

Ronaldo creates one problem but solves 100, says Sarri

Reuters | Milan

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-tos 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.



Cristiano Ronaldo

Bahrain outclass UAE

Nationals victorious in Main Round of Asian handball

TDT | Manama

Bahrain powered to a resounding 29-18 victory over the UAE yesterday to begin their Main Round campaign on a positive note in the 2020 Asian Men's Handball Championship, being held in Kuwait.

The Bahrainis are in Group One of this eight-team stage in the tournament alongside the Emiratis, Japan and Saudi Arabia.

They must finish in the top two after a single round-robin to book a berth in the semi-finals and secure their qualification to the 2021 World Men's Handball Championship.

Bahrain took one step forward to achieving both targets with their convincing victory yesterday at Shaikh Saad Al Abdullah Sports Hall Complex in Kuwait City.

The nationals were in control virtually the entire contest and led 15-9 at the half. They maintained their form and controlled the pace of the game the rest of the way, en route to sealing the big win.

Ali Eid and Ali Mirza finished as Bahrain's leading goal-scorers with four apiece. Team captain Hussain Al Sayyad and Ahmed Fadhul added three goals each, while finishing with two were Bilal Askani, Ahmed Almagabi, Jassim Alsalamat, Mahdi Saad and Mahmood Mohammed.

Abdulla Ali, Mohammed Abdulredha, Mohammed Mirza, Hassan Al Fardan and Mohammed Habib fired in one goal apiece.

At the end of the contest, Al Sayyad was named the Player of the Match and he was presented with a trophy by an official from the tournament committee.



Al Sayyad jumps in the air as he tries to score a goal against the UAE



Al Sayyad receives his Player of the Match award from a tournament official

The Bahrainis are scheduled to return to action today when they take on Japan at 2pm, Bahrain time. The UAE and Saudi face-off in the day's other Group

One fixture at 4pm.

In yesterday's other Group One game, Japan also made a winning start after beating Saudi Arabia 30-22. The Japanese

led at the half 16-10.

Bahrain are gunning for their first-ever title in the Asian championship. They have finished as silver-medallists four times in the past, including the last three editions of the tournament.

Group Two in the Main Round consists of defending champions Qatar, Iran, South Korea and hosts Kuwait.

Following the Main Round, the top two teams from each group march on to the final four, which is scheduled for Saturday. The final will then be held on Monday along with the bronze medal game.

The Asian championship also acts as the continental qualifying tournament for next year's world championship in Egypt. The four semi-finalists will all earn berths in the competition.

Barty roars back to make winning start in Melbourne



Ashleigh Barty hits a return

AFP | Melbourne

World number one and home hope Ashleigh Barty suffered a scare before she "tightened the screws" to power into the second round of the Australian Open.

The 23-year-old recovered from an error-strewn start to see off Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko 5-7, 6-1, 6-1 under the roof at a partisan and wet Melbourne.

Barty, under huge pressure to deliver a home women's champion for the first time since Chris O'Neil in 1978, plays Polona Hercog of Slovenia or Sweden's Rebecca Peterson next.

Poster girl Barty, who joked on the eve of her opener that she was sick of seeing her picture everywhere, is the face

of the first Grand Slam of the year.

A nation expects, and Barty said after dismissing the 120th-ranked Ukrainian that she had always felt in control, despite the indifferent start.

"Look, I think I was pressing a little bit early, made a few too many errors," said Barty, fresh from winning her first title on home soil, in Adelaide, on Saturday.

"Was able to tighten the screws in the second set and run away with it.

"Yes, it was disappointing to not start as well as I would have liked.

"Being able to kind of rectify that and fix that so quickly at the start of the second set was really important," the Australian added.

Djokovic survives scare in tough Slam opener

AFP | Melbourne

Defending champion Novak Djokovic dropped his first set in the opening round of the Australian Open since 2006 yesterday before grinding down Jan-Lennard Struff to keep his quest for a record eighth title on track.

The 16-time Major winner finally got the job done 7-6 (7/5), 6-2, 2-6, 6-1 on Rod Laver Arena for his 900th career win to make the second round at Melbourne Park for a 14th consecutive year.

"Credit to him for fighting, he's a very powerful player," said Djokovic, who is seeking to become only the third man to win eight or more titles at the same Grand Slam after Rafael Nadal (12 at Roland Garros) and Roger Federer (eight at Wimbledon).

"I started well, there was a close tiebreak and in the second set I played well, but he turned it around.

"Obviously when you are on the court, especially in my position I am expected to win most of my matches.

"There is a lot of pressure and a lot of different emotions involved. I definitely try to remind myself to stay present and really enjoy."

The last time he dropped a set at the first hurdle in Melbourne was 2006 before going on a streak of 41 straight sets during round one matches until Struff crashed the party.

The second seed came into the tournament after leading Serbia to the ATP Cup title in Sydney, winning all six of his singles matches.

But he didn't have it all his own way against the world number 37.

He ground through a series of long rallies before breaking his opponent in the fifth game

of the opening set and seemed to be cruising.

But the German saved a set point in the eighth and then broke Djokovic in the ninth to trail 4-5, with the match back on serve and the crowd on their feet.

The comeback restored gallant Struff's confidence and the set went to a tie-break, where the Serb dug deep when it mattered most to come out on top.

He broke Struff in his opening game of the second set and then put his foot on the gas, with the

gulf in class widening as normal order was restored.

But it didn't last long with the plucky German refusing to give up and the Serbian making uncharacteristic errors in a horror third set.

Djokovic was broken to love to go 2-0 down and while he broke back for 2-3, Struff broke twice more with a Djokovic double fault sending the match into a fourth set.

The world number two didn't make any more mistakes, keeping his focus to get over the finish line.



Novak Djokovic hits a return