

# SPAIN - GERMANY

## MATCH PREVIEW

Gamla Ullevi, Gothenburg

Monday 15 June 2009 - 20.45CET (20.45 local time)

Group B - Matchday 1



### Heavyweights target telling early blow

Two of European football's powerhouses who have surprisingly struggled to make a recent impact at the UEFA European Under-21 Championship, both Spain and Germany are only too aware of the importance of making a positive start when they meet in Group B.

### Title challenge

Champions in 1986 and 1998, Spain have not qualified since 2000, while Germany have never won this competition and also missed out on the last finals in the Netherlands two years ago. Yet both coaches exuded an air of confidence at their respective pre-match press conferences at the Gamla Ullevi. "The team is very well prepared," said Germany's Horst Hrubesch. "When I see them in training and the atmosphere around the squad then I really believe they're in good shape. We are not here just to play a few games; we have always clearly said that we are going to challenge for the title."

### Swiss example

Spain coach Juan Ramón López Caro stopped short of publicly setting out such ambitious targets, although he did admit "the players feel very confident. They have a lot of responsibility and come here looking to do well and hope to have a good tournament." When asked if Spain could challenge for the title he pointed to the narrow escape in the play-offs for these finals: "We only won against Switzerland in the last minute so I wouldn't say we're favourites. What we have to do is demonstrate we have good quality and perform at a high level. Germany are a physical team full of personality who like to attack and also defend very well. We have to play our own game."

### Expect the unexpected

The omens are good for Hrubesch, who guided Germany to a 2-1 victory against Spain on Matchday 1 of last year's UEFA European Under-19 Championship and the side went on to lift the trophy for the first time. "I'm convinced we're going to have a good tournament," said Hrubesch, who will return to the U19 post next month. "This team is strong physically and mentally – we've worked on the second part a lot. We can play at a high technical level and this all contributes to the team spirit which is very important at a tournament like this. We can play at a very fast pace and we have some great individuals. That's one of our strengths as no team knows what to expect against Germany. But the main thing is that these players know what they want: to win the title."

### 'Small details'

Neither side have any injury concerns ahead of their meeting in Gothenburg, and with both looking for a positive start – Germany have won only two matches in a U21 final tournament, their opening games in both 2004 and 2006 – López Caro believes he has pinpointed where the match will be won and lost. "We know we're in a difficult group and we have to respect our rivals – we know matches like these will be decided by small details," he said. "As always, it will be important not to make mistakes in either defence or attack. I expect there to be lots of chances; the percentage that are turned into goals will be key."



### EURO glory spurs on Spain's García

Raúl García believes Spain can draw on their senior counterparts' victory at UEFA EURO 2008™ as they look to reclaim the UEFA European Under-21 Championship title after a wait of eleven years.

#### 'Extra motivation'

Champions in 1986 and 1998, by their own high standards Spain have endured a fallow period in recent times – indeed this is their first final tournament at this level since 2000. Yet their captain is adamant that last summer's success in Austria and Switzerland can spur the U21 side to glory in Sweden. "We're very proud Spain won that tournament last summer, it's extra motivation for the squad. We know that if we perform well here we can win this tournament as well – and that would give us greater pride," said García, who was similarly bullish when asked about that nine-year absence from the finals. "This team really believes in itself. We didn't come here just to play football, but to win the tournament."

#### European experience

Spain might have struggled to make an impact at the U21s but they have had no shortage of success at youth level, with four titles collected in both the U17 and U19 competitions since that 1998 triumph. Indeed, eight of Juan Ramón López Caro's 23-man squad have already tasted European glory at various age levels and García believes his team-mates have the know-how to add this crown to an ever-growing pile of trophies. "We are really confident," he said simply. "We know we have a good team, but we also know this competition is very strong. Our main intention is to win the tournament and we'll fight for that."

#### 'Fight to win'

A man of few words and concise statements, when asked how he imagined how the opening match against Germany might pan out, García responded: "I don't imagine how the game will be; I know how it will be. It will be very tough, a physical game in which we will have to fight until the very end. Being the first game of the tournament it's always important to perform well." He was similarly straightforward when it was put to him that, after a long season for club and country spanning almost ten months, fatigue could be an issue. "We've been trying to qualify for these finals for two years," he said. "There's no question of us being tired – we will fight to win this tournament."

### Castro commits to nurture over nature

Gonzalo Castro admits it will be "emotional" when Germany take on the land of his parents' birth, Spain, in the opening round of matches at the UEFA European Under-21 Championship but both he and his captain are confident Horst Hrubesch's side can rise to the occasion.

#### 'Send a signal'

Castro was born in Wuppertal in western Germany to a Spanish couple and admits to mixed feelings ahead of the Group B game – although he is confident that there will no question of divided loyalties once the referee's whistle sounds in Gothenburg. "It's a very emotional situation for me," the versatile midfielder, often deployed at right-back by Bayer 04 Leverkusen, told the pre-match press conference. "My father comes from Malaga and my mother from Girona in Catalonia. But this is an important match for us because we can send a signal to the other teams. We're very well prepared for the tournament."

#### 'No pressure'

That last point was echoed by skipper Sami Khedira, who emphasised the importance of beginning the finals in positive fashion. "We want to get off to a good start against Spain to generate a good feeling in and around the squad for the forthcoming matches," said the VfB Stuttgart midfielder, who is confident his side will do themselves justice in Sweden over the next fortnight. "We can handle this situation. The whole team are very experienced; we're used to playing in the Champions League and the Bundesliga. Sometimes we're playing for the league title, sometimes against relegation. We're used to playing in front of sold-out stadiums so that's why we're looking forward to this. There's no pressure – it's a nice challenge."

#### Team of leaders

Khedira and Castro are both likely to shoulder additional responsibility, with the former wearing the captain's armband and Castro one of only two squad members to have previously appeared in a U21 finals, in Portugal in 2006. Both, however, are advocates of the notion of collective responsibility, the former explaining: "It's not a new situation for me – I've always thought of myself as one of the leaders in the team. Now I get the chance to discuss with the coach and share my opinions, but lots of the squad are leaders so it's not difficult."

#### Löw ambitions

In the unlikely event of any members of Hrubesch's squad needing additional motivation, senior coach Joachim Löw will attend the first two matches in Sweden and Castro, with five full caps to his name already – although none since November 2007 - has particular reason to shine. "I'm very proud to have played for the senior team but I haven't played too well for a while so I'm looking to do that at this tournament and next season," he said. "I'm a young player, I have to learn a lot and develop and I'm very optimistic for these finals."