

Juventus - FC Zenit St. Petersburg

MATCH PREVIEW

Stadio Olimpico, Turin

Wednesday 17 September 2008 - 20.45CET

Group H - Matchday 1



On the eve of Juventus's UEFA Champions League Group H opener against FC Zenit St. Petersburg, coach Claudio Ranieri said he was "curious" to see how far his side had come in the last 12 months.

Fightback

Much water has passed under the bridge since the Bianconeri last appeared on Europe's biggest stage, in a 2005/06 quarter-final defeat by Arsenal FC. After Juventus spent the following season in Serie B, Ranieri replaced Didier Deschamps and guided La Vecchia Signora to third place in Serie A last term. Their return ticket to the élite was rubber-stamped by August's 5-1 aggregate thrashing of FC Artmedia Petržalka in the third qualifying round.

'Experience'

"In our first season back in Serie A, I was curious to see how we would fare," said Ranieri. "Now I am just as interested to see how we cope in the Champions League. It's been a long wait for some of these players but our determination and motivation are right. We have plenty of new players but we also have players with a wealth of experience at this level, players who have been an important part of the history of this club. They are more than ready."

Amauri winner

Two of those seasoned performers, Alessandro Del Piero and David Trezeguet, missed Sunday's 1-0 success against Udinese Calcio as Ranieri partnered Amauri and Vincenzo Iaquinta in attack. His decision paid off as Amauri scored the 68th-minute winner, yet Ranieri revealed he would be turning to the combined experience of 65 UEFA Champions League goals in 130 games, embodied by Del Piero and Trezeguet, from the start in Turin on Wednesday.

'Sacrifice'

"The fact they are vastly experienced came into it but the main reason I have selected Del Piero and Trezeguet is what they sacrificed for the club. They had Serie A and European football snatched away from them but decided to stay here and work for two hard years to get their side back where it belongs. I have so much respect for them. This is the main reason I decided to give them the chance to play."

Zenit rout

Juve, who recover Giorgio Chiellini and Nicola Legrottaglie from injury, are unbeaten at home in the initial group stage in eight years, but know the threat of Zenit. Dick Advocaat's men won the Russian title and the UEFA Cup last term and last month lifted the UEFA Super Cup at Manchester United FC's expense. Although seventh in the Premier-Liga, Zenit enjoyed a third win in four matches on Saturday, defeating FC Terek Grozny 4-1. Andrei Arshavin contributed a goal and an assist for Ivica Križanac before Pavel Pogrebnyak and Konstantin Zyryanov completed the rout.

Fleeting visit

"We respect Juventus," said Zenit coach Advocaat, who flew into Italy by private jet on Sunday to recce the opposition. "But it's never good to fear anyone. We know their danger men but, hopefully for them, they know ours too." After spending €30m on Danny and going to great lengths to keep Arshavin, there is nothing obscure about Zenit's leading lights. "I could have bought four players for €10m each, but I chose to buy Danny for €30 and you'll see why," added Advocaat, who also hinted at changes to the lineup that beat Terek.



Zenit ready to join élite, says Tymoshchuk

FC Zenit St. Petersburg captain Anatoliy Tymoshchuk insists his side will not be overawed by the occasion when the Russian champions make their UEFA Champions League debut at Group H rivals Juventus on Wednesday.

'Big-game players'

Zenit followed up their UEFA Cup triumph in May by defeating Manchester United FC in the UEFA Super Cup last month – evidence, says Tymoshchuk, that Zenit are ready for this level of competition. "We've won a lot of big games, especially over the last two years, so we've learned to channel our emotions when we play," he explained. "It's a big game for us but controlling the emotion of the occasion won't be a problem. We've proved in the past we have a big-game temperament. There's no question this is a big game for Zenit as it's our first match at this level, but beating sides like Manchester United gives us great belief and the confidence to play well against Juventus."

'High standard'

The Ukrainian international, once a transfer target of the Turin club, made 15 UEFA Champions League appearances for FC Shakhtar Donetsk before moving to Russia's Premier-Liga in 2007. His experience may prove decisive as Zenit step out on to Europe's élite stage. "I've already shown what I can do on the pitch," said the 29-year-old anchorman, who has 75 UEFA club competition matches to his name. "I've played to a high standard for a number of years and I don't need to prove anything to anyone."

'Massive step'

Another player with nothing to prove is Juventus captain Alessandro Del Piero, with the Italy forward relishing the prospect of returning to the UEFA Champions League after a two-year absence. "It's a great feeling to be back in the Champions League," said Del Piero, 33, who will be making his 80th outing in the blue-riband event. "It's the culmination of two years' hard work and it's a massive step for us."

'Desire'

The hard part, however, may only just be starting for the Bianconeri. "Zenit will be tough opponents," Del Piero added. "I saw them in the UEFA Cup and the Super Cup, and I also watched Russia play very impressively with a number of Zenit players in their side at EURO 2008. Russian football is on the up and Zenit have proved as much by winning those trophies, but now we're back we want to give a good account of ourselves. At this level you have to be ready for everything because the opposition are so good. You have to have heart for the fight, intelligence, motivation and desire, and we'll need all those qualities against Zenit."