

AS Roma - Sporting Clube de Portugal

MATCH PREVIEW

Stadio Olimpico, Rome

Tuesday 23 October 2007 - 20.45 CET

Group F - Matchday 3



AS Roma coach Luciano Spalletti has urged his players to stay positive ahead of their UEFA Champions League Group F encounter with Sporting Clube de Portugal. After a strong start to the season, the Rome club have stuttered recently, shipping eight goals in their last two Serie A games at the Stadio Olimpico, slipping to fourth place and prompting lengthy questioning of the side's tactics.

No panic

"We like to attack," said Spalletti, whose team struck four goals of their own in Saturday's thrilling home draw with SSC Napoli. "Maybe it's a philosophy more common in foreign leagues than the Italian, but just because we haven't been ourselves for the last two or three matches, I don't think we should panic and change the way we have been playing for more than two years."

Defence

After a robust defence of their style, the coach did admit Roma needed to tighten up at the back. "We have to pay more attention to the defensive side of things. It's true we are conceding too many goals and that produces anxiety," added Spalletti, who with Alberto Aquilani and Taddei sidelined may be forced to rejig his midfield after a late injury to Simone Perrotta. "It's easy to change when things aren't going well. We could change the lineup and the formation. We could play more physically and put men behind the ball, but we need to confront the problems and not run away from them."

Head-to-head

Having launched their European campaign with a comfortable 2-0 home win against FC Dynamo Kyiv, Roma then went down by the only goal at Old Trafford against group leaders Manchester United FC, leaving them with the same points – three – as their Portuguese opponents. "These next two matches will be decisive," Spalletti said, referring to the return fixture in Lisbon in two weeks' time. "Tuesday will be difficult because Sporting are an attacking side that know how to play football, but playing at home the onus is on us."

Late arrival

Sporting, seeking a second successive away victory following their 2-1 triumph at Dynamo Kyiv on Matchday 2, were unable to train at the Stadio Olimpico on Monday after the late arrival of their flight. "It's not ideal preparation because it's an important game and we haven't been able to train, but it shouldn't make a difference to the result," said visiting coach Paulo Bento before praising the hosts. "Roma are not your average Italian team. They press from the front, are balanced, technically adept, have quick players and elaborate their attack through Francesco Totti."

Two halves

With the Estádio José Alvalade staging these sides on 7 November, the former Sporting player admits he would settle for any advantage going into Matchdays 5 and 6. "Our objective is to win in Rome but our second goal is to stop them taking three points," said the 38-year-old, who will make numerous changes from the team that lost the first leg of a Portuguese League Cup tie at home to second-division CD Fátima at the weekend. Goalkeeper Vladimir Stojković will play no part, however, having been omitted for returning late from Serbia duty.

