

Chelsea FC - Juventus

MATCH PREVIEW

Stamford Bridge, London

Wednesday 25 February 2009 - 20.45CET

Matchday 7 - First knockout round, first leg



For the second successive year Chelsea FC have changed manager during a UEFA Champions League campaign and Guus Hiddink, who has replaced Luiz Felipe Scolari until the end of term, admits he has had precious little opportunity to work with a team who will try to reach a fifth quarter-final in six seasons by overcoming Juventus.

Great start

First impressions for the new man have been entirely favourable, with Hiddink guiding Chelsea to a vital Premier League victory at Aston Villa FC last weekend in his first game in charge. Next up is the challenge of the Italian giants with former Chelsea boss Claudio Ranieri in the opposing dugout. "It's a challenge because when you are into spring and in the Champions League you are among the elite clubs of Europe," said Hiddink. "It's very exciting for all of us. It's special because it's my first home game and we had a good first match. Being at home everyone can expect a lot from this team by way of energy and passion."

No excuses

Appointed only two weeks ago, the Dutchman said it would be easy to offer excuses because of the limited time he has had with the players, but insists that everyone concerned must fight the temptation. "Every manager wants to have four, five, six weeks to implement things with the team but I have to do it in reduced time," Hiddink explained. "We just have to get on with it. We must not give ourselves an excuse because then there might be a tendency to believe we can do a little less. You need to give 100 per cent in the Premier League and the Champions League, and it is not in my mind or in the players' minds to give any less."

Cole in and out

Hiddink described Ranieri as a "gentleman coach" and praised the Italian's organisational skills, adding: "A team of stars can expose themselves but he can organise his team in a very disciplined way. That makes his teams difficult to play against." The game will probably come too early for Ricardo Carvalho, who has a hamstring injury, while Joe Cole is a long-term absentee due to a knee problem although Ashley Cole should return at left-back after a domestic suspension.

Positive response

Ranieri, back at Stamford Bridge where he spent four years at the helm from 2000 to 2004, believes his former employers will respond positively to Hiddink's arrival. "They will be determined to carry out his wishes," he said. "When I saw them against Aston Villa they played in a more direct style but we are prepared for this. Chelsea are a strong team and we respect them but we will have a say in the game as well."

Welcome returns

Alessandro Del Piero and Amauri look likely to fill the striking places for Juventus after they were named on the substitutes' bench for the 2-0 victory at US Città di Palermo on Saturday. Olof Mellberg also seems certain to return at right-back as Ranieri, whose side have lost their last six away matches in the UEFA Champions League knockout rounds, seeks to add solidity to his defence.



Hunger drives on determined Del Piero

At 34, Alessandro Del Piero is just as desperate for UEFA Champions League glory as he was as a young player and he insists the desire to lift the trophy is the same regardless of his team's fortunes in Serie A.

New ground

The first knockout round tie at Stamford Bridge finds the Juventus captain breaking new ground because the Bianconeri have never before met Chelsea FC in UEFA competition. "I'm very happy to be playing at a stadium where I have never played before, it gives me lots of incentive," Del Piero said. "It is such a massive competition that everyone wants to win. Obviously the fact we are not at the top of our league should give us incentive to improve, but the truth is we want to win it no matter what position [in the league] we are in."

Invaluable experience

The Italian international helps lend great experience to Claudio Ranieri's side along with midfielder Pavel Nedvěd and goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon, and agrees that this could be an important factor at this stage of the competition when there is precious little to separate opponents. At the same time, though, he stresses the part the younger members of the Juve squad can play. "We are very united in our intentions and what we want to do," Del Piero added. "Yes, perhaps people look to [the experienced players] a little bit more but we have a very good set of players who know their strengths and have intelligence. So we should not dwell too much on the question of who has more influence on the team."

English domination

The tie is one of three that bring together rivals from Serie A and the Premier League. Last season England produced both UEFA Champions League finalists in Chelsea and Manchester United FC, and Del Piero sees no reason why the English clubs should not continue to dominate, saying: "Speaking selfishly, I would not mind if there was an English team in the final every year as long as they didn't win it. All the teams at this stage of the competition are very strong and the English sides are particularly well-equipped to reach the latter stages. I imagine that also goes for the next few years."

Hiddink can help Chelsea conquer, says Lampard

Frank Lampard says Guus Hiddink has brought a winning mentality to Chelsea FC which he believes will be vital in restoring the club's fortunes and propelling them towards the latter stages of the UEFA Champions League.

European glory

The Russia coach has assumed the reins at Stamford Bridge on a temporary basis until the end of the season following the departure of Luiz Felipe Scolari and has already experienced the thrill of lifting Europe's most prestigious trophy, which could make all the difference according to the England midfielder. "Every coach has slightly different ideas but the main idea is that we want to win and that's what he has brought with him," said Lampard of the Dutchman who won the European Champion Clubs' Cup in 1988 with PSV Eindhoven. "It's what the players want as well. We have not performed as well as we should have done in the last two or three months considering the quality in the squad, but we still have a chance in all the competitions we are in and that makes the Juventus game a massive one."

Ranieri return

The first knockout round tie brings the Chelsea players up against former manager Claudio Ranieri and Lampard is looking forward to renewing acquaintances with the Italian. "Without Claudio I probably wouldn't be at Chelsea," he added. "He signed me at a time when £11m was seen as a lot of money and I have the utmost respect for him. He's a great man as well as a great manager and he helped me develop after leaving West Ham [United FC]. I had not seen the real world in football terms and he opened my eyes to a lot of things. He deserves credit for the success this club has had since he left because he signed a lot of good players and elevated John Terry to captain. He's now grown into one of the best captains in the world."

'Great determination'

Chelsea have reached the semi-finals of this competition in four of the last five years and Lampard stressed again the hunger that drives the London team on in this competition – the desire to make amends for last term's disappointment when they lost in a penalty shoot-out to Manchester United FC in the Moscow final. "You can't help but have that in the back of your mind – the manner in which we came so close gives us great determination to go back and win it one day."

Ranieri not too blue over Juve draw

Coach Claudio Ranieri refused to be too downhearted after the UEFA Champions League first knockout round draw handed Juventus a tie against his former employers Chelsea FC.

First return

The 57-year-old will return to Stamford Bridge for the first time since leaving the club on 31 May 2004 when Chelsea stage the first leg on Wednesday 25 February, two weeks before the tie concludes in Turin. The draw was undoubtedly not a kind one for Ranieri, but he took solace in the fact that the Premier League side would hardly be relishing an easy tie against the Bianconeri. "I can't imagine they are happy with the draw either," he said. "We'll play our game and see what happens. Chelsea are one of the favourites to win the competition. They only lost last season's final on penalties. It will be hard for us, but also very stimulating."

Chelsea past

Hired in September 2000, Ranieri helped John Terry to establish himself in the Chelsea first XI and also signed Frank Lampard from West Ham United FC. He was also the first Chelsea coach to benefit from Roman Abramovich's riches, leading a team featuring a number of big-money signings to the semi-finals of the UEFA Champions League in 2004 before being replaced that summer by José Mourinho. "I don't want revenge on Roman Abramovich because I can only thank him," said Ranieri. "It was the first time in my career that I could sign expensive players. He used to tell me the only thing he cared about was that the players we signed had to be stronger than the ones we already had. I can't forget my four years at Chelsea. We will see two good games. It will be a fascinating clash. It will be useful for the Italian teams to meet English sides so we can see how we stand up alongside them."

'Good reception'

Chelsea club secretary David Barnard added: "Any team at this stage of the competition is obviously quality but it could have been a lot worse, maybe Barcelona. It obviously brings back Claudio Ranieri to the Bridge and I am sure Claudio will get a good reception from the Chelsea supporters. In Claudio's last season we actually reached the semi-finals and the Champions League means a lot to him and Chelsea."