

BELARUS - SERBIA

MATCH PREVIEW

Malmö New Stadium, Malmö

Friday 19 June 2009 - 18.15CET (18.15 local time)

Group A - Matchday 2



If Serbia's squad needed any reminder of the significance of their second Group A game against Belarus, they got it in bold letters from coach Slobodan Krčmarević when he described Friday's contest as "the biggest match for this generation".

Time to deliver

After holding Italy 0-0, Krčmarević believes Serbia must deliver three points against Belarus to retain realistic hope of a semi-final place. "It will be a very difficult game for us and a very important one," he said. "Right now I can say it will be the biggest match for this generation." It is a view shared by his Belarus counterpart, Yuri Kurnenin, who declared: "Whoever loses will not go further in the competition."

Goals required

With the stakes high, Serbia require goals and Krčmarević is confident they will "score at least once". Despite the absence of a conventional centre-forward – given Filip Djordjević's pre-finals injury – Krčmarević noted that his players created four good chances against Italy. He will likely alter his forward line, dropping Gojko Kačar into a more usual midfield role. Yet while Nemanja Matić has flown home after his metatarsal fracture against Italy, Nemanja Tomić, who hurt his ankle in the same game, will be fit to play some part, having trained on Thursday.

Adventure and aggression

Whatever the lineup, Krčmarević admitted Serbia must show greater adventure. "I can say we will be more offensive than in the first game but also we must be very controlled. We can't just go forward and leave ourselves open at the back. Belarus have some good attacking players and we have to think about that," he said, citing the speed of Leonid Kovel. Greater aggression, meanwhile, is the key to Belarus's chances of bouncing back from their crushing 5-1 defeat by Sweden, according to coach Kurnenin.

'Contact sport'

Noting the statistic that Belarus committed only nine fouls to Sweden's 23 on Tuesday, he said: "We should be more aggressive – in a sporting sense – because if we look at the statistics, we had only nine fouls and that's very few. Football is a contact sport and we should be more aggressive. If we play like that against Serbia we will not be able to win." Kurnenin, back on the bench after his suspension from the first match, will also demand that his players avoid the "huge mistakes" that contributed to the scale of their opening loss in a game where they actually enjoyed more possession.

Qualifying meetings

The Belarus trainer promised "some changes" – Andrei Chukhlei could replace Mikhail Afanasiev in midfield – and takes heart from their efforts against Serbia in qualifying, a 3-1 loss in Belgrade and 1-1 draw in Vitebsk. "We were equal to them and the 3-1 result did not reflect the performance we gave," said Kurnenin, albeit adding: "The Serbian team have progressed a lot – they have players at clubs like Manchester United [FC], [AFC] Ajax and Hertha [BSC] Berlin." That may be true but Krčmarević is taking nothing for granted: "I know what a difficult game awaits us."



Kislyak strikes defiant note for Belarus

The 5-1 defeat by Sweden in their opening Group A match was a bitter pill to swallow for Belarus but midfielder Sergei Kislyak maintains they still have their destiny in their own hands in this UEFA European Under-21 Championship.

Ray of light

The FC Dinamo Minsk player provided the one ray of light for Belarus's watching supporters on Tuesday with the tremendous effort that gave the eastern Europeans a short-lived first-half lead. Speaking on the eve of the meeting with Serbia in Malmö, he retained an optimistic outlook. "We have the chance to qualify from the group stage," he said. "We have to win both remaining matches. We have forgotten about our opening defeat and taken the proper conclusions after analysing our mistakes. We want to go out on to the pitch now and get a result. Everything is still in our hands."

Need for vigilance

Kislyak, 22, remembered his side's positive showing against Serbia in the qualifying round for these finals – besides holding their opponents at home, they also performed creditably in a 3-1 loss in Belgrade. "I came on after an hour in Belgrade. We started very well. Leonid Kovel missed two great opportunities and then they punished us from a free kick. The two other goals were the result of our own mistakes, but we could easily have got a different result." To achieve a different result in Malmö, Kislyak said they would have to cut out the "big mistakes" made against Sweden, yet acknowledged Serbia would provide tough opposition. "Serbia's tactics differ from the ones used by Sweden. The Serbs have a wider range of individual talents, particularly in attack, and we will have to watch them closely."

Coach returns

Head coach Yuri Kurnenin's return to the bench after suspension could be a positive factor according to Kislyak. "Yuri Anatolievich's [Kurnenin] presence on the bench is extremely important" said the defensive midfielder, a national champion with Dinamo Minsk in 2004. "We are a unified group and have to be together," he added. "We can only blame ourselves for the opening defeat. We were told to play in one way, but did it in another. We have to follow closely our coach's instructions this time."

Birthday greeting

"We need to play strictly in defence, keep ourselves fully focused until the final whistle, play more compactly, cover each other, not to allow our opponents to create any single opportunity and then of course, convert our own chances," continued Kislyak. He finished with a word for his colleague in the Belarus central midfield, Aleksandr Volodko, who turned 23 on Thursday, wishing the FC BATE Borisov player "many football achievements and famous victories". A victory over Serbia would fit the bill perfectly.