

AS Roma - FC Dynamo Kyiv

MATCH PREVIEW

Stadio Olimpico, Rome

Wednesday 19 September 2007 - 20.45CET

Group F - Matchday 1



AS Roma will be eager to keep up their fine early-season form when they take on FC Dynamo Kyiv at the Stadio Olimpico in their opening UEFA Champions League Group F fixture.

'Balance'

Having finished as runners-up behind FC Internazionale Milano last term, the Giallorossi lead the Serie A pack with three wins out of three, having also beaten the champions last month in the Italian Super Cup. For coach Luciano Spalletti, who guided Roma on their best run in this competition in 23 years last season, before the heavy quarter-final defeat by Manchester United FC, "balance" will be key if they are to progress further. "As well as having one more year of experience under our belts, this year we are a much more balanced squad," he said.

'Better and better'

Although Romanian international centre-back Cristian Chivu left during the summer to join Inter, among the new players Spalletti has recruited are former FC Barcelona forward Ludovic Giuly and Brazilian defenders Cicinho from Real Madrid CF and Juan from Bayer 04 Leverkusen. "We have just the one objective – to get better," added the coach. "While we want to attack, we have to be careful not to leave spaces at the back. Against Manchester United last season, we weren't relaxed and we were too eager to score too quickly."

Tough draw

The Italian has tipped Roma's conquerors in 2006/07 to be the team to beat in Group F, which also includes Sporting Clube de Portugal. "I think we're in one of the most difficult groups this time and everyone will be dangerous, but United are the strongest," he said. "The most important thing in the Champions League is to show your character, think big and overcome the difficulties."

On the defence

Third in the Ukrainian Premier League, seven points adrift of leaders FC Shakhtar Donetsk, Dynamo Kyiv's start to the campaign has been disappointing by their high standards. "We know Roma are a strong squad, and we have to be careful because they can move quickly from defence to attack," said coach Anatoliy Demyanenko. "Of course we hope we won't lose, so a draw wouldn't be a bad result."

Knockout bid

Other than a 3-0 default win over Roma three years ago, Dynamo's record on Italian soil – two draws and four losses – hardly inspires confidence. Although they clinched the league and cup double last term, Dynamo failed to progress beyond the UEFA Champions League group stage for the sixth time since reaching the last 16 in 1999/00, finishing bottom of their group with just two points.

Milevskiy doubt

"Like Roma, we have worked hard in the last three years to improve things when we play in Europe," continued Demyanenko, who will make a late decision on fit-again striker Artem Milevskiy. "But there are no easy games. Football is something you cannot predict so we have as good a chance as the others in the group."



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De Rossi puts faith in resolute Roma

AS Roma midfielder Daniele De Rossi is adamant there are no psychological scars among his team-mates despite the manner of last season's UEFA Champions League exit as they prepare to open their latest European campaign against FC Dynamo Kyiv.

'Take responsibility'

After a 2-1 home win in the quarter-final first leg, Roma were overwhelmed 7-1 by Manchester United FC at Old Trafford in the return, a result that caught the attention far beyond the Italian capital. "That result was not something we could wipe from our memories," De Rossi said before their opening Group F fixture. "Unfortunately it will stay with us but we can learn from it and become stronger. Nobody was to blame; we all had to stand up and take a bit of the responsibility."

Consistency sought

The Italian international believes Roma must now show consistency if they are to challenge for the top European honours on a regular basis. "The same six or seven sides are always up there – [AC] Milan, [FC] Internazionale Milano, [FC] Bayern München, [FC] Barcelona, Real Madrid [CF] and Manchester United," he said. "For us to be considered among the best, we have to reach the knockout stages over a period of time. If we do that today, then tomorrow we can become like them."

'Up for it'

De Rossi, along with fellow Roma midfielders Alberto Aquilani and Simone Perrotta, has seen at first hand the strength of a number of Dynamo players having been part of the Italy squad that edged to a 2-1 win against Ukraine in UEFA EURO 2008™ qualifying Group B two weeks ago. "Performing for your national and club teams is very different but they will be up for it," he added. "They possess good technical players who will be harder to beat than most think. Victory in your first match at home is psychologically important but we have a bit of experience from last year of how to manage these games."

Testing schedule

After winning their first three Serie A matches the next month, which features league matches against Juventus and champions Inter along with a daunting encounter at Old Trafford on Matchday 2, could define Roma's season. "It's difficult to be at 100 per cent for all matches and every game is now crucial," De Rossi added. "It will be important to play as a unit – to attack and defend together. But we are more balanced, we are better individually and have a stronger squad this year."