

PFC Levski Sofia v Chelsea FC

MATCH PREVIEW

Vassil Levski National Stadium, Sofia

Wednesday, 27 September 2006 - 20:45CET

Group A - Matchday 2



PFC Levski Sofia coach Stanimir Stoilov is coming to terms with an injury crisis on the eve of the Bulgarian capital's first ever UEFA Champions League match but nevertheless promises that "we will attack from the first whistle" against Group A rivals Chelsea FC.

Strike problems

Already without Valeri Domovchiyski and Emil Angelov due to muscle strains, centre-forward Georgi Ivanov is rated doubtful with an ankle injury, although Stoilov remains upbeat. "Georgi Ivanov will have a late fitness test and we expect him to make the 16, but he won't be in the starting lineup," he said. "My dilemma is who should lead the attack - Hristo Yovov and Cédric Bardon can play there but it's a pity our top three strikers are having problems."

'Gulf in class'

Yovov is favourite to get the nod, with the versatile Stanislav Angelov being deployed on the left flank ahead of full-back Lucio Wagner, back from suspension. Stanislav Angelov is a survivor of the team that lost 5-0 on aggregate to Chelsea in the 2001/02 UEFA Cup and, five years to the day later, Stoilov is expecting a very different encounter. "Both clubs have improved a lot but there is still an obvious gulf in terms of class," he said. "Chelsea have a solid defence, excellent midfielders and strikers who are capable of scoring from nowhere."

'Euphoria'

Factoring in that and a 5-0 defeat by FC Barcelona on Matchday 1, many sides would be content to sit back and defend in numbers. Not so Levski, who have scored 23 unanswered goals in seven league games this season, including a 3-0 weekend dismantling of PFC Rodopa Smolian. "Despite the injury problems, we will attack from the first whistle," Stoilov promised. "We'll be looking for a goal and hopefully the fans' euphoria will lift us." If he is hoping to catch Chelsea off guard, however, he is set for disappointment.

Well prepared

"I know it will not be easy for us," said the English champions' manager José Mourinho. "We have done a scouting job on Levski. The players know they have to give their best. This is only the second matchday and both teams need the points." The visitors, back in the Premiership's pole position after Saturday's 2-0 victory at Fulham FC, kicked off their continental campaign with a 2-0 home success against Werder Bremen two weeks ago.

Stoichkov legend

Chelsea's hopes have also been boosted by the likely return of influential captain John Terry following a back injury and the Londoners' medical staff are working overtime to get him back to fitness. Mourinho's work alongside another totemic figure, local striking legend Hristo Stoichkov, should leave him in no doubt as to the quality of which Bulgaria's footballers are capable. "I know Stoichkov from my time at Barcelona," he said. "He was one of the best players I have ever worked with."

Probable teams

Levski: Georgi Petkov; Zhivko Milanov, Elin Topuzakov, Igor Tomašić, Lucio Wagner; Daniel Borimirov, Richard Eromoiobe, Cédric Bardon; Dimitar Telkiyski, Hristo Yovov, Stanislav Angelov.

Chelsea: Petr Čech; Paulo Ferreira, John Terry, Ricardo Carvalho, Ashley Cole; Michael Essien, Claude Makelele, Michael Ballack, Frank Lampard; Andriy Shevchenko, Didier Drogba.

