

FC Steaua București - Arsenal FC

MATCH PREVIEW

Steaua Stadium, Bucharest

Tuesday 2 October 2007 - 20.45CET

Group H - Matchday 2



Massimo Pedrazzini has called on his FC Steaua București players to "put their hearts and souls" into Tuesday's UEFA Champions League fixture against Arsenal FC as he tries to enhance both the club's chances of progress from Group H and his own prospects of being handed the coaching reins permanently.

Italian-inspired renaissance

The 49-year-old Italian was appointed caretaker coach two weeks ago after Gheorghe Hagi stood down after just three months in charge, and he has since overseen a draw and two wins – including Saturday's 1-0 success over SC Vaslui – despite a lack of senior coaching experience. The renaissance will come under severe pressure from opponents who are unbeaten in 18 games since 7 April and who top England's Premier League. Pedrazzini remains unfazed, however.

'Underdogs'

"Everybody will say we're the underdogs but no matter how tough the opposition, matches always start at 0-0," he said. "We have to show self-confidence because we're not just here to make up the numbers. People who achieve big things become a part of football history, and we'll have to put our hearts and souls into the game if we want a victory."

Tough target

Pedrazzini was part of Hagi's coaching team when Steaua went down 2-1 at SK Slavia Praha on Matchday 1. He now has a chance to stamp his authority on a side attempting to improve on a sequence of only four victories in 25 group stage appointments – no easy task against the firing Gunners. "I don't think Arsenal have any weak points," Pedrazzini continued. "Arsène Wenger can select a team exclusively from quality players ... but they can still be beaten. To achieve that, we have to be clever and take our chances."

On a roll

Steaua have struggled to do exactly that this term, with their eight Romanian league outings yielding just six goals. Arsenal, in contrast, have plundered 16 in seven Premier League matches and boast a two-point advantage at the summit having played a game less than their closest rivals. Saturday's 1-0 triumph at West Ham United FC came at a cost, though, with Aleksandr Hleb sustaining a knee injury which makes him 50-50, according to Wenger; Emmanuel Adebayor (thigh), Mathieu Flamini (groin) and Abou Diaby (ankle) face late fitness tests along with Steaua pair Dorin Goian and Florin Lovin.

'Carry on winning'

"We are the favourites but we also have to be humble," said Wenger. "I've heard Steaua have some problems but sometimes when you play such teams they don't have any problems at all. It will not be our intention to exploit their weaknesses but to play our best and win. Usually ten points is enough to qualify but this group is unpredictable. We would like to qualify as quickly as possible but first we want to continue our positive run."



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Missing links

The Londoners, who lead the section on the back of a 3-0 home defeat of Sevilla FC, are without Jens Lehmann, William Gallas, Eduardo da Silva and Tomáš Rosický, while seven Steaua players are absent with long-term injuries including key men Mirel Radoi, Mihaita Plesan and Sorin Ghionea.

Neaga eager to unsettle Arsenal

FC Steaua București forward Adrian Neaga is back in Romania after three years overseas and is eager to make his mark in the UEFA Champions League. Neaga was motivated to return home from the Korea Republic by the prospect of Europe's premier club competition and is now anticipating a group-stage debut against Arsenal FC.

Hopeful

The 28-year-old had been a firm favourite at Steaua – scoring 27 league goals in 79 games between 2001 and 2005 – before leaving to play in Asia. Gheorghe Hagi, Steaua's now former coach, omitted him against SK Slavia Praha on Matchday 1, so a first appearance in the tournament proper beckons for Neaga on Tuesday. "I hope to make my debut, as till now I have only played in the second and third qualifying rounds," he told uefa.com.

National pride

As well as being excited about a possible UEFA Champions League bow, Neaga is quick to emphasise that Steaua's Group H campaign will be followed closely throughout Romania. "Don't forget that Steaua are the only Romanian team to have qualified for the group stage," said the former Chunnam Dragons and Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma FC player. "This means our match will be a festival for the whole country, for all Romanian football. All we want is to be at the same level as our opponents, and of course we will do our best to win."

Different planet

Steaua have never lost at home to English opposition, yet with Arsenal – the early Premier League and Group H leaders – enjoying such a strong start to the season, Neaga was asked if they could cope with football that looks as though it comes from a different planet. The striker, who has six Romania caps, replied: "Arsenal's players are human beings, like us. Of course they are a very strong team, but we don't consider ourselves underdogs. Steaua are a member of football's elite and we will play like equals against our visitors from England."