

Cricket 86

Chapter 86

The moment the ball left my bat for the first six, the adrenaline surged through me like never before. My feet instinctively moved toward Virat bhaiya at the non-striker's end, and I extended my fist. He met it with his own, grinning widely.

"What a shot, man!" he said, his voice filled with both amusement and pride. "First ball, flick for six! Are you trying to show off or what?"

I chuckled nervously, still feeling the rush. "Just trying to stay natural, bhaiya, like you said."

Virat smirked and gave me a light slap on the back. "Natural, huh? If this is you being natural, I can't wait to see what you do when you're fired up!"

As we shared that moment, the ball was being returned from the stands. It reached Trent Boult, who caught it with one hand and rubbed it meticulously on his thigh, inspecting it closely before taking his mark. His face betrayed no emotion, but I could sense he was determined to reclaim control.

I walked back to the crease, adjusting my helmet and taking a deep breath. The noise from the crowd was deafening, but it was also empowering. My eyes darted around the field, scanning the placements. The slip cordon had thinned out, and the fielders on the off-side boundary were positioned deep.

"He's going for a wide yorker," I muttered under my breath, trying to anticipate Boult's plan. I tightened my grip on the bat, tapping it lightly against the ground as I crouched slightly, my eyes fixed on the bowler's hands.

Boult began his run-up, his strides purposeful and measured. My heart thudded in my chest as I tracked the ball leaving his grip. It was wide, just as I had predicted, and aimed at the block hole. My body reacted instinctively—I shuffled across and bent down, preparing for a sweep shot.

The moment my bat connected with the ball, I felt a pang of uncertainty. It didn't hit the sweet spot. My eyes darted upward, following the ball as it climbed into the air.

For a brief, excruciating moment, the stadium seemed to hold its collective breath. The ball hung there, suspended in time, as Glen Phillips, stationed at deep mid-wicket, ran in toward it. My heart raced, and my mind screamed, "Please, no!"

I barely dared to blink as Phillips positioned himself under the ball, his hands cupped and ready. The crowd's roar softened into an anticipatory murmur.

But then, as if carried by destiny itself, the ball cleared his outstretched hands by mere inches, sailing over the boundary rope. The stadium erupted once again, louder and more electrifying than before. My legs felt weak with relief as I stood frozen, trying to process what had just happened.

The commentator's voice rang out, filled with excitement. "Aarav Bharat ka gaurav! What a shot from the debutant! The audacity to play such a stroke against someone like Trent Boult! This young man is fearless!"

Virat bhaiya was grinning from ear to ear, his hands resting on his hips. "Yeh kya tha, Aarav?" he called out, laughing. "Do you have any idea what you just did? A sweep shot for six against Boult? Unbelievable!"

I jogged toward him, unable to suppress my smile. "Honestly, bhaiya, I wasn't sure if it would clear the boundary."

He laughed harder, shaking his head. "Well, it did. And you've just given the crowd a moment they won't forget."

In the stands, the Indian fans were on their feet, waving flags and chanting. The noise was deafening, but it filled me with pride.

Back in the dugout, the reaction was just as enthusiastic. Mahi bhaiya clapped slowly, a knowing smile on his face. Rohit Sharma leaned back in his seat, shaking his head in disbelief.

The coach nodded approvingly.

On the field, Boult was already preparing for the next ball, his expression steely. I took my position at the crease, trying to calm my nerves. The crowd's energy was infectious, but I couldn't let it distract me.

The next ball after my second six was a moment to reset. Boult, visibly more focused, delivered a length ball angling into my pads. I leaned into it but played defensively, letting the ball roll back toward the bowler. It was a dot ball, but it helped me steady myself after the high of the previous shot.

The power play ended soon after, and the field spread out. Ish Sodhi was introduced into the attack, his leg-spin likely meant to challenge our rhythm. Virat bhaiya and I exchanged a quick chat.

"Take your time with him, Aarav," he advised. "Let the ball come to you. No rush."

I nodded, adjusting my gloves. Sodhi's first delivery for me was a well-pitched googly, but I spotted it early and blocked it safely. The next few overs were a mixture of singles, doubles, and the occasional boundary. Virat bhaiya was in complete control, rotating the strike efficiently.

By the 18th over, bowled by Mitchell Santner, Virat bhaiya stood on 49. As Santner delivered a flatter ball, Virat moved back, punching it neatly through the gap at deep mid-wicket. The ball sped toward the boundary, but a diving fielder cut it off, limiting us to a single.

The crowd erupted as Virat raised his bat toward the stands, acknowledging the applause. I joined him at the non-striker's end for a fist bump.

"Fifty up, bhaiya!" I grinned. "You make it look too easy."

Virat smiled back. "The hard work begins now, Aarav. Let's keep building this."

His words fueled me. By the 23rd over, I was nearing my own milestone. Sodhi bowled a slightly short delivery, and I rocked back, pulling it firmly between mid-wicket and square leg. The ball raced to the boundary, taking me to 49.

As the fielders retrieved the ball, I took a moment to soak in the crowd's energy. Sodhi was ready with the next ball—a tossed-up leg-break that invited a drive. I leaned into the shot, timing it perfectly as the ball sped along the ground through the cover region. The boundary signaled my maiden international fifty, and the crowd went wild.

I also took the bat and raised towards the crowd in acknowledgement of there appreciation .

Virat bhaiya walked up to me with a broad smile and patted my back. "Congratulations, Aarav! Just do this and keep following the game Rythm and don't fall for bowlers trick."

I raised my bat toward the stands, my heart pounding with pride. The team in the dugout stood to applaud.

For the next few overs, we continued to build our partnership. Singles and doubles flowed freely, interspersed with the occasional boundary. By the 26th over, Virat bhaiya was on 60, looking as solid as ever.

Then it happened. Sodhi floated a delivery outside off-stump, enticing Virat into a cover drive. The shot was elegant as always, but it wasn't perfectly timed. My eyes followed the ball as it soared into the air, heading toward long-off.

The fielder, stationed at the boundary, sprinted forward. The crowd held its collective breath, the suspense thick enough to cut with a knife. Virat, standing beside me, didn't move, his eyes glued to the fielder's hands.

For a moment, I thought it would clear him. But the fielder (Martin Guptill) leaped forward, diving full stretch, and clasped the ball just inches above the ground.

The stadium erupted, a mix of cheers from the New Zealand fans and groans from the Indian supporters. Virat bhaiya turned and began his walk back to the pavilion, disappointment etched on his face.

Before leaving, he placed a reassuring hand on my shoulder. "It's your time now, Aarav. Carry this forward for the team."

I nodded, determined. Watching Virat bhaiya walk off reminded me of the responsibility on my shoulders. The crowd was still buzzing, the atmosphere electric.

Taking a deep breath, I reset my stance and prepared for the next delivery. This was my moment to shine, and I wasn't going to let it slip away.

As Ambati Rayudu walked to the crease, there was a sense of calm but determined energy. The scoreboard showed India in a tricky position, and Rayudu was here to steady the ship. Bracewell bowled his first delivery to him—a good-length ball outside off. Rayudu adjusted quickly but chose to defend, the sound of bat meeting ball solid but unspectacular. It was a dot ball.

From there, Rayudu and I worked to rotate the strike, squeezing singles and pushing for doubles wherever possible. It was cricket in its simplest form—steady, strategic, and essential. However, Bracewell was relentless. By the time Rayudu faced him again in the 36th over, Bracewell had settled into a rhythm. The ball was full, swinging in ever so slightly. Rayudu went for a flick toward mid-wicket but missed, the stumps lighting up in dramatic fashion.

Rayudu stood there for a moment, staring down at the ground in frustration. He had managed only 12 runs from 37 balls, and it was a tough pill to swallow. As he walked back to the pavilion, I tightened my grip on the bat.

The next man in was Kedar Jadhav. At 5'4", his compact frame stood in stark contrast to my 6'2" build. It was almost comical to see us side by side, but cricket isn't about height; it's about skill and composure. Kedar gave me a nod and tapped his bat against mine.

"Let's take it ball by ball," he said, his tone steady.

We began to rebuild the innings. Kedar, with his quick wrists, managed to find gaps with ease, while I focused on timing my shots, taking calculated risks only when necessary. By the 43rd over, Kedar had reached 38 runs off 38 balls, a vital contribution to the team's effort.

I, on the other hand, was at 98. Every muscle in my body was tense as I prepared to take the strike. The crowd sensed the milestone approaching and grew louder with every passing second. But just as the atmosphere reached a fever pitch, Kedar fell to Trent Boult.

Boult delivered a full delivery, angling it in toward Kedar's stumps. Kedar misjudged the length and went for an aggressive drive, only to see the ball sneak through the gap between bat and pad. The sound of the stumps rattling echoed across the stadium, and Kedar hung his head in disappointment.

As Kedar made his way back, there was a moment of silence before the crowd erupted again. Entering the field was none other than Mahendra Singh Dhoni. The man, the legend, the finisher.

Mahi bhaiya walked up to me and patted my back. "Two runs away," he said with a grin. "Let's make it count."

I nodded, feeling a surge of confidence. Dhoni took strike first and, in true Dhoni fashion, worked the ball toward deep square leg for a quick double. The over ended, and it was my turn again.

Bracewell was ready with the ball. He charged in, his rhythm smooth and his intent clear. The field was set tight, with a few players pushed back to guard against the boundary. I knew I had to focus, to stay calm and play my natural game.

The delivery was full and outside off. My eyes lit up as I saw the opportunity. I leaned into the shot, driving the ball powerfully through the cover region. For a split second, there was silence as everyone watched the ball speed toward the boundary rope. The fielder at deep cover gave chase, diving desperately to cut it off, but it was in vain.

The ball crossed the rope, and the stadium erupted into a deafening roar. I had done it—my maiden international century.

I stood there for a moment, soaking it all in. Then, as the realization hit, I let out a roar of pure joy, punching the air with my fist. My helmet came off, and I raised my bat high, first to the dressing room, where my teammates were on their feet applauding, and then to the crowd, which was going wild.

Virat bhaiya, from the dugout, was clapping furiously, a proud smile on his face. Rohit bhaiya yelled, "That's how you announce yourself, Aarav!"

Meanwhile, the commentators couldn't hold back their excitement. "Aarav is truly Bharat ka Gaurav! What a knock under pressure—an innings of grit, class, and sheer brilliance."

Mahi bhaiya walked up to me with his signature calm smile. "Well played, champ," he said, giving me a firm handshake. "Now, let's finish what we started."

The crowd continued to cheer as the game resumed, but for me, that moment was etched in time.

With the innings winding down, Mahi bhaiya and I found ourselves in complete control of the game. His experience and composure were evident as he masterfully rotated the strike and kept the scoreboard ticking. I, on the other hand, had already crossed my maiden century and was playing with a mix of confidence and caution, ensuring that we capitalized on the foundation laid by the earlier partnerships.

The crowd's energy remained electric, every run greeted with roars and applause. Mahi bhaiya was at his calculative best, picking gaps and taking calculated risks when needed. He smacked a beautiful straight drive for four in the 47th over, the sound of the ball hitting the bat reverberating like music across the stadium.

I kept my focus sharp, working singles and the occasional boundary, pushing our total higher. In the 49th over, with the crowd urging us for a big finish, Mahi bhaiya unleashed a trademark helicopter shot off

Boult's full delivery. The ball soared into the stands, and the cheers from the crowd hit a fever pitch. I couldn't help but grin, marveling at the genius I had the privilege of sharing the crease with.

By the end of the innings, I stood unbeaten at 113, having faced 132 balls. Mahi bhaiya played a crucial role, scoring a quickfire 32 off 23 deliveries, ensuring the team ended with a strong total. Our team finished at 296 for 4, with 12 extras contributing to the scoreboard.

As we began our walk back to the dugout, the stadium erupted in applause, a standing ovation that sent chills down my spine. I paused for a moment just before stepping off the field, turning to raise my bat toward the crowd. It wasn't just a gesture of acknowledgment—it was my way of thanking them for their unwavering support and for being a part of this unforgettable moment.

The crowd responded with even louder cheers. Virat bhaiya and Rohit bhaiya were at the edge of the dugout, clapping enthusiastically and gesturing their approval.

As I sat down, my heart still racing from the adrenaline, Mahi bhaiya patted my shoulder. "You've announced yourself in style today, Aarav," he said with a smile. "Remember this feeling—it's just the beginning."

Amid the laughter and camaraderie, I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of fulfillment. The hard work, the sacrifices, the endless hours of practice—it had all led to this moment.

As we waited for the bowling innings to begin, I sat there in quiet reflection. The sound of the crowd, the warmth of my teammates, and the sheer joy of achieving something I had dreamed of for years—it was a day I would cherish forever.