room buzzing with energy. The management team, key players, and new recruits were already present, and Aarav immediately felt the camaraderie that defined the Royal Challengers Bangalore spirit.

The management team consisted of six members:

Siddharth Sharma – Head of Cricket Operations

Rohan Desai – Media and Communications Director

Shweta Nair – Team Analyst

Mark Jefferson – Foreign Strategy Consultant

Evan Walker – Fitness and Conditioning Coach from New Zealand

Prakash Iyer – Logistics Manager

Aarav quickly spotted the players on the call: Virat Kohli, the captain himself; AB de Villiers, the legendary South African; Yuzvendra Chahal, the team's ace spinner; Tim Southee, the experienced pacer; Mohammad Siraj, who had recently earned widespread recognition; and two fellow new recruits, Navdeep Singh, Aniruddha, Washington and Ankit Chaudhary.

Virat Kohli, with his signature energy, began the meeting.

"Alright, everyone, let's get this rolling. First of all, welcome to the RCB family, especially our new recruits: Aarav, Navdeep, Washington, Aniruddha and Ankit. You've all earned your spots, and we're excited to see what you bring to the table this season. Aarav, I've heard a lot about you—World Cup winner, young, dynamic, and hungry to prove yourself."

Aarav smiled, his nerves slightly calming. "Thank you, Virat Bhaiya. It's a dream come true to be part of RCB and to have the chance to play under your captaincy. I've looked up to you my entire career."

AB de Villiers chimed in with a friendly laugh, "Careful, Aarav, he'll put you through a lot of fitness drills if you say that."

Everyone laughed, and Virat played along. "AB's just jealous because he's not getting younger. But don't worry, Aarav. We'll make sure you're in top shape for the season. Speaking of which, Mark and Evan will

handle your fitness schedule, and Shweta will provide you with detailed player analysis for your role in the team."

Mark Jefferson jumped in, "Aarav, we've seen your stats, and there's a lot of potential there. Fitness is key at RCB, and with Virat leading the way, we'll make sure you're unstoppable."

"Absolutely," Evan Walker added. "We'll create a tailored regimen for you to enhance your agility and endurance."

Aarav nodded enthusiastically. "I'm ready to give my 200%, sir."

Tim Southee, the experienced Kiwi fast bowler, spoke next. "Aarav, as a young player, the IPL can be overwhelming at times. If you ever need advice or guidance, feel free to reach out. We're all here to support you."

"Thanks, sir. That means a lot," Aarav replied sincerely.

The conversation shifted to team strategies, with Siddharth Sharma and Shweta Nair presenting plans for the upcoming season. Shweta displayed data on players, opponents, and the team's strengths.

After the formal discussion, Virat turned his attention back to Aarav.

"Aarav, let me ask you this—what's your mindset when you're under pressure?"

Aarav thought for a moment before replying, "Virat Bhaiya, I believe in focusing on the basics. Pressure is just a part of the game, and I've learned to embrace it. I try to stay calm and remind myself why I love cricket in the first place."

Virat smiled approvingly. "Good answer. That's exactly the kind of attitude we need. Pressure makes diamonds, and at RCB, we thrive on it. And remember, we're all a team here. No matter what, we've got each other's backs."

Mohammad Siraj added, "Aarav, you're lucky to have Virat Bhaiya as your captain. He pushes you to be your best, but he's also there when you need someone to lean on."

Yuzvendra Chahal couldn't resist adding some humor. "And if you're ever feeling down, just come to me. I'll make sure you're laughing in no time."

The room erupted in laughter again. Aarav felt a deep sense of belonging, realizing this was more than just a team—it was a family.

Rohan Desai the Media and Communications Director asked the new players to make a video and share with them, thanking RCB for picking them and would love to play for them and would enjoy the IPL.

As the meeting concluded, Virat addressed everyone.

"Alright, guys, this is just the beginning. Let's keep the energy up, stay focused, and give our fans the season they've been waiting for. Aarav, Navdeep, Washington, Aniruddha and Ankit—welcome to the RCB family. Let's make it a season to remember."

"RCB! RCB!" everyone chanted, and the call ended with smiles and excitement all around.

Aarav leaned back in his chair, exhilarated. His journey with RCB had officially begun, and he couldn't wait to step onto the field with his new team.