

Liverpool FC - Chelsea FC

MATCH PREVIEW

Anfield, Liverpool

Wednesday 8 April 2009 - 20.45CET

Matchday 9 - Quarter-finals, first leg



The epic series of encounters between Liverpool FC and Chelsea FC in the UEFA Champions League resumes at Anfield on Wednesday, when the English sides face each other for the ninth time in the past five seasons.

Remarkable series

This year the teams meet at the quarter-final stage, following two extraordinarily tense last-four victories for Liverpool – 1-0 on aggregate in 2004/05, and after a penalty shoot-out in 2006/07 – while Chelsea reached the 2007/08 final by winning 4-3 over two legs after extra time. Two goalless draws in the 2005/06 group stage complete the remarkable sequence. Chelsea will be encouraged that their sole triumph against Liverpool in the last four came after playing the first leg away from home, just as they will this time.

Giants slain

The two clubs overcame strong opposition in the first knockout round, with Liverpool dispatching Real Madrid CF 5-0 on aggregate while Chelsea prevailed 3-2 over two legs against Juventus. Liverpool manager Rafael Benítez, who has been in charge for all of their European encounters with the London club and masterminded the elimination of Arsenal FC at this stage last season, said: "We are really pleased to be playing against Chelsea again at this stage of the competition and hopefully it will be the same for the next five years because it will mean we're still there."

Unlikely fan

Liverpool and Chelsea remain the only serious contenders to halt Manchester United FC's quest to retain the English Premier League title, and Benítez said he believes that Sir Alex Ferguson will be in the unusual position of cheering on the home side at Anfield. "He'll be supporting Liverpool because he knows that we are the biggest threat now," Benítez said. "If we continue in the competition then maybe we will be tired [for the league], but if we are not in the competition he knows that we will be a threat. If Chelsea are not in the competition he knows that they can be a threat. He will lose either way!"

Title chasers

Benítez's side returned to the top of the table on Saturday after Yossi Benayoun struck in added time in a 1-0 triumph at Fulham FC, although United regained their one-point lead at the summit on Sunday with similarly late victory against Aston Villa FC. Goals by Frank Lampard and Florent Malouda earned Chelsea a 2-0 win at Newcastle United FC that kept them in touch with the top two.

World is watching

Benítez is without midfielder Javier Mascherano as he serves a one-match suspension while Chelsea manager Guus Hiddink has full-back José Bosingwa missing due to a calf strain, although striker Didier Drogba is fit following an ankle problem. Hiddink pledged to take the game to Liverpool, saying: "These matches are finals, watched by the whole world. We did not come here to sit back and wait until we are overcome, and then react. It's not the way to play football in my philosophy. Wherever we can we will try to take the initiative. When the players are fully committed and stick to the tactical plan, it will depend on which team is not making fatal errors."



On-song Riera relishing relief of pressure

Albert Riera promised Liverpool FC would play with both composure and passion as the five-time winners absorb the "beautiful pressure" of facing English rivals Chelsea FC in the UEFA Champions League quarter-finals.

No comparison

Buoyed by goals in his last two outings, including a late winner for Spain against Turkey in Istanbul, the 26-year-old was in upbeat mood as he looked ahead to Wednesday's first leg at Anfield, although he says Liverpool's 2-0 and 1-0 victories against Chelsea in the Premier League this season will count for nothing when the sides lock horns in Europe for the fifth successive campaign. "We will play with our hearts as well as our heads. These kinds of matches in the Champions League are nothing like the Premier League," said Riera, who returns to the European reckoning having served a one-game ban when Liverpool defeated Real Madrid CF 4-0 on Matchday 8. "In the Premier League you play for 90 minutes to get the three points. In the Champions League, we have to play at Anfield, but also be thinking about the other match away as well. This game will be really important, but the away match will decide who makes the next step."

Mixed emotions

Many of the Liverpool players will have mixed memories of their emotional UEFA Champions League encounters with Chelsea over recent years, with two last-four victories to look back on in 2005 and 2007, plus the bitter disappointment of being denied a place in the final last season. For Riera, however, this is uncharted territory, having arrived from RCD Espanyol only in September. "I know this pairing has happened very often before and it will be really difficult for us, but likewise for them. If you want to get to the final you have to play against very good teams: Chelsea are one of those and if we want to continue we have to beat them."

'Really confident'

With Liverpool in the last eight and just one point adrift of Manchester United FC at the Premier League summit, Riera believes that the mood in the camp could scarcely be better. "Sometimes we have been in the best position and sometimes a little bit behind Manchester United, but right now we are really, really confident," the winger said. "We are playing well and have to keep that going over the next month and a half until the end of the season. Personally, fighting for titles is really nice. This is the kind of pressure we want – it's beautiful pressure."

Anfield test holds no fear for Terry

Captain John Terry insists Chelsea FC have lost the fear factor of visiting Anfield in the UEFA Champions League as this year's quarter-final first leg chalks up their fifth trip to face Liverpool FC in the past five seasons.

Familiar ground

Terry was on the wrong end of semi-final defeats on Merseyside in 2005 and 2007, while a 1-1 draw at the same stage last season paved the way for a 4-3 aggregate win at Stamford Bridge. Looking ahead to Wednesday's game, Terry said: "Their fans are going to play a big part and we need to approach the first 15 minutes of the game in the right way. Coming up against Liverpool so many times in the bigger stages of the competition was intimidating but now we are very much used to that. We know exactly what to expect and it's down to us as a group of players to go out there and do the business on the field."

No compromise

Like team-mates Nicolas Anelka and Ashley Cole, Terry is a caution away from a one-match suspension, but he says that will not compromise his no-nonsense style against Liverpool. "I'll play just the same as I did in the last game against Juventus [in the first knockout round]. I'll deal with that in my own way and if there's a ball to be won, as a player and a defender for Chelsea, I have to go and win the ball," the 28-year-old said. "You can't go into the game thinking negatively about that. A yellow card will come if you make a bad tackle, but I'm obviously hoping not to make any."

Forward planning

His job will be made no less easy by the fact that he has to deal with Liverpool's formidable attacking players. "Fernando Torres and Steven Gerrard are up there with the very best in the world," continued Terry, whose winning goal for England against Ukraine last week was created by a Gerrard knock-down. "Stevie links well from midfield and bombs on in behind the defence. Torres poses a great threat to all defenders and we've seen over the last two years that he is definitely one of the best in the world. As a defence we have to be very organised and try not to focus on one player more than the other because if we focus too much on Stevie, Torres will do the damage, and it could go the same the other way. Collectively we have to play a big part and try and keep them at bay."

Penalty torment

Terry's missed penalty against Manchester United FC in last season's final in Moscow cost Chelsea their chance of winning the UEFA Champions League and he still has to deal with the daily torment of that shoot-out disappointment. "I'm very determined to go the extra step this year and win the trophy but the memory of what happened last year will live with me forever, no doubt about that," conceded the centre-back. "One thing that can make that pain ease a little bit is to win this trophy and with the manager and the team that we have at the moment we've got a great chance to do that."