

Chelsea FC - FC Barcelona

MATCH PREVIEW

Stamford Bridge, London

Wednesday 6 May 2009 - 20.45CET

Matchday 12 - Semi-finals, second leg



As his players prepare to remove FC Barcelona from their path towards a second successive UEFA Champions League final, Chelsea FC manager Guus Hiddink has warned that there will not be many more opportunities for them to realise their ambition of a winners' medal.

Elder statesmen

With this their fifth semi-final in Europe's most prestigious competition in six seasons, it is tempting to assume Chelsea now have a season ticket to the business end of the UEFA Champions League. However, only one of those previous ties has been won and even then the London club lost the final. Interim manager Hiddink, whose spell at the club will come to an end after the FA Cup final later this month, is only too aware that the clock is ticking and Frank Lampard, Didier Drogba, Michael Ballack and Nicolas Anelka are all now in their thirties.

Moscow misery

Chelsea desperately hope this will be their year and that there will not be further disappointment to compound the agonies they suffered in last year's showpiece in Moscow, when the trophy was seemingly within their grasp in the penalty shoot-out only for Manchester United FC to prevail. "It is obvious that [Chelsea] are good and that the players have a lot of desire," said Hiddink, whose charges claimed a 3-1 derby win against Fulham FC on Saturday. "They have proved that in previous Champions Leagues but these players don't have five or six more years to take these chances. This will be one of the last occasions for many players to get to where they want to go."

'Intelligence and emotion'

If Chelsea thought they had done the hard part in returning from the Camp Nou with a goalless draw, then Barcelona's 6-2 defeat of Real Madrid CF at the weekend will have reminded them just how potent Josep Guardiola's team can be, even away from home. Hiddink admits he enjoyed the spectacle and is full of praise for the way the Catalan club retain their attacking philosophy, but insists this will be a different game to the one that silenced the Santiago Bernabéu. "We must play both with intelligence and emotion," he added. "Barcelona are the top team in Europe and you have to play with intelligence because the slightest error will be punished. On the other hand you must not play without emotion because that would put a brake on your performance. If you can combine the two you should have a very good game."

Barça absentees

Chelsea believe the absence of both the injured Rafael Márquez and the suspended Carles Puyol from the heart of the visitors' defence offers them a way to get at Barça. Guardiola is likely to switch Eric Abidal into the centre to play alongside Gerard Piqué, with Sylvinho coming in at left-back. Barcelona also have serious concerns over Thierry Henry, who injured a knee against Madrid, but Guardiola is nevertheless confident his team can rise to the occasion. "We have a marvellous chance to get to the final and that's what me and the squad will be dreaming about," he said. "I genuinely feel we have a great chance and I will pick a team to go out and win the game."



Confident Guardiola quells Barça furore

Josep Guardiola may be urging his FC Barcelona side to put Saturday's remarkable 6-2 victory at Real Madrid CF behind them, but he is hoping they can tap into the same devastating vein of skill and stealth when they vie with Chelsea FC for the right to face Manchester United FC in the UEFA Champions League final.

Winning in style

While some criticised Chelsea for what they saw as a defensive approach in the goalless first leg, full of physical commitment, Guardiola insists he himself had no complaints. "How Chelsea set up at the Camp Nou seemed fine to me; they did well and got a good result – now we'll see how that pans out over the whole tie," he said, adding that far from fighting fire with fire, it will be business as usual for his players. "We'll try and play around them, impose our style of play and score goals. While we won't avoid physical contact, if we try to combat Chelsea physically that will only play into their hands as that's their strength. Chelsea are very intense and direct – they put you under pressure. If they lose the ball, they work hard to get it back."

'Marvellous chance'

Barça scaled unbelievable heights at the Santiago Bernabéu at the weekend to open up a seven-point lead at the Liga summit and while the plaudits have subsequently poured down on the architects of that famous victory, Guardiola remains grounded. "What happened in Madrid is history now," he said. "It was great and the merit of that win is greater because of [Real Madrid's] performances in the second half of the season. If we were looking at a game of lesser importance then maybe the players might be a little over-confident, but they know this is a massive game, played before millions. We have a marvellous chance of getting to the final and me and my squad will be falling asleep tonight dreaming about it."

Late decisions

Some may drift off merely dreaming of playing, with the absence of Rafael Márquez and Carles Puyol through injury and suspension leaving an opening at centre-back alongside Gerard Piqué. Eric Abidal is likely to move across to fill the void, with Sylvinho coming in at left-back, and things are also far from clear in the opposition ranks as Guus Hiddink weighs up the pros and cons of departing from Chelsea's usual 4-3-3 formation and pairing Didier Drogba and Nicolas Anelka up front. "I don't waste one second thinking about things that are out of my control; I'll know after five minutes how they are lining up and I only think about my side, their mental state, what we can control," said Guardiola, who faces a nervous wait on Thierry Henry as the French striker is struggling with a knee problem. "Whoever I put in the team will compete, fight and do a good job. I will go into the game thinking that Chelsea will play the game of their lives and I will tell my team to prepare for that."

Drogba draws comfort from attacking depth

Turning the tables on free-scoring FC Barcelona, Didier Drogba insisted it is Chelsea FC's fire power that could be the difference between the teams as they bid for a place in the UEFA Champions League final.

Century up

Barça brought up 100 goals in the Liga this term when Gerard Piqué rounded off a remarkable 6-2 dismantling of Real Madrid CF at the weekend, yet Drogba points to the potential of goals all over the pitch for Chelsea. "[Lionel] Messi, [Thierry] Henry, [Samuel] Eto'o and [Andrés] Iniesta can all score but we have more players who are able to score," said Drogba. "Our midfield players can score and our defenders can score so goals can come from any position."

Missed chance

Given that the visitors have found the net in all but four of their 55 games in all competitions this season, a repeat of the 0-0 scoreline at the Camp Nou a week ago looks unlikely, especially as Stamford Bridge was the venue for eight goals in its last UEFA Champions League tie, the 4-4 draw against Liverpool FC in the quarter-final second leg. Chelsea might have been defending a lead again this time round had Drogba accepted a first-half chance on the counterattack in Spain but initial disappointment at that eventually gave way to satisfaction at a solid team performance. "I was a little bit frustrated because in these games if you manage to score it can make the difference, but you know as a striker that another chance will come your way," Drogba explained. "It's the team that matters most of all and we were pleased with the result."

Rare pairing

In Saturday's 3-1 home defeat of Fulham FC, Drogba was paired alongside Nicolas Anelka in a two-pronged attack that has not been seen too often at Stamford Bridge since the Frenchman's arrival 16 months ago. It has left manager Guus Hiddink with a decision to make about how best to approach the task of beating the Catalan club. "We have shown we can win games with two up front or with a 4-3-3 formation so the manager has to make his decision," Drogba added. "I will be really happy to be on the pitch whatever the manager decides. I enjoy these kinds of moments – they are rare in a footballer's career."

Chelsea strength causes Sylvinho concern

FC Barcelona defender Sylvinho believes his side will have to stand up to the physical challenge posed by Chelsea FC if they are to reach the UEFA Champions League final.

First-leg frustration

Frustrated in last week's goalless draw at the Camp Nou, the Spanish Liga leaders travel to west London hoping to unpick a Chelsea defence that smothered their best efforts in the first leg – and Sylvinho has no doubts where the tie will be won and lost. "Chelsea are one of Europe's best teams and very strong at home, particularly physically," said the 35-year-old, who expects a similar pattern of play to the first match. "They won't change their approach too much but with the fans behind them I expect them to come out a little more. I don't think they will be overly attacking; they will play to their strengths. I can assure you that everyone who's coming here is really up for the occasion and hopefully we'll get a good result. I personally wasn't too disappointed by the result in the Camp Nou. We have to be very strong mentally and hopefully we'll put in a good performance."

Defensive reshuffle

Suspension to Carles Puyol and Rafael Márquez's knee injury means the 35-year-old is in contention for his sixth UEFA Champions League appearance of the season on the left of the Barça defence, although he accepts coach Josep Guardiola has other options. "The manager hasn't said anything about the team yet – even if he had and I told you, he'd kill me," he joked. "Obviously Puyol and Márquez are big losses for us but whoever plays we'll be ready. There's one or two of us who can come in but we're all focused and together as a unit – and we think we can do well here."

'Extra motivation'

If Chelsea needed any reminder of the potency of Barça's attack, Saturday's 6-2 league win at Real Madrid CF provided ample evidence. An unused substitute, Sylvinho watched admiringly from the bench and believes the result – and, perhaps more relevantly, the manner in which it was achieved – provides an invaluable confidence boost. "That result was essential for us," he explained. "Given the result and the way we performed against Madrid it's going to be an extra motivation for us – not that you need any extra motivation for a Champions League semi-final."

'Beautiful atmosphere'

The Brazilian has started only seven league games this season but has fond memories of Stamford Bridge having recorded a win and a draw there during his two seasons with Arsenal FC between 1999 and 2001, scoring a memorable goal in the latter fixture, a 2-2 draw in September 2000. "The fans in England are fantastic, they get behind the side for 90 minutes and more," he said. "It's probably the stadiums that make the atmosphere so special, they're a lot tighter and the crowd are right on top of the pitch. The atmosphere is beautiful. But it's nothing new to our players; we have experienced and understand that type of atmosphere and can expect to do well."