

Cricket 94

Chapter 94

The hum of the airplane engines filled my ears as I gazed out of the window at the clouds passing by beneath us. I was on my way to Bangalore for the next season of the IPL. The date on my watch read March 10, and in just a day's time, I would be joining the Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) camp. The excitement bubbling inside me was hard to contain.

My mind drifted back to the previous month—the Ranji Trophy final between Mumbai and Kerala at the Krishnagiri Stadium, Wayanad, Kerala. The memories of that match were still fresh, like a highlight reel playing on repeat in my head.

Kerala had batted first, struggling against our pace attack and crumbling for a mere 106 runs. I had bowled my heart out, picking up 7 wickets in 12 overs, conceding 48 runs with an economy of 4.00. Every delivery had felt like it was meant to take a wicket. The pitch had some bounce, but my rhythm was perfect—outswingers, inswingers, and the occasional short ball that made the batsmen fumble and sudden increase in ball speed helped me even more.

When I finally got my seventh wicket, trapping their last batsman with a beautiful inswinging yorker, the roar of the Mumbai crowd echoed through the stadium. My teammates rushed to me, patting my back.

"Aarav, yaar! You're unstoppable!" Suryakumar Yadav had grinned as we walked back to the pavilion.

I simply smiled. I wasn't done yet.

When it was our turn to bat, the wicket wasn't easy. The Kerala bowlers put up a good fight, but I was in a zone. I played every ball on its merit, rotating the strike when needed and attacking loose deliveries with precision. After what felt like an eternity, I reached my century—101 runs in 167 balls. Raising my bat to the crowd, I let the moment sink in.

The final Mumbai score stood at 234, a solid lead, but not completely out of Kerala's reach.

On the field again, I knew we needed quick breakthroughs. And I delivered. The second innings was even better than the first; I took 5 wickets in 10.5 overs, and Kerala was bundled out for just 91 runs.

The victory was emphatic, and when the final wicket fell, the stadium erupted. I was awarded Player of the Match, holding the trophy high with pride. My teammates celebrated, the photographers clicked away, and my phone buzzed non-stop with congratulatory messages from friends, family, and even some international cricketers.

After the celebrations died down, I decided to take a much-needed break—spending time with my family in Mumbai, unwinding from the intense grind of the Ranji season. But the break was short-lived.

A week ago, an message popped into my inbox from RCB Management Department.

Subject: RCB IPL Camp - March 11 Onwards

"Dear Aarav, you are requested to report to the Royal Challengers Bangalore training camp around March 11, 2019. The first match is scheduled against Chennai Super Kings on March 23. We look forward to having you on board. Regards, RCB Management."

Seeing that message had set my heart racing again. IPL season. The biggest stage.

And now, here I was, flying to Bangalore, ready to take on a new challenge.

As the plane touched down at Kempe Gowda International Airport in Bangalore, I leaned back in my seat, taking a deep breath. I was officially in the heart of RCB territory. The city known for its passionate cricket fans, bustling streets, and now, my next big challenge—the IPL 2019 season.

I grabbed my backpack from the overhead compartment, put on my sunglasses, and stepped off the plane. The moment I set foot inside the arrival terminal, a wave of excited voices hit me.

"Aarav! Aarav Pathak!"

I turned to see a group of people rushing towards me, their eyes wide with excitement. Before I could process it, more fans gathered, phones out, smiles beaming.

"Sir, one selfie, please!" a teenager pleaded, his hands trembling with excitement.

I smiled and nodded, taking a quick selfie with him. That single click opened the floodgates. Suddenly, I was surrounded by people, eager for a picture, an autograph—anything. Security personnel nearby quickly stepped in, but I gestured to let the fans come closer.

The enthusiasm of RCB fans was on another level. They chanted, "RCB! RCB! RCB!" as if we had already won the trophy.

A middle-aged man wearing an RCB jersey patted me on the back. "This year, you're going to bring the cup home, right, Aarav?"

I chuckled. "We'll give it our best shot, sir."

A young girl, barely ten years old, shyly approached me with a small notebook in her hand. "Can I have your autograph, please?" she asked softly.

I kneeled down, took the pen, and scribbled my signature, adding, Keep smiling and chasing your dreams.

Her eyes lit up. "Thank you so much!"

A nearby news reporter took the opportunity to shove a mic toward me.

"Aarav, how does it feel to receive such a warm welcome in Bangalore?" she asked.

I adjusted my sunglasses and replied, "It feels amazing! The love and energy from RCB fans are unreal. I'm really looking forward to this season."

After signing a few more autographs and clicking countless selfies, my phone buzzed with a message from the RCB team manager.

"Car waiting outside, please proceed to the exit soon."

I waved to the fans. "Thanks, everyone! See you at Chinnaswamy!"

As I walked towards the exit, chants of "AARAV! AARAV!" echoed behind me. It felt surreal—just a year ago, I was watching IPL matches as a fan, and now, I was a part of it.

Once outside, the chauffeur stood by a gleaming black Range Rover, holding the door open for me. As I slipped inside, the noise of the crowd faded into the background. I let out a sigh and leaned back.

"Excited, sir?" the driver asked with a grin as he maneuvered through the traffic.

"Very," I said, gazing out at the Bangalore skyline.

My phone buzzed again—this time, a message from my dad.

Dad: Landed??

I smiled and typed back:

Me: Yeah.

His reply came almost instantly.

Dad: Best Of Luck for future Games!

I put my phone aside, staring at the passing streets, mentally preparing for the days ahead.

The team hotel was a luxurious 5-star property in the heart of the city, and the moment I stepped in, I was greeted by the RCB staff.

"Welcome, Aarav!" the team manager smiled warmly. "Hope the crowd outside didn't overwhelm you!"

"Not at all, sir. It was incredible," I replied.

"Good. Get some rest today. Training starts tomorrow at 8 AM sharp."

I headed to my room—a lavish suite with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the city. I tossed my luggage onto the bed and stood by the window, taking in the breathtaking view of Bangalore's skyline.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door.

I opened it to find Virat Kohli standing there with a casual smile.

"Mind if I come in?" he asked.

"Of course, bhaiya!" I stepped aside, still in awe every time I saw him.

He walked in, glanced around the room, and sat down on the couch. "So, how's after vacation cricket suiting you?"

"Incredible, and Cricket even after vacation is love for me" I replied honestly. " And the welcome at the airport was overwhelming."

He chuckled. "Bangalore fans are something else. You'll get used to it."

We sat for a while, chatting about daily life's and what to expect in the upcoming days. Before leaving, Virat looked at me and said, "Enjoy the Game Champ!"

"Sure Bhaiya 🤝," I said.

"Get some rest," he said with a grin before walking out.

Later that evening, I scrolled through my social media. My Instagram was flooded with tags and messages from fans.

@rcbfanclub: Aarav Pathak landed in Bangalore! This season is going to be legendary!

@cricketlover23: Aarav, please win the IPL for us! We believe in you!

{But we only believe in Jassi Bhai}

I replied to a few, thanking them for their support. Just as I was about to put my phone down, a notification popped up.

"RCB Practice Schedule for March 11"

I opened it to see the rigorous training plan ahead—batting drills, fitness sessions, media interactions, and tactical meetings. I smiled.

Time to get serious.

We had a team Meet in evening before dinner then after meeting we all players interacted with each other and get to know each other.

The next morning, I walked onto the practice ground wearing my RCB training kit. The sight of Chinnaswamy Stadium in the morning sun was something else. The empty stands, the lush green outfield, and the smell of freshly cut grass—it felt magical.

As I jogged around the field, I noticed Shimron Hetmyer and Heinrich Klaasen engaged in a playful banter.

"Hey, Aarav!" Klassen called out. "First day for the team Practice!"

I laughed. "Yeah! I am Just Super Excited for this."

Maxwell smirked. "Everyone is!"

"Yeah!," I replied with a grin.

Training was intense but fulfilling. I spent hours working on my batting, perfecting my pull shots, and focusing on my fitness. The coaches pushed us hard, but I loved every moment of it.

Later, during the team huddle, our coach spoke, "Boys, this year, we play for the trophy, our aim is IPL 2019."

Everyone cheered, and I felt a surge of motivation.

As we wrapped up for the day, Virat came up to me again. "Good work today."

"Thanks, bhaiya," I said, wiping the sweat off my forehead.

Walking back to my hotel room, I couldn't help but smile. T

That night, as I lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, I thought about everything that had led me to this moment—my struggles, my hard work, and my dreams.

With a deep breath, I closed my eyes, knowing that tomorrow would bring another opportunity to prove myself.

After some days of Training session, we had our first match today in the evening and we are currently at our hotel and Virat Bhaiya was standing at front of us and everyone including players, management staff and all the coaches were sitting surrounding him, like students sitting and Vrat bhaiya as a teacher addressing everyone.

He started with, "The IPL Campaign had started, and we had our first match today evening and I hope we could start it positively, now coming back to topic, the playing 11 for today's match is: - ,"

"Me i.e. Virat Kohli (c),

Parthiv Patel,

Aarav Pathak (Aarav had a big smile on his face.)

AB (WK) → □ ,

Shimron Hetmyer → □ ,

Klassen → □ ,

Washington Sundar,

Tim Southee → □

Yuzvendra Chahal,

Umesh Yadav,

Mohammed Siraj"

And we just received the message that Dale Steyn would be joining us before the second match, so don't worry we would have Steyn with us to booster our bowling attack.