

CFR 1907 Cluj - AS Roma

MATCH PREVIEW

CFR, Cluj-Napoca

Wednesday 26 November 2008 - 20.45CET

Group A - Matchday 5



CFR 1907 Cluj's Italian coach Maurizio Trombetta is hoping lightning can strike twice as his side take on AS Roma on Wednesday.

Different situation

The teams met for the first time on UEFA Champions League Matchday 1 when CFR made a stunning group-stage debut with a 2-1 win at the Stadio Olimpico. Since then the Romanian titleholders have picked up just one point and slumped to the bottom of Group A, while Roma have beaten FC Girondins de Bordeaux and Chelsea FC to move into second place. Trombetta duly recognises that a lot has changed in the two months since CFR's success in Rome.

Hope

"I would say that things have settled down," he said. "Roma were struggling to integrate new players back then and had injury problems. Now they are playing well, second in the group. We are in last place, and have had something like 16 matches in the last two months, which has taken its toll." He then smiled. "But I'm looking for a second miracle. We want to beat them again."

Struggling for consistency

Trombetta's charges are certainly struggling to find the kind of consistency that took them to last season's Romanian title. Friday's 2-1 defeat by CS Pandurii Lignitul Târgu Jiu left them sixth in Liga 1 and their cause has not been helped by injury either. Portuguese full-back Tony underwent surgery last week for a problem with the meniscus in his right knee; he will not play again this year. Brazilian striker Didi is likely to be out for six months, also after a knee operation. Meanwhile, Gabriel Mureşan and Juan Culio, the two-goal hero in the Italian capital, are troubled by knocks.

Counterattacking

Although anything less than a win could be fatal to CFR's chances, given they go to Chelsea on Matchday 6, Trombetta is reluctant to throw caution to the wind in Cluj-Napoca. "We have to keep things tight at the back, because we know how lethal their strikers can be if they get an opportunity," said the 46-year-old, who will probably keep faith with his trusted 4-5-1 formation, relying on counterattacks led by frontman Yssouf Koné.

Into the groove

After a shaky start to the campaign, Roma are beginning to find their feet again, with their improved European form being echoed by Sunday's comprehensive 3-0 win at US Lecce, on the back of a triumph over city rivals S.S. Lazio the week before. "We have reacted very well since the CFR defeat," said coach Luciano Spalletti. "There has been a big improvement in our play. This is an intelligent group of players. I'm happy with our progress."

Talented opponents

While confident of prevailing in Romania, Spalletti also has respect for the opposition. "I know Maurizio Trombetta, he's very capable of coaxing high standards from his teams," said the trainer. "And CFR have plenty of quality – [Sebastián] Dubarbier, [Sixto] Peralta, Koné, Dani ... We'll have to be careful." The Giallorossi have travelled without defenders Christian Panucci, still labouring with a knee injury, and Cicinho, who has a cold. Mirko Vučinić sat out training on Tuesday, also with a virus, and is rated doubtful.



Trică clue to CFR Cluj ambitions

Eugen Trică has reiterated CFR 1907 Cluj's aim of finishing third in Group A and booking a place in the UEFA Cup, even if to do that they probably need to repeat their Matchday 1 win against AS Roma. And this time the Giallorossi have the "major threat" of Francesco Totti.

Faltering campaign

CFR's shock 2-1 victory away to Roma on Matchday 1 has been the undoubted highlight of the Romanian outfit's first UEFA Champions League group-stage campaign. However, since that heady evening in the Italian capital – when two Juan Culio goals catapulted the Transylvanian club on to back pages across the world – they have taken only one point from three games, albeit against 2007/08 runners-up Chelsea FC.

Long-term ambitions

Now, following back-to-back defeats by FC Girondins de Bordeaux, the Liga 1 titleholders are propping up Group A; not that Trică is too downhearted. "We said right from the start that our main objective was to finish third and qualify for the UEFA Cup, seeing as this was our Champions League debut," said the striker. "After our first two extraordinary performances, many said we would reach the knockout stage, but we remained realistic. Third place will be fine."

Multiple threat

Even that seemingly modest goal will not be easy. Two points short of Bordeaux in the UEFA Cup spot and with a trip to Stamford Bridge on Matchday 6, CFR must beat Roma to entertain any notions of extending their European adventure beyond Christmas. Indeed, Trică appreciates his team have it all to do, and does not have to think long about their likely obstacles. "Totti will be a major threat, there's no doubt about it – he didn't play against us in Rome, and I think he will have a major influence this time round," he continued, adding that the Serie A side are anything but a one-man band. "[Mirko] Vučinić is also important for Roma up front. In fact, there are probably seven or eight players who could cause us problems."

Inventive attacking

Trică may be keen to highlight the potential damage Totti and Co can inflict, yet his own availability following suspension could be equally telling. The 32-year-old's inventive attacking play was a major factor in CFR's early Group A successes, and it was only by the width of a post that he failed to turn the Chelsea draw into a win, his fizzing drive hitting the upright in the closing moments. Roma have been warned.