

Cricket 98

Chapter 98

The air at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad was electric. The sea of orange, the Sunrisers Hyderabad fans, roared in excitement as David Warner and Jonny Bairstow took their positions to open the innings.

Virat Bhaiya walked towards me and the team, clapping his hands. "Alright, focus! We need early wickets! Stay disciplined, bowl tight lines, and let's not give them any freebies."

I nodded, taking a deep breath. This was one of the best opening pairs in the tournament and stopping them early was crucial.

The first over was handed to Me. I steamed in and bowled a perfect outswinger to Bairstow, who left it with ease. The next ball was short, and whack—pulled for four.

From the first ball, it was clear. The pitch was a batting paradise.

The Hyderabad crowd roared louder as Warner and Bairstow started accelerating. Our pacers—Me, Tim, Dale and even Chahal—were all struggling to find the right length.

Then in the 7th over, Virat handed me the ball again.

I walked up, adjusting my wrist band, feeling the sweat trickle down my forehead.

First ball—full and swinging in. Warner flicked it effortlessly for two.

Second ball—back of a length, angling away. Crack! He cut it past point for four.

The sound of the ball meeting the bat was crisp. Warner was seeing it like a football.

I gritted my teeth, determined to not let them take me apart. I changed my strategy—slower ones, wide yorkers, mixing the pace. I controlled the run flow, but wickets were nowhere to be seen.

Virat Bhaiya patted my back. "Good bowling. Keep it tight."

But the rest of our bowling lineup was getting massacred.

Bairstow was playing fearlessly. Every delivery that was slightly short—pulled for six. Anything too full—driven through the gaps.

By the 15th over, they were 180/0.

"Unbelievable," Klassen muttered from the slips.

Our heads were down. The crowd was wild. It felt like a nightmare.

Then in the 18th over, I finally got my moment.

I ran in, gripping the ball tightly. Focus. One breakthrough can change momentum.

Bairstow was on 114.

I bowled a deceptive slower ball, right at his pads. He went for a big slog sweep, but the ball dipped unexpectedly—missed the middle of the bat—top edge!

It went high, soaring towards the deep midwicket boundary.

AB de Villiers called for it. The entire stadium held its breath.

Thud!

Caught.

Finally, a wicket.

I let out a roar, pumping my fist. The dugout cheered, but our celebration was muted. Because despite this breakthrough, we had already been destroyed.

By the end of 20 overs, Sunrisers Hyderabad had posted 231/1.

David Warner remained unbeaten on 100, and it was a total carnage.

Chasing 231 was never going to be easy, but we believed in our lineup.

Virat Bhaiya and Parthiv walked in, but...

First over. Boom.

Virat Bhaiya tried to flick Bhuvneshwar Kumar but edged it straight to the keeper.

Silence in our dressing room.

We lost our biggest hope in the very first over.

The wickets kept tumbling.

ABD—gone. Parthiv Patel—gone. Pawan Negi—gone.

By the time I played my 6th ball, we were 35/5 in 7 overs.

The game was already lost, but I kept my hope High to do something Miracle.

I took a deep breath, gripping my bat. I could hear the Hyderabad fans chanting, mocking our collapse.

At the other end was Heinrich Klaasen. He looked at me, nodding. "We both had a talk regarding to stabilize the inning and even we loss the runs different should not be much more, to maintain the Run-Rate."

I nodded. And for the next few overs, we just swung our bats.

I played aggressively, hitting boundaries wherever possible. There was no pressure, only frustration.

One over, I stepped out and lofted Rashid Khan over long-on. A clean, satisfying six.

In another, I pulled a short ball from Sandeep Sharma for four.

I wasn't playing for victory anymore. I was playing for pride.

Klaasen tried supporting me, but he fell soon after. And from there, the famous RCB collapse resumed.

In the 16th over, I was the last wicket to fall.

Trying to flick a ball towards deep square, I mistimed it, and the fielder took an easy catch.

I had scored 42 runs, but it meant nothing.

The scoreboard read:

RCB all out for 113.

We lost by 118 runs.

A humiliating defeat.

As I walked back, I could feel my heartbeat pounding in my chest. My fists were clenched.

The dugout was silent.

No one was talking.

No one was making eye contact.

I threw my helmet on the bench and sat down, breathing heavily.

The commentators were talking about our embarrassing loss.

I could hear the fans booing.

The frustration was unbearable.

And then, I saw Dale Steyn sitting there, clutching his shoulder and ankle.

Injured.

I lost it.

I stood up and punched the dugout wall—hard.

The pain shot through my knuckles, but I didn't care.

"Damn it!" I shouted.

Virat Bhaiya turned to me. "Aarav—"

"I can't stand this!" I growled. "We were destroyed out there. We didn't even fight! I—" I clenched my fists, breathing heavily.

Then I Just left because the dugout, I was feeling extremely angry as this was the first loss I faced with this much humiliation. For me a player with system, many skills, I feel like I should have made a difference and winning was not possible for me alone, but I could reduce the runs difference to reduce this humiliation and stop this booing and all.

Time Skip

The dressing room was silent. The weight of four consecutive losses hung in the air like a thick fog. No one dared to speak, not even Virat Bhaiya. We had just lost against Rajasthan Royals, Kolkata Knight Riders, and Delhi Capitals. Three more defeats—back to back.

And the worst part?

Dale Steyn and Tim Southee—our two main pacers—were now ruled out of the tournament. Injuries had taken them away, leaving our already weak bowling attack in shambles.

I clenched my fists, my nails digging into my palm. Not even a single win.

Not one.

We were dead last in the points table. The only team yet to register a victory.

Every time we stepped onto the field, we fought hard. I had given my best in every match. I had scored 30s, 40s, taken 1-3 wickets every game. And yet, we lost. Again and again.

The frustration inside me had built up like a volcano ready to erupt. As soon as I entered the dressing room, I picked up my gloves and threw them against the wall.

"Damn it!" I shouted.

Everyone turned to look at me, but no one said anything. They were all just as frustrated.

I sat down on the bench, my hands covering my face.

This was the first time in my life I had experienced loss after loss after loss. The feeling of failure was unbearable.

The management had tried to console us. The coaches had told us to keep our heads up. But what good was that?

We were at rock bottom.

And now, it was all down to one match.

Our next game was against Punjab Kings in Mohali.

A do-or-die match.

If we lost this one, we were out of IPL 2019.

I lifted my head, my eyes burning with determination. No more losses.

I was done with this.

I was done with losing.

We had to win. At any cost.

I knew one thing—this was it.

We had to win. At any cost.

I was determined. No more losses. No more excuses.

This was war.

The world had turned against us.

Social media was flooded with memes mocking RCB.

"RCB should change their name to 'Royal Challengers Bottom' this season."

"The only team without a single win. Should they even be in IPL?"

Even some opposition players, in their press conferences, made subtle jabs at our poor form.

Fans, who once stood by us, were now trolling us.

It was painful to watch. But I didn't blame them.

How could I?

We had failed them.

We had lost every match. Our bowling was weak, our batting was inconsistent, and we just couldn't find a way to win.

And now, we were up against Punjab Kings in Mohali.

A do-or-die match.

Lose this one, and RCB was officially out of IPL.

No more chances. No more second tries.

It was now or never.

MATCH DAY – MOHALI

The atmosphere in the stadium was electric. Fans from both sides filled the stands, waving banners and shouting chants.

The Punjab Kings fans were loud and confident, while RCB fans were desperate for a miracle.

As we walked out for the toss, I could feel the stares, the murmurs, the silent mockery.

The moment was tense.

Virat Bhaiya stood at the center with Ravichandran Ashwin, Punjab's captain. The referee tossed the coin.

"Heads," Ashwin called.

The coin landed.

"It's heads. Punjab Kings win the toss and elect to bowl first!"

The crowd erupted in cheers.

We had to bat first.

Virat Bhaiya nodded, his face unreadable, then turned towards the dugout.

I saw the look in his eyes.

Determination. Fire. Anger.

He wasn't here to lose. None of us were.

Parthiv Patel and Virat Bhaiya stood up, grabbing their bats. They jogged towards the field, their focus unshaken.

This was it.

Our last chance to prove everyone wrong.

Match Time Do-or-Die Match For RCB.

The air was thick with tension as Mohammed Shami ran in with the new ball.

Virat Bhaiya, standing tall at the crease, waited for the delivery.

It was a full-length ball, slightly outside off.

Virat Bhaiya leaned into the shot, his bat gliding smoothly through the line.

The crowd roared.

The ball pierced through the gap between extra cover and mid-off.

"What a shot! Pure class from Virat Kohli! Run Machine Special!" the commentator roared.

The ball raced to the boundary.

FOUR!

A perfect cover drive.

The fans erupted, waving RCB flags in the stands.

Virat Bhaiya didn't celebrate.

No fist pumps. No loud cheers.

Just a nod, a deep breath, and a quick single on the next ball to rotate the strike.

He wasn't here to enjoy the moment.

He was here to win.

Now, Parthiv Patel was on strike.

But something felt off.

His footwork looked shaky, his shots lacked conviction.

And in the fourth over, Ravi Ashwin saw his chance.

Ashwin tossed the ball up, sensing Parthiv's nervousness.

Parthiv took the bait.

He stepped forward, aiming for a lofted shot over long-off.

The ball stopped on him, and he completely mistimed it.

"Up in the air... is there a fielder?!" the commentator shouted.

Mayank Agarwal was underneath it, eyes locked on the ball.

He settled under it, calm and composed.

The ball landed safely in his hands.

"OUT! Parthiv Patel is gone!"

The Punjab Kings (Kings XI Punjab) fans erupted in joy.

The RCB dugout fell silent.

Parthiv, clearly frustrated, looked at his bat, then shook his head and walked back, scoring 19 off 9 balls.

AARAV ENTERS THE GROUND

I took a deep breath, adjusted my gloves, and stepped onto the field.

As I walked toward the crease, the stadium exploded with noise.

"AARAV! AARAV! AARAV!"

A loud roar from the RCB fans.

I felt the energy, the passion, the expectation.

It wasn't just the Bengaluru crowd that loved me anymore.

All of India was watching.

I gripped my bat tighter, my eyes locked onto Ashwin.

He had just taken a wicket, his confidence was high, but I wasn't here to play safe.

I was here to dominate.

I reached the crease and tapped my bat against the pitch.

Virat Bhaiya walked towards me.

"Take your time. Get set. Then go all in."

I nodded.

I wasn't going to hold back.

The predator was ready to hunt. And I am The Predator Here!