

Chelsea FC - FC Girondins de Bordeaux

MATCH PREVIEW

Stamford Bridge, London

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Group A - Matchday 1



He has won the FIFA World Cup as well as a host of club trophies in his native Brazil but, two months short of his 60th birthday, Luiz Felipe Scolari will tread new ground when last season's runners-up Chelsea FC begin another UEFA Champions League campaign at home to FC Girondins de Bordeaux.

'More quality'

The former Brazil and Portugal coach, appointed to succeed Avram Grant in the summer, has twice lifted the Copa Libertadores – the South American counterpart to this competition – but he insists the fight for supremacy on this continent is a far tougher proposition: "In Europe there are many teams that are strong. In South America it is the same two or three countries that arrive every year in the final but here there are different countries [capable of winning it]. That means more competition, more quality, more difficulties."

Final loss

A 3-1 win at Manchester City FC on Saturday continued Chelsea's impressive start to the Premier League season, and the manager is eager to launch this latest adventure "in a good way" by beating Bordeaux. "I need to win, my team need to win, and the way [to the final] is hard and long," Scolari said. The Brazilian is all too aware how important the UEFA Champions League has become to the west London club, given the frustrations they have encountered with three semi-final defeats in addition to last term's penalties loss to Manchester United FC in the Moscow final.

English challenge

Scolari – who seems sure to have Michael Ballack available after injury, though Didier Drogba misses out through suspension and Michael Essien with a serious knee problem – was asked if he considered the three other English challengers as Chelsea's main rivals for the crown. "All the teams will be dangerous," he said. "For now the most difficult team for us is Bordeaux. I know everything [about them] – I saw five tapes, the staff have prepared many things for me."

Scoring mark

Bordeaux coach Laurent Blanc is also leading out a side in the competition for the first time, but at least the former France defender has experienced it as a player. Indeed, he remains the oldest – at 36 years and 339 days – to have scored in the tournament, when he netted for United against Olympiacos CFP in October 2002. The 42-year-old led Les Girondins to second place in the 2007/08 Ligue 1 table in his debut season as a coach, yet knows his team face a huge test of their mental and technical capabilities both at Stamford Bridge and in Group A.

Menegazzo available

He said: "We have not got the set-up and players that Chelsea have, but one of the charming things about football is that any team can beat another if they have the right desire. We are not apprehensive and we are not here to make up the numbers, but we are facing one of the best three or four teams in the world." Bordeaux are likely to recall Fernando Menegazzo after a domestic suspension kept the Brazilian out of Saturday's 1-1 draw against Olympique de Marseille, while Diego Placente and Franck Jurietti are poised to deputise for suspended full-backs Matthieu Chalmé and Benoît Trémoulinas.



Mikel sets sights on new horizons

John Mikel Obi says Chelsea FC have put distance between themselves and the acute disappointment of falling at the final hurdle in last season's UEFA Champions League as they begin a new campaign determined to make amends.

'Good chance'

The Nigerian midfielder, whose importance to Chelsea has increased significantly with Michael Essien being sidelined by a knee injury, says that while the bitter experience of the Moscow defeat by Manchester United FC was profound, it is time to move on. "We all felt really bad after the game," the 21-year-old said. "We know why we lost and now we have a very good chance of getting it back. We want to start well and finish well in the competition."

Essien loss

Beginning with Tuesday's Group D home game against FC Girondins de Bordeaux, Essien could miss the entire group stage after rupturing an anterior cruciate ligament playing for Ghana last week. Mikel perhaps stands to gain the most, but is keen to emphasise the bigger picture – a huge setback for Chelsea's hopes of going one better, not only in Europe but also in the Premier League. "Michael's injury is a big blow. We all feel sorry for him and wish him well in his recovery," said Mikel. "But we have to get on with our jobs and carry on playing and wait until he comes back. He's a great player and we will miss him, but we have to carry on."

Deco class

Essien may be absent but Deco has arrived in west London from FC Barcelona to boost the squad that came so close last term – and his creative skills have been a strong feature of Chelsea's first matches under Luiz Felipe Scolari. "Deco brings a lot to the team, everyone can see that from the way he plays – he gives us a lot of options in the middle," Mikel added. "Deco always wants to express himself when he's on the ball and when you have players like that, you're going to have more possession. This is what the manager says: 'Pass the ball around and wait for opportunities to come'." Chelsea hope that mantra can take them to Rome next May.