

Cricket 87

Chapter 87

As the innings came to an end and the players moved to the dressing room, a member of the support staff approached me, saying I had been called for a post-innings interview with Scott Styris and Ian Smith. My heart raced a little; this would be the first time I'd speak on such a big platform after achieving my dream milestone—a debut century. I quickly ran a towel over my face, fixed my jersey, and headed to the pitchside where the interview setup was arranged.

As I approached the stage, the two commentators were already waiting with warm smiles. The crowd near the boundary line erupted into applause as I stepped up.

"Welcome, Aarav! And first of all, congratulations on a sensational debut century!" Scott Styris began, his voice filled with genuine admiration. "A hundred on debut—it doesn't get any better than that, does it?"

I couldn't stop smiling as I adjusted the microphone pinned to my jersey. "Thank you so much, Scott. Honestly, it feels surreal. I've dreamt of this moment since I was a kid, but to actually live it, to hear the cheers of the crowd, it's overwhelming."

Ian Smith chimed in, his trademark enthusiasm lighting up the conversation. "Aarav, you seemed calm and collected out there, but take us through your emotions when you walked out to bat. Facing Trent Boult on debut and hitting consecutive sixes to him isn't exactly an easy task!"

I laughed nervously, recollecting the moment. "To be honest, I was extremely nervous. My palms were sweating, and my heart was racing. But before I walked out, Mahi bhaiya told me to just be natural, and Virat bhaiya at the crease kept telling me to stay calm. That advice really helped me zone in on the moment and play my game. Of course, hitting a six on the very first ball eased a lot of pressure."

Scott leaned forward, clearly intrigued. "That flick for six off Boult—what a shot! The crowd went absolutely wild. Tell us, was that instinct, or did you plan for it?"

I smiled, shaking my head. "It was pure instinct. I saw the ball angling into my pads, and my natural reaction was to flick it. I didn't even realize it was going for six until I heard the roar of the crowd. It was a special feeling, one I'll never forget."

Ian nodded appreciatively. "Speaking of special moments, you received your debut cap from none other than Virat Kohli, arguably the best batsman in the world right now and your captain. What was that like?"

The memory brought a wide grin to my face. "It was incredibly emotional. Virat bhaiya handed me the cap and said some words of encouragement, which I'll cherish forever. To receive my debut cap from someone I've admired growing up, someone who embodies passion and excellence—it was the perfect start to this journey."

Scott smiled. "And you didn't disappoint. A hundred on debut isn't just about skill—it's also about mindset. How did you keep yourself composed through the innings?"

I took a moment to reflect before answering. "I think it comes down to preparation. The domestic circuit in India is highly competitive, and that taught me to handle pressure. But at this level, the crowd, the cameras, and the intensity are on a completely different scale. I kept reminding myself to focus on one ball at a time. Also, having Virat bhaiya at the other end helped immensely. His guidance and confidence in me made a big difference."

Ian leaned back, clearly impressed. "You mentioned the difference in intensity. How else does playing at the international level differ from domestic cricket?"

"The margin for error is so much smaller here," I replied earnestly. "In domestic cricket, you might get away with a mistimed shot or a misjudged delivery. But at this level, bowlers like Boult and Southee don't give you a second chance. Every decision, every movement has to be precise. It's a huge step up, but also a thrilling challenge."

Scott nodded. "And what about the crowd? This Napier crowd gave you a standing ovation for your hundred. How did that feel?"

I exhaled deeply, remembering the moment. "Oh, it gave me goosebumps! When I raised my bat after reaching my century, hearing the cheers and seeing the fans on their feet—it was surreal. I've watched players experience those moments on TV, and to have my own moment like that—it's a dream come true."

Ian chuckled. "Well, you've certainly made a mark. Now, let's talk about the man you were batting with for a significant part of your innings—Virat Kohli. He scored a fluent 60 and anchored the innings beautifully. How was it partnering with him?"

I smiled, recalling our conversations at the crease. "It was amazing. Virat bhaiya is such a calming presence. He reads the game so well and always knows what needs to be done. He kept telling me to play my natural game and not worry about anything else. His positivity is infectious, and it made my job a lot easier."

Scott leaned forward with a playful grin. "Alright, one last question. What's next for Aarav? How do you plan to build on this incredible start?"

I laughed lightly, feeling a mix of excitement and responsibility. "Well, the goal is to stay consistent. One innings doesn't define a career, and I have a lot to learn and improve. I just want to keep contributing to the team in whatever way I can and make the most of every opportunity."

Ian concluded the interview with a warm smile. "Aarav, it's been an absolute pleasure talking to you. Congratulations once again on a phenomenal debut, and we wish you all the best for the future."

"Thank you so much," I replied, my heart full of gratitude.

As I stepped down from the stage and made my way back to the dressing room, I couldn't help but feel an overwhelming sense of fulfillment. The journey had just begun, but this day, this moment, would always hold a special place in my heart. The cheers of the crowd, the warmth of my teammates, and the pride in my family's eyes—all of it reminded me why I fell in love with this game in the first place.

The team gathered in a huddle after the interview, forming a tight circle with Virat bhaiya at the center. His voice, filled with determination and belief, echoed through the group. "Boys, Play your best cricket. No matter what happens, let's stay united and give it everything we've got. Let's win this!" The energy was palpable, and the team roared in agreement before dispersing to take their positions on the field.

Bhuvneshwar Kumar, India's trusted swing bowler, stood at the top of his mark, ball in hand, ready to deliver the first over. The crowd buzzed with anticipation as England's opening pair, Colin Munro and Martin Guptill, took their guard. Bhuvneshwar's first delivery was right on the money—an outswinger that beat Munro's tentative poke. The next few balls followed the same rhythm, tight lines and movement off the pitch, leaving Munro struggling to get bat on ball. The over ended as a maiden, setting the tone for a disciplined start.

From the other end, Mohammed Shami steamed in. His second ball was short, and Guptill, ever the aggressor, latched onto it, pulling it powerfully through mid-wicket for four. The crowd cheered, but Shami didn't flinch. Two balls later, Guptill repeated the act, this time driving a half-volley through the covers. It was a classic Guptill shot—crisp, effortless, and commanding. Shami tightened up after that, conceding no further boundaries, but the damage had been done in the over.

The third over brought Bhuvneshwar back into the attack. This time, his line was straighter, angling into the stumps and cramping Guptill for room. Munro was still struggling at the non-striker's end, visibly frustrated. On the final ball of the over, Bhuvneshwar pitched one fuller, inviting Guptill to go for a big shot. The batsman obliged, attempting to loft it over mid-off. But the ball didn't connect as cleanly as Guptill had hoped, and it soared high into the air toward long-on.

Shikhar Dhawan sprinted backward from mid-on, keeping his eyes on the ball as it descended. The stadium held its collective breath. The ball dipped sharply, and at the last moment, Dhawan dived, clasping the ball safely in his hands. The roar of the crowd erupted, and the Indian players swarmed toward Dhawan in celebration. Guptill was out for 13.

As the team celebrated, something unexpected happened. On his follow-through for the last ball, Bhuvneshwar slipped on the damp surface, landing awkwardly on his left leg. He winced in pain, clutching his calf. The physios rushed onto the field, and after a brief examination, it was clear Bhuvneshwar couldn't continue. He limped off the field, supported by the medics, leaving the team a bowler short.

This was a setback. Losing a bowler of Bhuvneshwar's caliber so early in the innings was a blow to India's plans. But the team quickly regrouped, their resolve stronger than ever.

Into the fray walked Kane Williamson, England's captain and one of the Fab Four of international cricket. The applause from the crowd was respectful, acknowledging the class of the batsman who now took

guard. Calm and composed, Williamson adjusted his gloves, surveyed the field, and got ready to face his first ball.

Shami began the fourth over with precision, targeting the top of off-stump. Williamson, true to his style, defended solidly, his movements compact and assured. The over yielded just four runs, a testament to Shami's discipline and Williamson's respect for the conditions.

Back in the dressing room, my phone buzzed with notifications—messages from friends, family, and fans pouring in after my debut century.

The atmosphere was electric as I stood at the boundary line, watching the game unfold. Out of nowhere, Virat bhaiya approached me, his voice calm yet firm, "Aarav, you're bowling the next over." My heart skipped a beat. Me? Bowling to someone like Kane Williamson? It was a daunting ask. But before I could process the nervous energy building inside me, I nodded. "Yes, bhaiya. I'll do it."

Walking to the bowling mark, I could feel my palms getting sweaty. This was no IPL game. This was the international stage. The stakes were higher, and the opponent was one of the best batsmen in the world. I glanced at Mahi bhaiya behind the stumps. He adjusted the field with his usual calm precision. Then, almost as if reading my thoughts, he pointed toward Shikhar bhaiya at mid-on and gestured for a slight adjustment. I nodded in agreement and moved Shikhar bhaiya a couple of steps forward.

Taking a deep breath, I rubbed the ball against my thigh, trying to channel every ounce of focus into that one delivery. My fingers played with the seam as I visualized the perfect ball.

From the slip cordon, Virat bhaiya watched me intently. His POV:

"I took a risk handing the ball to Aarav. He's a debutant, a raw talent, and this is no small moment. But I've seen what he can do in the IPL. The kid's got a knack for swinging the ball both ways. This situation is difficult without Bhushi, but maybe... just maybe, Aarav can deliver something special."

He saw me adjusting my run-up, the ball shining under the lights. "Come on, Aarav, come on," I shouted to boost his morale.

Aarav started my run-up. My heart pounded, but my focus was razor-sharp. Kane Williamson stood at the crease, his calm demeanor unnerving. As I reached my delivery stride, I released the ball, aiming for a length that could swing.

The ball pitched on a good length and seemed to be swinging away. Kane, with his impeccable technique, moved to leave the ball thinking it would go straight to wicketkeeper. But in an instant, the ball curved sharply back in. The movement was sudden and pronounced, catching Kane off guard. Before he could adjust, the ball zipped past his defense and crashed into the stumps.

The sound of the stumps rattling was like music to my ears. For a moment, I stood frozen, disbelief and elation battling for dominance. Then, the adrenaline kicked in. I pumped my fists and let out a roar, my face a mix of aggression and pure joy. Virat bhaiya, from the slips, had already started sprinting toward me. His excitement mirrored mine as he yelled, "YES, AARAV!"

We met halfway, our high-five echoing amidst the crowd's deafening cheers. Both of us were visibly fired up, our faces reflecting the intensity of the moment. Virat bhaiya gripped my shoulders and shouted over the noise, "What a ball, Aarav! Ben Stokes!"

In his mind, Virat couldn't help but feel a sense of pride. "I see myself in Aarav," he thought. "But this kid... he is even more exceptional. That swing, that control under pressure—it's special."

The rest of the team ran toward us, the excitement contagious. Mahi bhaiya jogged over, a rare smile breaking his usual calm expression. He patted my back, his words simple but powerful, "Good job, Aarav. Keep it up."

As the crowd roared, I took a moment to soak it all in. This was what dreams were made of—taking the wicket of one of the world's best on my debut, under the watchful eyes of legends like Virat and Mahi bhaiya.

As the match drew to a close, the scoreboard painted a victorious picture. New Zealand, despite their resilience, had been bowled out for 203 runs in 47 overs. My figures of 3 wickets for 39 runs in 10 overs were etched on the screen, a testament to one of the most memorable days of my life. Alongside me, Shami picked up 2 crucial wickets in his 9 overs, while Chahal and Kuldeep Yadav spun a web around the batsmen, claiming 3 and 2 wickets respectively. Even Kedar Jadhav chipped in with a few overs, keeping the pressure alive during the middle stages.

The celebrations began the moment the final wicket fell. A sense of triumph swept through the team, and before I could even process it, my teammates surrounded me.

Virat bhaiya was the first to reach me, a broad smile on his face as he patted my back and ruffled my hair with his usual playful aggression. "Brilliant, Aarav! What a debut, yaar!" he exclaimed, his eyes filled with pride. Shikhar bhaiya and Rohit bhaiya followed suit, their joyous laughter echoing around me as they joined in the hair-ruffling ritual. "Welcome to the big leagues, champ!" Shikhar bhaiya said, his grin infectious.

Then came Mahi bhaiya. His calm demeanor was as steady as ever, but his pat on my back and the approving nod he gave me felt like receiving a medal of honor. "Well done, Aarav." he said simply, his words carrying a weight that sent a surge of pride through me.

We laughed, cheered, and celebrated as one team, the unity among us palpable. The crowd in the stands roared, chanting our names, their energy matching ours. I couldn't help but raise my hands toward them, acknowledging their unwavering support.

After the initial celebrations, it was time for the customary handshake with the opposition. The New Zealand players lined up, their sportsmanship shining through despite their loss. As I approached Kane Williamson, he offered a warm smile and extended his hand. "Good bowling, champ. That was a beauty of a delivery to get me out," he said with genuine admiration.

I quickly shook his hand, my voice almost stumbling over itself as I replied, "Thank you, Kane. It means a lot coming from you."

The brief interaction left me feeling as though I was walking on air. To be acknowledged by one of the finest captains and batsmen in the world on my debut—it was surreal.

The rest of the New Zealand players also congratulated me warmly, their handshakes firm and their words encouraging. Each interaction reminded me of how special this moment was and how much effort and perseverance had led me here.

As we wrapped up the handshakes and walked off the field, I glanced around one last time, taking in the scene—the cheering fans, the victorious Indian team, and the proud faces of my mentors and teammates. This wasn't just a victory for the team; it was the beginning of a new chapter in my journey.

As we made our way back to the dressing room, Virat bhaiya slung his arm around my shoulder. "Aarav," he said, his voice filled with excitement, "this is just the beginning. Enjoy the moment, but remember—many more such days are waiting for you. Keep working hard, and trust me, the world will be watching you."

I nodded, a wide smile on my face as the realization of the day's events began to sink in. It was a day that would remain etched in my memory forever—a day when dreams turned into reality.