

FC Dynamo Kyiv v FC Steaua Bucuresti

MATCH PREVIEW

NSC Olimpiyskiy Stadium, Kiev

Wednesday, 13 September 2006 - 20:45CET

Group E - Matchday 1



FC Steaua Bucuresti's return to Europe's premier club competition after ten years has already got off to a shaky start and they face a tricky test in their UEFA Champions League Group E opener against an FC Dynamo Kyiv side also in contention again after a rare absence last season.

Plane drama

Steaua's plane was forced back to Bucharest on Tuesday when a problem with one of the windows was detected 20 minutes into the flight to Kiev. Once in the Romanian capital, the defect was fixed and the same plane departed for the Ukraine, where the Steaua squad finally arrived safely.

Dynamo problems

If the 1986 European champions' preparations have trumped them for drama, Dynamo's have hardly been ideal either. Coach Anatoli Demianenko has had to contend without a number of key players. Latvia forward Maris Verpakovskis and Ukraine midfielder Ruslan Rotan - who both sustained thigh injuries in recent international matches - have joined Artem Milevskiy and Badr El Kaddouri on the absentee list, along with the suspended Goran Sabljic.

Good start vital

Demianenko is in philosophical mood, however, telling his pre-match press conference: "We have a lot of injured players. But what can we do about that? One must win by quality, not by quantity. It is very important to make a good start tomorrow, by giving the kind of performance we are capable of." Steaua too have plenty to offer, as Demianenko knows all too well. "They are a pretty good team who deserved to be in the semi-finals of the UEFA Cup last season. But they are just another opponent for us. We will take them on and we can win. The main thing is not to play by the opponents' rules, but to play our own game."

Playing to win

Steaua might be stymied by knee injuries to captain Mirel Radoi and striker Victoras Iacob, but coach Cosmin Olaroiu is nonetheless relishing Steaua's return to the European top table. He said: "It has been ten years since our last appearance in the UEFA Champions League. It has been a long time and we and our supporters have really had to wait for this moment." He is now hoping last term's UEFA Cup experience will prove beneficial. "We learnt a lot from last year when we got to the UEFA Cup semis. I think we are ready to be competitive in the UEFA Champions League. We are here in Kiev to play the Steaua style of football: we always play to win, never to draw."

Biggest match

Banel Nicolita, one of the stars of Steaua's UEFA Cup exploits, sums up what this game means to the Romanian title-holders, saying: "It is the match of my career so far. We have only one player who has appeared in the UEFA Champions League before so this is a big game for all of us."

Probable teams

Dynamo: Olexandr Shovkovskiy; Marjan Marković, Rodrigo, Rodolfo, Andriy Nesmachniy; Oleh Gusev, Ayila Yussuf, Carlos Corrêa, Serhiy Rebrov; Diogo Rincón; Maksim Shatskikh.

Steaua: Carlos Alberto Fernandes; Stellian Stancu/Rahamin Saban, Dorin Goian, Sorin Ghionea, Mihai Nesu; Banel Nicolita, Sorin Paraschiv, Florin Lovin, Vasilica Cristocea; Cyril Thereau/Valentin Badea, Nicolae Dica.



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Brazilians make eastern promise

That Brazil produces a remarkable pool of footballing talent is hardly a revelation - yet again the South American nation is one of the five best represented countries in the UEFA Champions League squad lists, including a handful in the former Soviet Union.

CSKA run

Among the more established is PFC CSKA Moskva striker Vágner Love, who came to prominence in 2004/05 by inspiring the Russian side past Rangers FC and into the UEFA Champions League group stage. He then ended the season with the clinching goal in the UEFA Cup final against Sporting Clube de Portugal to give Russia its first European club trophy.

Elano bow

In the competition proper for the first time is Elano Blumer, who joined FC Shakhtar Donetsk in 2004/05 and took his overall UEFA competition tally to six goals with his penalty in the first leg of Shakhtar's third qualifying round win against Legia Warszawa. Neither went to the FIFA World Cup, but both were involved in Brazil's two recent friendlies in London; Elano scoring twice in the 3-0 defeat of Argentina and Vágner Love collecting the second as Wales were seen off 2-0.

'Very excited'

Now though they are focused on club duties and UEFA Champions League Matchday 1. The 25-year-old Elano, with the Ukrainian title-holders at AS Roma tonight, cannot wait. "I am very excited about the Champions League," he told uefa.com. "This is the first time I am taking part in the competition and I am going to give my best." It will not be easy against Roma, let alone Valencia CF or Olympiacos CFP in Group D. "I think Shakhtar's chances are good, despite being in a very difficult group," Elano added. "All three of our opponents will be tough teams to beat, great clubs who will also be thinking of reaching the next stage of the competition."

Porto reunion

Vágner Love, 22, is on familiar territory and hoping to go one better than two terms ago when CSKA were headed for the last 16 until a late FC Porto winner against Chelsea FC redirected them into the UEFA Cup. Inevitably, fate has decreed that CSKA visit Portugal on Wednesday for what he describes as "a huge match" against the 2004 European champions. This time Vágner Love feels more confident. "I believe CSKA have a good chance as the anxiety of playing in the Champions League for the first time is over," he said.