

Cricket 75

Chapter 75

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Aarav woke up to the first rays of sunlight filtering through his hotel window. Today felt different, charged with an energy he couldn't quite put into words. It wasn't just another practice day at the iconic M. Chinnaswamy Stadium; today, he had a plan.

He quickly got ready, throwing on his RCB training kit, and after a quick breakfast, made his way to the team bus. The ride to the stadium was filled with chatter and excitement from his teammates, but Aarav's mind was laser-focused on two players—Virat Kohli and AB de Villiers.

As soon as Aarav stepped into the stadium, the familiar smell of freshly cut grass and the sight of the iconic stands sent a thrill down his spine. But Aarav wasn't here to soak in the atmosphere. His eyes scanned the field, searching for the two legends.

He spotted them near the nets, casually chatting and laughing. Virat was swinging his bat in mock strokes while AB gestured animatedly, probably talking about tactics or something equally brilliant.

"System," Aarav whispered under his breath.

"Yes, host?"

"Activate the 2nd Reward: Shake the Future," Aarav said, his heart pounding.

"Ding! Shake the Future activated. Select the first target."

Aarav's eyes locked onto Virat Kohli. His confidence, aura, and unmatched skills made him an obvious choice. "Virat Kohli," he said decisively.

"Target locked. Shake hands to activate."

Aarav grinned, adrenaline surging through his veins. Without wasting another second, he jogged towards Virat and AB.

"Good morning, bhaiya!" Aarav called out, trying to sound casual despite the excitement bubbling inside him.

Virat turned to him with a warm smile. "Good morning, Aarav! Ready for another day of hard work?"

"Always, bhaiya," Aarav said, extending his hand.

Virat chuckled and shook Aarav's hand firmly. As their hands met, Aarav felt a strange warmth rush through his body. It was brief, but he knew the system had worked.

"Ding! Target acquired. Two random skills from Virat Kohli have been transferred to the host."

Aarav struggled to contain his excitement. "Thank you, bhaiya!"

"Don't mention it," Virat said, patting him on the back.

Aarav nodded, filing those words away.

Next, Aarav turned to AB de Villiers, who greeted him with his trademark wide smile.

"Morning, Aarav! How's it going?" AB asked.

"Better now that I get to train with you guys," Aarav said honestly.

AB laughed. "Well, let's see if you can handle us in the nets later."

"Looking forward to it!" Aarav said, extending his hand.

AB shook it with the same friendly enthusiasm.

"Ding! Target acquired. Two random skills from AB de Villiers have been transferred to the host."

Aarav felt another wave of warmth, this time more intense. He couldn't wait to check what skills he had gained, but he knew he had to act normal for now.

After a few minutes of casual conversation, Aarav excused himself and moved to a quieter corner of the field.

Aarav finally found a quiet spot in the stadium—a shaded bench under a tree near the practice nets. He took a deep breath and opened the system interface, eager to review the rewards he'd just received.

"System," he called.

"Yes, host?"

"Show me the rewards I got from Virat bhaiya and AB de Villiers."

"Ding! Displaying rewards:

Rewards from AB de Villiers:

ABD's Shot Selection:

Description: Gain the ability to analyze field settings and bowlers' variations like AB de Villiers. You can choose unconventional and highly effective shots with precision, making it almost impossible for bowlers to set a field against you.

ABD's Skin Tone:

Description: Receive AB de Villiers' iconic fair skin tone."

Aarav stared at the screen, dumbfounded.

"Wait, WHAT?" Aarav almost shouted, looking around to make sure no one heard him. "Are you calling me... black Nigga?"

The system remained silent.

"What is this nonsense? Skin tone? How is this even a reward?!" Aarav fumed.

After a few moments of silence, the system finally replied, its tone as deadpan as ever, "Host, this reward is designed to improve your physical appearance. Research indicates fairer skin tones are globally perceived as appealing. and this is random, you could receive anything from AB Devillers."

Aarav facepalmed. "So you're telling me that out of all the skills ABD has, you decided to give me his skin tone?"

"Rewards are randomized," the system replied coolly.

Shaking his head, Aarav decided to move on. "Fine, show me the rewards from Virat Kohli."

"Rewards from Virat Kohli:

High Beard Growth:

Description: Inheriting the genetic advantage that ensures your beard grows thick, evenly, and stylishly, similar to Virat Kohli's iconic beard.

Style and Aura in Playing Shots:

Description: Beyond technique, gain the unique style and aura that makes Virat Kohli's shots unforgettable. From cover drives to flicks, your shots will now carry an elegance that resonates with viewers, evoking awe and admiration."

Aarav blinked at the screen in disbelief. "Beard genes? Seriously?"

"Yes, host. This ensures that in the future, your beard will be as thick and well-groomed as Virat Kohli's, enhancing your visual appeal on and off the field," the system explained.

"Okay, great. So, I'll have a great beard and fair skin. Am I competing for Mr. World now?" Aarav muttered sarcastically.

But the second reward caught his attention. "Style and aura in playing shots? What does that even mean?"

"Host," the system began, "while many players can execute technically correct shots, very few possess the charisma that leaves a lasting impact on spectators. Virat Kohli's shots are not just about technique; they carry an unmatched elegance and emotional resonance. With this reward, every shot you play will exude that same aura and style."

Aarav leaned back, processing this information. "So... you're saying that even if someone else plays the same shot as me, mine will look better just because of this aura?"

"Precisely, host," the system confirmed.

Aarav couldn't help but chuckle. "Well, at least that's something useful. But seriously, beard genes and skin tone? Couldn't you just give me their cricketing skills instead?"

"Host, rewards are randomized and may vary based on compatibility and your needs," the system replied monotonously.

Aarav sighed, shaking his head. "Fine, whatever. I guess I'll take what I can get. But next time, focus on skills, not my looks, okay?"

"Ding! Feedback recorded," the system replied.

Despite his frustration, Aarav couldn't help but smile as he closed the system interface. The aura reward and ABD's shot selection were game-changers. He decided to test them out in the next practice session.

As for the skin tone and beard genes, well... he'd deal with those later.'

(*Skin tone and batting aura would change with time.)

Time Skip 16 days!

Aarav returned to his room after an intense practice session. The excitement was palpable in the air—tomorrow was the first match of the IPL season for Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB), and they were facing the formidable Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) at Eden Gardens. Aarav couldn't help but feel a mix of anticipation and nervous energy.

"I hope I get a chance to play," he thought as he paced around his room. The feeling of potentially stepping onto the field with cricketing legends was surreal. "Even if I don't play, just being part of this team is a dream come true."

The night passed quickly as Aarav visualized every possible scenario: his debut, taking wickets, maybe even hitting the winning runs. Eventually, exhaustion took over, and he fell asleep.

Match Day

The morning was electric. The team assembled at the hotel for a team meeting where Virat Kohli was set to announce the playing XI. Aarav sat with the rest of the squad, his heart racing.

Virat stood at the front of the room, exuding confidence and calm. "Okay, boys," he began, "here's the playing XI for today's match against KKR."

He read out the names one by one:

Brendon McCullum

Quinton de Kock

Virat Kohli (Captain)

AB de Villiers (Vice-Captain)

Sarfraz Khan

Mandeep Singh

Chris Woakes

Washington Sundar

Kulwant Khejroliya

Umesh Yadav

Yuzvendra Chahal

Aarav's name wasn't there. Though he was slightly disappointed, he quickly reminded himself that this was just the first game, and there were many more opportunities to come.

Virat addressed the rest of the squad: "To those not playing today, stay ready. This is a long tournament, and we'll need every one of you at some point. Keep training, keep pushing, and your chance will come."

Aarav nodded, feeling reassured.

The Match

As the team arrived at Eden Gardens, the iconic stadium was buzzing with energy. The crowd was a sea of purple and red, cheering passionately for their respective teams.

RCB lost the toss, and KKR opted to field first. Brendon McCullum and Quinton de Kock walked out to open the innings, their confidence evident as they took their positions at the crease.

The first few overs were cautious but steady. McCullum began to unleash his shots in the powerplay, smashing the bowlers all around the ground. His quickfire 43 off 27 balls set the tone for the innings.

Quinton de Kock provided a solid anchor but fell after a slow start. Then came Virat Kohli, who, along with AB de Villiers, started to rebuild the innings. The duo rotated the strike and found boundaries at regular intervals.

De Villiers, in particular, was in sublime form. His 44 off 23 balls was a masterclass in controlled aggression. He smashed two towering sixes over long-on that left the crowd in awe.

Unfortunately, the middle order couldn't capitalize on the momentum set by the top order. Sarfaraz Khan and Mandeep Singh chipped in with a few runs, but wickets kept falling at regular intervals. Chris Woakes' cameo at the end ensured RCB posted a competitive total of 176 runs.

Back in the Dugout

As the innings concluded, Aarav watched from the dugout, soaking in the atmosphere.

"That was some insane hitting by ABD," Aarav commented to Washington Sundar, who nodded in agreement.

"Yeah, but we'll need to bowl really well to defend this," Sundar replied.

Aarav glanced at the field, where the team was preparing for the second innings. He felt a renewed determination. "One day," he thought, "I'll be out there making an impact."

The second innings was about to begin, and Aarav couldn't wait to see how the team would fare in their opening match of the season.

Eden Gardens was alive with the roar of fans as RCB took the field to defend their 176-run total. The team huddled near the boundary line, with Virat Kohli delivering a few final words of encouragement.

"Boys, it's a good total, but this is Eden Gardens. It's not over until the last ball is bowled. Stick to the plan, stay calm, and trust your abilities," he said, clapping his hands to rally his teammates.

Umesh Yadav was handed the new ball, and the fielders took their positions. As Sunil Narine and Chris Lynn walked out to open for KKR, the energy in the stadium hit a fever pitch.

"Let's get an early breakthrough," Umesh muttered under his breath as he prepared to bowl the first ball.

The very first over set the tone for KKR's innings. Lynn and Narine wasted no time, attacking the bowlers right from the start. Narine, in particular, looked unstoppable, smashing boundaries and sixes with surgical precision.

In the third over, he sent two consecutive deliveries from Woakes sailing over the boundary, much to the dismay of the RCB camp.

"Come on, lads! Tighten up the lines!" Kohli shouted from mid-off, frustration beginning to creep into his voice.

By the time Narine reached his 50 off just 13 balls, the entire stadium was on its feet, cheering for the KKR all-rounder. Even the RCB fans couldn't help but appreciate the sheer audacity of his knock.

Gary Kirsten, watching from the dugout, muttered, "This guy's playing like it's a net session."

Finally, Umesh Yadav returned for his second spell and delivered a slower ball that deceived Narine. The ball crashed into the stumps, and the RCB players erupted in relief and joy.

"Finally!" Yadav shouted, punching the air.

Chris Lynn, who had played cautiously in comparison, fell shortly after, miscuing a delivery from Washington Sundar straight into the hands of long-on. He walked back to the pavilion with just 5 runs to his name.

With Narine and Lynn gone, the RCB players started to believe they could claw their way back into the game. However, Robin Uthappa came in next and began stabilizing the innings with his signature timing and elegant stroke play.

Robin Uthappa didn't last long, though, falling for 13 when he attempted an ambitious lofted shot off Yuzvendra Chahal, only to be caught at deep mid-wicket.

Nitish Rana and Dinesh Karthik were now at the crease, and the duo began to rebuild the innings. Their approach was measured but effective, with Rana rotating the strike and Karthik finding the gaps with clinical precision.

Karthik guided a delivery from Woakes to the third-man boundary, earning applause from the KKR dugout.

"Keep going, skip!" Rana said, patting Karthik on the back.

"We've got this, just don't do anything rash," Karthik replied, his voice calm but authoritative.

The partnership flourished, with both batsmen crossing into the 30s. Rana smashed a six over midwicket, prompting Kohli to change the field once again.

"Come on, boys, one wicket can change everything!" Kohli shouted, trying to keep his team's spirits high.

As the overs ticked by, the equation began to favor KKR. However, with Rana's dismissal for 34, bowled by Sundar, the pressure shifted slightly.

Andre Russell strode out to the middle, and his mere presence caused the crowd to roar. He wasted no time, smashing a couple of sixes that sent the ball sailing into the stands.

Russell's cameo, along with a quickfire 18 from Rinku Singh, brought KKR to the brink of victory.

With just 9 runs needed off 12 balls, it seemed all but over for RCB. Virat Kohli gathered his team for one last huddle.

"Listen up," he said, his voice firm. "Play to the last ball. If they win, they have to earn it. Fight for every run!"

Chris Wokes bowled the 19th over, managing to dismiss Russell with a slower ball that the West Indian skied to deep square leg. Kohli pumped his fist, shouting, "Come on!"

Vinay Kumar walked out to join his captain, and with just 4 runs needed off the final over, the match was almost in KKR's hands.

The first ball of the over was a dot, and the RCB fans dared to hope. However, on the second delivery, Kumar smashed a boundary through the covers, sealing the match for KKR.

The KKR players rushed onto the field, celebrating their victory as the RCB team looked on in disappointment.

Sunil Narine was named the Man of the Match for his explosive 50, which had set the tone for KKR's chase. As Kohli walked back to the dressing room, he patted his players on the back, offering words of encouragement.

"Chin up, guys. It's just the first game. We'll bounce back," he said, his focus already shifting to the next match.

Aarav, watching from the sidelines, absorbed everything. The intensity, the emotions, the stakes—this was IPL cricket. And he couldn't wait to be a part of it.

Post-Match Interview

Virat Kohli (RCB Captain):

"I think we were about 15 runs short with the bat. Personally, I played too many dot balls, and that hurt our momentum. Me and AB getting out in quick succession to a part-timer was a turning point. Sunil Narine took the game away with his batting in the powerplay—it's hard to bounce back when you're conceding 13 runs an over on this kind of wicket. It's a tough pitch for spinners, but fast bowlers can get some assistance, and it's become a really good cricketing surface over the years. Despite the loss, dragging the game into the 19th over and taking those late wickets was a positive for us."

Dinesh Karthik (KKR Captain):

"It feels great to start with a win; everyone wants that early momentum, and I'm no different. During the powerplay, I felt the fast bowlers were getting too much assistance, so I brought in wrist spin to add some risk for the batsmen. AB and Virat made it tough—they're incredible players—but we managed to get their wickets, which was a game-changer. Narine gave us the perfect start, and we're lucky to have a crowd like this backing us. Playing for KKR and these fans is always special."

Sunil Narine (Man of the Match):

"It's a great feeling to start strong in the first game. The team backed me to open again, and I'm happy to contribute, whether it's at the top or lower down the order. My mindset is simple—if I get out first ball, that's okay, as long as it puts pressure on the opposition. The pitch has improved a lot over the years, and it's a fair cricketing wicket. Happy to play my part for the team!"