

Chelsea FC - Olympiacos CFP

MATCH PREVIEW

Stamford Bridge, London

Wednesday 5 March 2008 - 20.45 CET

First knockout round, - Matchday 8



Any team with the ability to win away to Werder Bremen and S.S. Lazio deserves the utmost respect and Chelsea FC coach Avram Grant believes it would be folly to dismiss the threat that Olympiacos CFP pose when the sides resume their UEFA Champions League first knockout round tie after a goalless first leg.

Positive omens

Nevertheless, Chelsea will be favourites to progress and claim a quarter-final berth for the fourth time in five seasons. They have a fully-fit squad, enjoyed a resounding 4-0 victory at West Ham United FC on Saturday – despite playing with ten men for 54 minutes following the dismissal of Frank Lampard – and make no secret of the fact this competition is their priority this term. "We are a big club and we want to be bigger, we want to get to the Champions League final because we have not been there before," said Grant.

'Tough game'

"It's not easy because there are many good clubs trying for the same thing but that is our target. It is the priority of this club and also of me. Our players have experience of this stage, though we know it will be a tough game. Olympiacos have won at Werder Bremen and also at Lazio [this season], two very good teams. But we are at home so we want to win." The Israeli recognises that he will disappoint some major names and will think long and hard about his selection after receiving fierce criticism for the changes he made before the recent English League Cup final loss to Tottenham Hotspur FC.

Achieving the best

"I can only pick eleven so there will be big players on the bench and also big players who are not in the squad," he continued. "There is a lot of pressure in football and I welcome that because it pushes you always to achieve the best things. The results over the last four or five months should give us confidence, not just the win at West Ham. When we lose we respond and that was shown again on Saturday."

LuaLua blow

The Greek champions know a scoring draw will be enough to take them through to the quarter-finals for the second time and they intend to grab any opportunities to get at the Chelsea back line. "Our defence has played a major role in this competition and we are hoping the same applies and that it will give us opportunities to attack as well," said coach Panagiotis Lemonis. His attacking options are limited by the absence through injury of winger Luciano Galletti (thigh) and Lomana LuaLua. The former Newcastle United FC and Portsmouth FC forward dislocated a shoulder during Saturday's 1-1 draw with Asteras Tripolis FC – a setback which cost the Piraeus team first place in the Super League.

Onslaught

Lemonis is expecting an onslaught from Chelsea but reckons his side have the strength to recover should they fall behind. "We have responded in the past and I am hoping we can do so again," he said. "The first few minutes will be important as Chelsea try to control the pace of the game but I'm confident we can cope with that."



Chelsea competition fires Cole

Joe Cole believes a fully-fit squad gives Chelsea FC plenty of reason to believe they can overcome Olympiacos CFP at Stamford Bridge and continue their journey towards a first UEFA Champions League final.

Big names return

With the likes of Frank Lampard, Andriy Shevchenko, Florent Malouda and captain John Terry back in action after spells on the sidelines, the clean bill of health only increases the selection dilemma for manager Avram Grant – with several high-profile players sure to be left kicking their heels. Cole experienced that frustration for himself nine days ago when named on the bench for the English League Cup final, but having marked his return to the starting lineup with a goal at the weekend, he says it is part and parcel of life at one of the top clubs.

'No dramas'

"It is the same at Manchester United [FC] and Arsenal [FC] – big clubs have big players who are left out from time to time," said the England midfielder, who scored Chelsea's second goal in an impressive 4-0 win at Cole's former team West Ham United FC on Saturday. "As a footballer you have responsibility for one thing and one thing only, and that's your own performance. My job is to play as well as I can for Chelsea when selected, and I don't pay any attention to any of the dramas that surround this club."

'Confidence is high'

Chelsea won only one of four matches in all competitions before the 2-1 extra-time defeat by Tottenham Hotspur FC in the League Cup final, yet Cole insists the London side – UEFA Champions League semi-finalists in three of the last four seasons – are firmly back on track. "We had a dip in form leading up to the final and that culminated in a poor performance, but that's in the past and we are only focusing on Olympiacos and playing well," the 26-year-old added. "Confidence is high and all the players are fit, which is the first time that has happened in a long while. It's a great moment for this club and we are ready to build some good form."

'Fight for everything'

At their best Chelsea must be considered among the favourites to lift this trophy for the first time and an appearance in the Moscow final would have added appeal for owner Roman Abramovich, who is keen to see Chelsea crowned European champions in his home country. Yet they are also only seven points behind Premier League leaders Arsenal with a game in hand and this weekend they seek to progress in the FA Cup with a quarter-final at Barnsley FC. Cole argues against prioritising one title at the expense of another. "A club like Chelsea have to be fighting for everything," he explained. "You can't pick and choose at this level and on Wednesday all we will be concerned with is fighting to get in the last eight of the Champions League."

Patsatzoglou pins hopes on English first

As Olympiacos CFP prepare for their biggest European game in nine years, Christos Patsatzoglou believes the Greek champions can continue a campaign which has gone against the grain when they tackle Chelsea FC on Wednesday.

Away curse

After going 31 UEFA Champions League away matches without a victory, Olympiacos finally broke their curse at Werder Bremen in this season's group stage and swiftly followed that with another win at S.S. Lazio. Therefore, it is not surprising the 28-year-old feels his side have a decent chance of progressing at Chelsea's expense, despite only recording a goalless draw in their first knockout round first leg in Athens. "We have had a very good year this season – all three of our away games have been against very good teams [including Real Madrid CF] – and we hope to continue that," Patsatzoglou said.

English hoodoo

The Greek international is an integral member of a team who have qualified for the knockout stage for the first time since their 1998/99 quarter-final defeat by Juventus. And with one hoodoo consigned to history, Patsatzoglou would like to end another: Olympiacos's record in England which reads seven visits, seven losses. He said: "Yes, it's true we have had a series of defeats in this country and we need another victory away from Athens. We can do it, but we need concentration and we need to be strong."

Goalscoring options

Despite dominating a fortnight ago at the Georgios Karaiskakis Stadium, the Red and Whites could not break the deadlock – a fact not lost on Patsatzoglou. "We played very well in Athens but could not find a goal," he said. "Now we need to take our chances and try to play our own game." The defender struck the decisive second goal in October's 3-1 triumph in Bremen, but would be happy to see any of his team-mates find the net on Wednesday. "It's not a case of who scores – it is important that at least one of our team score and that we get through," he said.

'More pressure'

However, Patsatzoglou realises that the Premier League high-fliers will be a different proposition at Stamford Bridge, where they are 60 matches unbeaten in all competitions. "I expect Chelsea to be a bit more offensive than in Greece. We need to be patient and wait for our chance," he added. "We have qualified for this stage and there is a little bit more pressure, but that is always good and we will try to use that to our advantage."