

Ronaldo creates one problem, solves 100, says Sarri

REUTERS
JANUARY 20

CRISTIANO RONALDO sometimes appears to create more problems than he solves but, after another match-winning performance on Sunday, Juventus coach Maurizio Sarri was convinced the latter is true, even if the talisman is not always easy to accommodate.

The 34-year-old has shaken off the knee problems which have bugged him early in the season and on Sunday hit the target for a remarkable seventh Serie A game running as he scored both goals in Juve's 2-1 win over Parma.

His tally now stands at 16 league goals for the season including 11 in the last seven games and he has helped take Juventus four points clear at the top of Serie A as they chase a ninth successive title. It was enough for Sarri to quell the doubt that has often been raised about the five-times World Player of the Year: is he worth the trouble of organising the team around him? "Sometimes, Ronaldo creates a small problem because you know you have a champion in the team and it has to be set up around him but at the same time it solves 100 of them," said the chain-smoking coach.

"You just have to be clear that everything revolves around him." There have been murmurs that Juventus have looked better this season on the few occasions that the Portuguese forward has been absent and the partnership between Argentina pair Gonzalo Higuain and Paulo Dybala has flourished without him.

The two were certainly on form when, without Ronaldo, Juventus thrashed Udinese 4-0 in the Coppa Italia in midweek, combining superbly with three successive one-two to set up the opening goal for Higuain.

For all his titles and incomparable statistics, Ronaldo sometimes appears to have an overbearing presence on a team, displaying a body language that often suggests impatience with less gifted and less experienced team mates. He also insists on taking every penalty and free kick despite a remarkably poor success rate from the latter. According to the website Transfermarkt, he has yet to score from a free kick in his one-and-a-half seasons with Juventus. Ronaldo did certainly not look happy earlier in the season when he was substituted in the 55th minute of the match against AC Milan and reacted by giving Sarri a dirty look as he walked straight down the tunnel.

But Sarri said that was all in the past.

"He's succeeded in recovering from the aches and pains and he has been able to train consistently," said Sarri. "He is in brilliant form physically. I think it's a matter of physical condition and mental condition. The fact that he is scoring repeatedly means that his self-confidence is at its best right now. He is an animal who feeds off goals."

Messi gives new coach debut win

Barcelona: Barcelona may have a new coach but Lionel Messi remains their unquestionable talisman after guiding the Spanish champions to a nervy 1-0 win at home to Granada in La Liga on Sunday in Quique Setien's first game in charge of the club. The Argentine struck the only goal in the 76th minute, firing into the bottom corner to complete a well crafted team move shortly after the visitors had defender German Sanchez sent off.

"Messi did what he has done his entire life," said Setien of Barca's all-time top scorer, who proved the difference on a blustery evening at Camp Nou. "He has done this so many times in games like this, games when you cannot find a way through, things aren't going for you and you are lacking inspiration, but he always conjures up something special. The win took Barca back to the top of La Liga on 43 points after 20 games.

Coco eclipses Venus again

15-year-old American now owns two Grand Slam wins over former World No. 1; Djokovic, Barty advance

HOWARD FENDRICH
MELBOURNE, JANUARY 20

EVERYONE HAD the same question when the Australian Open draw was revealed: What were the odds that Coco Gauff and Venus Williams would face each other again in the first round at a Grand Slam tournament?

"I was a bit shocked," Gauff said, "I'm sure everyone was a bit shocked."

Gauff, 15, played Williams, 39, to begin her first appearance in the main draw at Melbourne Park, just like they matched up to start things off at Wimbledon about six months ago. And, just like at the All England Club, the youngest woman in the field got the better of the oldest woman in the field, with Gauff beating Williams 7-6(5), 6-3 on Monday.

"I definitely was more confident this time. I think I was used to playing on big courts, so the crowd — I guess the size of the crowd didn't startle me as much as last time," Gauff said. "Definitely a bit more positive coming into this match."

It was the most anticipated contest of Day 1 at the first major tennis tournament of the decade, and it did not disappoint. The first set, in particular, was intriguing, with Gauff repeatedly pulling ahead, only to have Williams — who already had won four of her seven Grand Slam singles trophies by the time her foe was born — rebut her.

It wasn't until her fourth set point that Gauff finally pulled it out. She quickly grabbed a 3-0 lead in the second and never let that edge go.

Gauff already has demonstrated all sorts of terrific qualities on a tennis court, from her big, gutsy serves to an ability to track down opponents' shots. Now you can add stick-to-it-iveness to the list.

Gauff beamed Monday while discussing a dance routine she did with Serena Williams that went viral on social media.

There were laughs about her love of TikTok and her self-deprecating discussion of a propensity for procrastination when it comes to schoolwork. She is, after all, still just a 15-year-old. One with lofty goals, though.

"I mean, my mission is to be the greatest. That's my goal, to win as many Grand Slams as possible. But for today, my mission was to win," said Gauff, whose good friend and doubles partner, 18-year-old American qualifier Caty McNally, upset 2011 U.S. Open champion Sam Stosur of Australia 6-1, 6-4 at night.

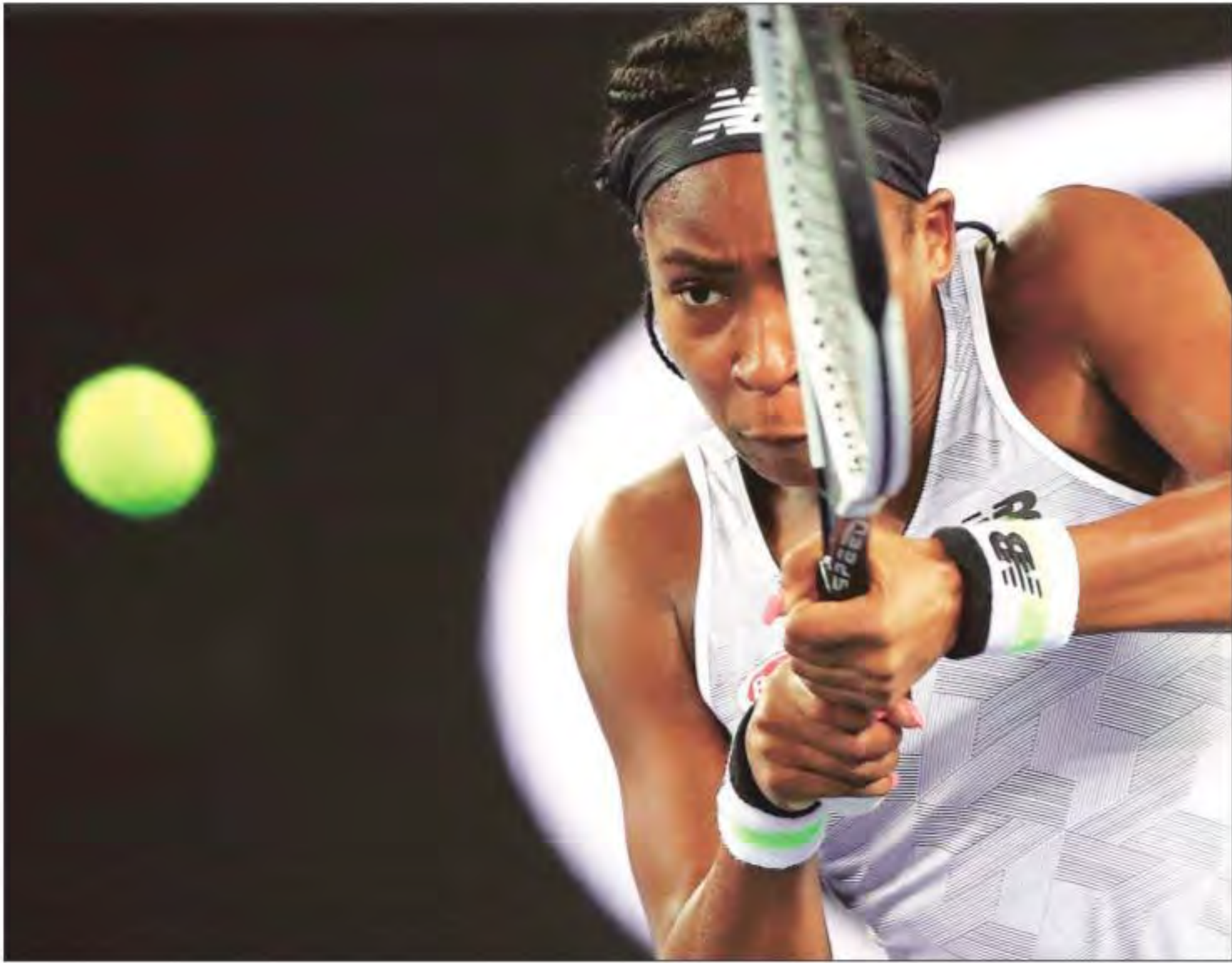
Another past champion at Flushing Meadows, Sloane Stephens, bowed out, too, beaten by Zhang Shuai 2-6, 7-5, 6-2.

Earlier, Gauff and Venus Williams combined for far more unforced errors, 71, than winners, 42. One key was that Williams ended up with 41 of those miscues, 11 more than Gauff. Another was that Williams, long one of the most feared servers on tour, was outdone in that category by her opponent on this day. Not only did Gauff face only two break points, saving one, but she often came up with the goods at the most crucial moments, pounding an ace at 115 mph, say, or hitting a risky second serve at a high velocity to the perfect spot to draw a no-good return.

All the while, Gauff was not shy about celebrating the biggest of points with a loud "Come on!" and a series of fist pumps.

Otherwise, she had her game face on, betraying little emotion, including when she walked out onto the court with earbuds in place after getting a pre-match peck on the cheek from her father, Corey, who also serves as Gauff's coach. Gauff is ranked 67th, and Williams, a former No. 1, is 55th. Williams was playing in a Grand Slam tournament's main draw for the 85th time, a record for the professional era, but this also was her first match of 2020, because of a hip injury that sidelined her at the start of January. This is Gauff's third major, but she sure is precocious.

"She clearly wants it and works very hard and is extremely mature for her age," Williams said. "The sky's the limit for her." **AP**



Teenager Coco Gauff, who stunned fellow American Venus Williams in the first round of Wimbledon last year, produced another superb performance to beat the 39-year-old seven-times Grand Slam winner 7-6(5) 6-3. *Reuters*

Federer, Serena duck downpours

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MELBOURNE, JANUARY 20

SERENA WILLIAMS and Roger Federer avoided chaos caused by rain at the Australian Open on Monday as heavy downpours forced organisers to postpone a swathe of matches on the first day. After a build-up disrupted by smoke from deadly wildfires, a prolonged rain storm struck in mid-afternoon, sending thousands of spectators scurrying for cover.

While play continued at the three stadiums with retractable roofs, 17 of the 64 scheduled matches were postponed, ensuring a big backlog for Tuesday. Wet conditions are unusual for the Australian Open, which is more used to extreme heat and was plagued by smog from bushfires during qualifying, when players suffered coughing fits and breathing problems. Air quality was rated 'good' as the first round started on Monday but about four hours later play was suspended on outside courts when the heavens opened in Melbourne.

World number three Federer was briefly hauled off court while the roof was closed on Rod Laver Arena before returning to complete a routine 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 victory over American Steve Johnson. Williams, on the hunt for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title, won the first set against Anastasia Potapova in just 19 minutes as she cruised to a 6-0, 6-3 win in less than an hour. "I feel like I can still improve and get better throughout this tournament, for sure. This is a good stepping stone for right now," Williams said.

Defending champion Naomi Osaka was done well before the downpour as she dismissed Marie Bouzkova of the Czech Republic 6-2, 6-4 in 80 minutes, smashing one powerful serve that broke a net fastening. "It was really tough for me trying to control my nerves," said Osaka. "It's tough to play someone you've



While play continued at the three stadiums with retractable roofs, 17 of the 64 scheduled matches were postponed. *Reuters*

never played before in the first round of a Grand Slam."

Djokovic digs deep

Second seed Novak Djokovic was forced to work hard by Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff in his first match before prevailing 7-6(5) 6-2 2-6 6-1 to stay on course for a record-extending eighth title at Melbourne Park. Playing against an opponent he defeated both times in straight sets in the past, Djokovic lost his serve four times in the match on Rod Laver Arena, where he beat Rafa Nadal in last year's final to pick up a seventh Australian Open title. The 32-year-old, however, managed to play at a different gear and in the end appeared in control of the match against the big-serving German.

"Overall it was a really solid start, especially

in the second and the fourth set I played on a higher level. (I) served pretty good, lots of aces, high percentage of first serves in," Djokovic told reporters. "I felt kind of in control of the match. Even when I lost the third set I just felt like 'if I am on the right level, I have the upper hand.' I ended this match in a good fashion, in a right way and this is very positive."

In the evening session on the covered centre court, Australian world number one Ashleigh Barty recovered from a set down to beat Lesia Tsurenko 5-7, 6-1, 6-1. In the men's draw, Greek sixth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, who beat Federer en route to last year's semis, beat Salvatore Caruso 6-0, 6-2, 6-3. Player anger over smog dominated the final days before the tournament, which is taking place after bushfires ravaged large parts of Australia.

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM
THE INDIAN EXPRESS, TUESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2020

I'm just Olympia's mum: Serena

Serena Williams blitzed the first set in 19 minutes as she launched her quest for a 24th Grand Slam title with a quickfire demolition of Anastasia Potapova 6-0, 6-3. Williams comes into Melbourne in ominous form after breaking her three-year title drought with victory in Auckland — her first since becoming a mother to daughter Olympia. Olympia was there to see her mother win the title last week, but Williams said after easing to victory over the 18-year-old Potapova: "It was really special for me (Olympia) and her — I hope for her." But the American legend, speaking to an adoring crowd at the 15,000-capacity Rod Laver Arena, admitted that Olympia "just cares about Play-Doh". "I try to tell her I'm someone, you know," she joked. "(But) I am just known about town as Olympia's mum — I love that." **AFP**

'Are you big mad or little mad?'

Defending champion Naomi Osaka fired back at a social media user who jeered her arrival on court before her 6-2 6-4 victory over Czech Republic's Marie Bouzkova first round. The 22-year-old from Japan, who admitted to some nerves entering the tournament as defending champion, was less than impressed with one social media user who wrote "Booooooo" on the event's official Twitter page as it announced the match was about to start. Osaka responded after the match with a tweet of her own, asking, "are you big mad or little mad?", then told reporters she could not understand why someone would attack her for no apparent reason. "She was hating. What would her children think? You're just going to come on the Internet and boo me for no reason? I didn't do anything to you," Osaka said. "She was very upset. I also wonder, people like this, if they see you in person, I wonder what they would do?" **REUTERS**



A powerful serve from Osaka broke a net fastening on Monday.

KEY RESULTS

Men's first round: No. 2 N Djokovic beat Jan-Lennard Struff 7-6(5), 6-2, 2-6, 6-1; No. 3 R Federer beat S Johnson 6-3, 6-2, 6-2; No. 6 S Tsitsipas beat S Caruso 6-0, 6-2, 6-3; No. 8 M Berrettini beat A Harris 6-3, 6-1, 6-3; M Fucsovics beat No. 13 D Shapovalov 6-3, 6-7 (7), 6-1, 7-6(3)

Women's first round: No. 1 A Barty beat L Tsurenko 5-7, 6-1, 6-1; No. 3 N Osaka beat M Bouzkova 6-2, 6-4; No. 7 P Kvitova beat K Siniakova 6-1, 6-0; No. 8 S Williams beat A Potapova 6-0, 6-3; C Gauff beat V Williams 7-6(5), 6-3; C Wozniacki beat K Ahn 6-1, 6-3; Z Shuai beat No. 24 S Stephens 2-6, 7-5, 6-2.

AGGRESSIVE APPROACH

With focus on basics and forward passing, Reid's India goes on attack

MIHIR VASAVDA
BHUBANESWAR, JANUARY 20

AS THE coach of Amsterdam Hockey Club, Netherlands' oldest and one of the most successful sides, Graham Reid followed a simple mantra. "He said, 'the team who dared to lose would win'," Billy Bakker, who captains Amsterdam and the Dutch national team, says. "He did not want you to be afraid."

Within days of taking charge of the Indian set-up last May, the 55-year-old Australian laid down a similar challenge. Playing fearlessly does not come naturally to the Manpreet Singh-led side that has often been accused of being mentally fragile. But Reid, as his ex-colleagues from the Australian and Dutch sides would testify, is never afraid of 'challenging the players and making the comfortable uncomfortable.'

In an Olympic year, Pro League matches have a feel of glorified exhibition games. But the twin ties against the Netherlands in Bhubaneswar last weekend, which the hosts won 5-2 and 3-1 via a shootout (after finishing 3-3 in normal time), offered a glimpse into what India under Reid might look like.

India were aggressive in their approach, relentless in the way they rushed the Dutch players, playing more forward passes rather than sideways or backwards, threw in a lot of tack-

les and took risks, which left them vulnerable at the back many times but something that Reid — a man so obsessed with goal-scoring that he isn't afraid of conceding a few — did not seem to be too concerned about that.

"Of course, I don't like taking ridiculous risks. I've spent too long with Ric Charlesworth to go out and play reckless hockey. But I don't believe in things like protecting a lead," Reid, who won silver at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, says.

It was Charlesworth, the legendary Australian, who recommended Reid for the India job after Harendra Singh was sacked last January. Reid had been an integral part of Charlesworth's coaching staff at Australia and was one of the architects of their back-to-back World Cup wins in 2010 and 2014.

Before he accepted Hockey India's offer, Reid took Charlesworth's advice. "He told me, 'you are a good match with the Indian mentality,'" Reid says. Charlesworth meant that from a couple of points of view: Reid's coaching philosophy as well as his man-management skills.

For the teams he coached — be it Dutch giants Amsterdam or world-beaters Australia or as Max Caldas' right-hand man at the Netherlands — it was paramount that they played aggressive and high-press hockey. Scoring a goal and protecting that lead, like the Germans or Argentines do, was not his thing.



Graham Reid, as his ex-colleagues from Australian and Dutch sides would testify, is never afraid of 'challenging the players and making the comfortable uncomfortable'.

That's how Indians played their hockey too, but a little less clinically than they wished to.

"He is funny, warm, cheerful... also relentless in what he demands from the players. He makes the comfortable uncomfortable; challenges them... there are no excuses when you are with Graham," Caldas, who was assisted

by Reid in plotting India's exit from the 2018 World Cup and leading Netherlands to a runner-up finish, says.

'More of a friend'

At Australia, Reid was seen as 'much more of a friend', according to Simon Orchard, who

was one of the four players in Reid's leadership group. "Graham made sure people were okay, making sure they were mentally fine, trying to comprehend a bit more about players but also having a wealth of knowledge from his playing career."

Orchard was convinced India could benefit from the way Reid handles the dressing room. And even though these are still early days, his prediction seems to be coming good so far. Forwards Mandeep Singh and Lalit Upadhyay said Reid's style was more 'friendly and he gave them a lot of freedom.' "Whenever there has been a problem, he has spoken to us personally. He encourages us to share our problems, so the mood in the dressing room has lightened a bit," Mandeep says.

To some, Reid's style and manner are similar to that of former India coach Jose Brasa, who was respected by most players and is regarded to have had a big impact on Indian hockey during his tenure. Like Brasa, Reid has gone back to the basics with the players, but instead of focusing on things like trapping, the Australian's agenda is to unclutter India's playing style. "Look up while receiving the ball, scan the pitch, search for the nearest option to pass the ball, and pass it forward," Rupinderpal Singh summarises Reid's instructions to the players.

These might sound like obvious things to

do but India, in the past, have struggled to execute the simple and obvious. The coaches, too, weren't exactly as attack-minded as Reid, according to Rupinderpal. "We played safe. Our first instinct was to pass backwards or sideways. Under Graham, our first option is to go forward," the drag-flicker adds.

Reid's primary focus in all the training camps, according to Mandeep, has been on honing the attack, improving tackling and technical aspects like 3D skills, where a player lifts the ball from the surface and dribbles it in the air — a technique often used by attackers to win penalty corners.

Refreshingly though, Reid chose to focus on India's struggles in Sunday's game rather than revelling in the back-to-back wins. "What was good today was we struggled," he said referring to the second and third quarters, where India were down 1-3 and on the backfoot. "As we learn from that, it's a good thing."

For most teams, the Pro League is nothing but match practice before the Olympics. India seem to be treating the tournament the same way. For Reid, the wins over his former team would come as reassurance that the players are buying into his ideas. Whether this was a one-off, or if the improvement is genuine, will be clearer when world champions Belgium and Australia visit Bhubaneswar next month for similar twin ties.

