

Cricket 83

Chapter 83

After the roaring success of MS Dhoni: The Untold Story, which stunned the nation and raked in an impressive ₹331(3+3+1=7 Thala for a Reason) crore at the box office on a modest ₹115 crore budget, the stage was set for our next cinematic masterpiece. The buzz around our production house, Dharma Productions, was palpable, and the momentum was electrifying.

By December, the entire industry was eagerly awaiting the release of Baahubali: The Beginning. This wasn't just a film; it was a spectacle, a cultural phenomenon in the making. With a jaw-dropping budget of ₹200 crore, this movie was set to redefine the Indian film landscape. But I wasn't content with it being a blockbuster just for the Indian audience—I had bigger ambitions. This would be India's cinematic gift to the world.

Sitting in the plush conference room of the Arka Media Works headquarters, I had called for a meeting with the marketing and distribution heads. The air was filled with anticipation as everyone waited for me to speak.

"As you all know, Baahubali: The Beginning is not just another movie," I began, standing at the head of the table. "It's a cultural mass movement. And I want the world to witness it. That's why I'm increasing the marketing budget by a substantial margin. This isn't just about breaking records in India—it's about making history globally."

The heads nodded in agreement, but I could see some hesitation in their eyes. Rajamouli, who had been a coach to me in the production world, spoke up.

"Aarav, increasing the budget significantly is a bold move. Are you sure it will yield the returns we're looking for?"

I smiled, leaning forward. "Raja Sir, this movie has everything—an epic story, stunning visuals, and a universal appeal. People from Tokyo to Toronto, Sydney to São Paulo, will connect with it. We're dubbing it in every major language and ensuring it gets a worldwide release on December 21. With Christmas and New Year holidays, it'll dominate the box office for weeks."

Raja nodded thoughtfully. "Alright Let's make it happen."

The marketing campaign that followed was nothing short of monumental. Every major city in the world had billboards featuring the iconic imagery of Baahubali. From Times Square in New York to Shibuya Crossing in Tokyo, the movie's presence was impossible to ignore.

I was hands-on throughout the process, attending meetings with international distributors even organizing fan events in key markets. During one such meeting in Los Angeles with Netflix executives, who were interested in acquiring the streaming rights post-theatrical release, I laid out my vision.

"This isn't just a movie; it's a movement," I explained passionately. "It's the kind of cinema that transcends language and culture. When people see Baahubali, they won't just be watching—they'll be experiencing a story that stays with them forever."

The executives were impressed, and by the end of the meeting, they had agreed to a record-breaking deal for the streaming rights.

As December 21 approached, the excitement was palpable. The advance bookings were unlike anything the Indian film industry had ever seen, with theaters across the world reporting sold-out shows for days.

I made it a point to visit the sets one last time before the premiere to thank the cast and crew personally.

On the grand set of *Mahishmati*, I met Prabhas, Rana Daggubati, and Anushka Shetty, who were rehearsing for the press event.

"Aarav, you've taken this movie to a whole new level," Prabhas said, walking over to shake my hand.

"I just gave it the push it deserved," I replied. "The real credit goes to all of you and the incredible work you've put into bringing this story to life."

Rana Daggubati, who played the formidable Bhallaladeva, joined in. "You've turned it into a global phenomenon, Aarav. People are calling it India's Game of Thrones. How does it feel?"

I smiled. "It feels like we're just getting started. The world hasn't seen anything like this yet from the Indian Cinema."

The premiere night was nothing short of magical. Held in a grand cinema hall in Mumbai, the red carpet was rolled out for the biggest names in Bollywood and beyond. The media swarmed the venue, capturing every moment.

I arrived with S. S. Rajamouli, the visionary director of the film. As we walked the red carpet, reporters bombarded us with questions.

"Aarav, what are your expectations from the film?" one asked.

"I expect it to shatter every record, not just in India but globally," I said confidently.

Another reporter chimed in, "You've made some bold moves with the marketing campaign. Do you think it will pay off?"

I looked directly at the camera and said, "Mark my words—this movie will redefine Indian cinema."

After a week or two in the film business I again shifted to cricket.

After wrapping up the cinematic whirlwind with Baahubali: The Beginning and basking in its monumental success, I returned to my true passion—cricket. I was determined to stay disciplined, focusing on improving my game. Representing Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy once again, I smashed a scintillating 200. The innings was nothing short of spectacular, filled with authoritative drives, precise footwork, and the kind of dominance that left bowlers scratching their heads.

Social media was ablaze with edits and clips of my innings. Videos of my masterclass batting started circulating, with hashtags like #AaravOnFire and #MumbaiMaestro trending. The credit for my growing presence both on and off the field went to my management team—a professional PR agency my mother had thoughtfully hired.

The team worked seamlessly behind the scenes, ensuring I stayed relevant in the business and cricketing worlds. They managed my media appearances, curated content for my social platforms, and even handled sponsorship deals. Every aspect of my image was meticulously crafted, allowing me to focus entirely on my game.

As the new year rolled in, I found myself at the crossroads of cricket and celebrity. It was now January 9th, and I was enjoying a rare day off at home, scrolling through the latest cricket updates. That morning, news broke that Hardik Pandya and KL Rahul had been handed suspensions for a controversial interview.

Social media erupted with opinions, memes, and debates about who might replace them in the Indian ODI squad for the upcoming series against New Zealand. My name was unexpectedly thrown into the mix by fans, former players, and analysts.

"Aarav Pathak is in phenomenal form. A double century in Ranji and incredible consistency—could he be the answer to India's middle-order woes?" one cricket analyst tweeted.

The idea of representing India so soon filled me with excitement and nerves. My phone buzzed incessantly with messages from friends, teammates, and journalists. Even my management team was abuzz.

"Aarav, this could be it," my manager, Rohan, said during a call. "The selectors are going to consider your recent form, and your social media buzz only adds to your case."

I tried to stay calm, but my mind raced at the thought of donning the Indian jersey.

Later that evening, I sat down with my mom to discuss the developments. She had always been my biggest support and guide, and her wisdom was invaluable.

"Aarav, you've worked incredibly hard for this moment," she said, her tone encouraging yet grounded. "But remember, if the call comes, it's just the beginning. Staying in the team is harder than getting into it. Keep your focus, and never take your success for granted."

I nodded, absorbing her words. My mom had always been the voice of reason in my life, and her advice helped me stay grounded amidst the growing hype.

The next few days were a blur of anticipation. The squad announcement for the New Zealand series was scheduled for January 12th, and the cricketing world was buzzing with speculation. I continued my training rigorously, knowing that my performance on the field would ultimately define my career.

Finally, the day arrived. I was at the Mumbai Cricket Association's practice nets, working on my batting, when my phone rang. It was Rohan.

"Aarav, it's official. You've been selected for the ODI squad against New Zealand!"

For a moment, I stood still, letting the news sink in. My heart raced with a mix of joy and disbelief.

"Are you serious?" I asked, my voice trembling with excitement.

"Dead serious. Congratulations, Aarav! This is your moment."

The rest of the day felt like a dream. Teammates congratulated me, and my phone was flooded with calls and messages from well-wishers. Social media erupted with posts celebrating my selection, and #AaravInBlue began trending within hours.

That evening, I sat with my mom and dad to share the news officially.

"You've earned this, Aarav," she said, tears of pride glistening in her eyes.

My dad continued, "But remember, this is just the start. Representing your country is an honor, and it comes with immense responsibility. Always stay humble, work hard, and respect the game."

I hugged them tightly, promising to give it my all.

POV

The moment I received the call confirming my selection for the Indian cricket team, time seemed to stand still. My heart raced, and I felt an overwhelming wave of emotions surge through me—pride, joy, gratitude, and even a touch of disbelief. This wasn't just a call; it was the culmination of years of relentless effort, discipline, and dreams that had been nurtured since I first picked up a cricket bat as a little boy.

At just 18, I was about to represent my country on the international stage. The thought alone brought tears to my eyes. For a fleeting moment, I allowed myself to reflect on the journey that had brought me here—the early mornings spent training in the nets, the sacrifices my parents had made, the highs of century knocks, and the lows of heartbreakingly dismissals. Every run, every wicket, every drop of sweat had led to this moment.

I sat alone in my room for a while, letting the news sink in. My chest swelled with pride, but there was also a deep sense of responsibility. This wasn't just about me; it was about representing 1.2 billion people, about wearing the jersey with honor and making my country proud.

After taking a deep breath, I walked out of my room and found my mom and dad waiting in the living room. The expressions on their faces said it all—they had already heard the news. My mom's eyes were brimming with tears, and my dad's usually stoic face bore the faintest smile of pride.

"I did it," I said, my voice trembling. "I've been selected for the Indian team."

My mom enveloped me in a tight hug, whispering, "We always knew you would. This is just the beginning, Aarav."

My dad, ever the man of few words, placed a hand on my shoulder and said, "You've made us proud, son. But remember, this is where the real work begins."

The next morning, we decided to visit the temple as a family. It was a tradition we had upheld through every milestone of my life. As we drove to the temple, I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of gratitude—for my parents, who had been my pillars of support, for my coaches, who had honed my skills, and for the divine grace that had guided me through it all.

At the temple, I knelt before the deity, folding my hands in prayer. I didn't ask for success; instead, I prayed for the strength to face the challenges ahead, for the discipline to stay grounded, and for the wisdom to handle the pressures of international cricket. My mom lit a diya and placed it at the altar, while my dad stood beside me in silent reflection.

After the prayers, we distributed food to the poor gathered outside the temple. Seeing their smiles as they received the simple meals filled my heart with a profound sense of purpose. It was a reminder that while cricket was my passion, life was about so much more—about giving back, about staying humble, and about being a source of positivity in the world.

As we drove back home, I couldn't stop thinking about what lay ahead. I was about to share a dressing room with legends, players I had idolized growing up. I imagined stepping onto the field wearing the Indian jersey, hearing the national anthem play, and representing the dreams of an entire nation.

But with that dream came an undeniable weight. I was just 18—a young man with aspirations, yes, but also insecurities and doubts. What if I didn't perform? What if I couldn't live up to the expectations?

In that moment, my dad's words came back to me: "Stay balanced, Aarav. Keep your focus on the game and your heart in the right place."

That evening, I sat in my room, staring at the jersey I had worn during my last Ranji match. It wasn't the Indian jersey, but it represented the hard work that had gotten me here. I thought about the countless

hours I had spent on the field, the blisters on my hands, the sweat that had dripped into my eyes, and the sacrifices my family had made.

A tear rolled down my cheek, but it wasn't one of sadness—it was pure joy. I was living the dream of millions of young boys in this cricket-crazy nation. I had climbed one step of the ladder, but I knew there were many more to go.

As I closed my eyes that night, I whispered a silent promise to myself: "This is just the beginning. I'll work harder, stay humble, and honor the privilege of wearing that jersey."

For the first time in my life, I felt like the world had truly opened its arms to me. And I was ready to embrace it with everything I had.

The morning after my selection announcement, I woke up to the sound of my phone buzzing relentlessly. It was a call from the BCCI office, an official reaching out to discuss my jersey number.

"Good morning, Aarav," the voice on the other end said. "We need to finalize your jersey number for the upcoming series. Do you have a preference?"

I paused for a moment, the weight of the decision hitting me. A jersey number isn't just a number; it's an identity, a legacy.

"Number 4," I said confidently. It had always been a number close to my heart—a symbol of balance and strength.

"Number 4 it is," the official replied. "We'll get it printed and ready for the series. Also, please submit your passport to the BCCI office as soon as possible. You'll need it for the travel formalities."

After hanging up, I stared at my phone for a moment, letting the reality of the situation sink in. I was no longer just a cricketer playing for Mumbai. I was now a part of the Indian cricket team. The next chapter of my life was beginning, and I was ready to embrace it with open arms.

I quickly got dressed and made my way to the BCCI office. The atmosphere there was electric, buzzing with energy and anticipation. As I entered the grand building, I was greeted by a few officials who congratulated me warmly.

"Welcome, Aarav," one of them said. "It's good to finally have you here. We've been keeping an eye on your performances, and you've more than earned your spot."

"Thank you," I replied, trying to remain humble despite the surge of pride within me.

After handing over my passport and signing a few necessary documents, I was informed that I'd be meeting the rest of the team at the office the following day. From there, we'd depart for New Zealand.

The thought of finally meeting all my teammates—players I had idolized growing up—made my heart race with excitement. I was particularly eager to spend more time with Virat Kohli, MS Dhoni, and Rohit Sharma.

As I left the BCCI office, I couldn't help but smile. Everything was falling into place, and I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the journey that had brought me here.

That evening, I called my mom to share the details of my day.

"Mom, I finalized my jersey number—Number 4," I said proudly.

"Number 4 suits you, Aarav," she replied, her voice filled with emotion. "It's balanced, just like you. Always remember to keep your head steady, no matter where life takes you."

"I will, Mom," I promised.

As I prepared for the days ahead, I knew this was just the beginning. The road to success was long, but I was ready to walk it with determination, discipline, and unwavering passion for the game.