

GERMANY - ENGLAND

MATCH PREVIEW

Örjans vall, Halmstad

Monday 22 June 2009 - 20.45CET (20.45 local time)

Group B - Matchday 3



A draw would take Germany into the semi-finals of the UEFA European Under-21 Championship and see England progress as Group B winners, but those anticipating a drop in intensity between these rivals when they meet in Halmstad are likely to be sorely mistaken.

Progress assured

Both have beaten Finland, and England also dispatched Spain in their last outing to secure progress to the last four with a match to spare. Germany have four points and one more would guarantee they join Stuart Pearce's men in the knockout stage. Any thoughts of each side being satisfied with a draw were swiftly banished at the pre-match press conferences, however, with Germany playmaker Mesut Özil summing up the mood by predicting a "very exciting" contest. "The team knows what it's all about now," said his coach Horst Hrubesch. "We take every situation step by step. The team has improved in training over the past few days, we're working well together and I'm absolutely convinced we're going to win."

Yellow peril

Sebastian Boenisch is still sidelined with an ankle problem so Marcel Schmelzer will continue at left-back, while Gonzalo Castro (right thigh) and Jerome Boateng (back) are expected to shrug off minor injuries. In addition no fewer than ten players – seven of them German – would miss a possible semi-final should they be booked at Örjans vall, but Hrubesch will not let that influence his thinking. "This changes nothing, it's not my first thought to avoid yellow cards or suspensions," the coach explained. "Everyone has to be at their best, and I'm only interested in the victory. Nothing else counts."

'Big, big fixture'

The teams last met in October 2006 when two late goals from Theo Walcott in Leverkusen gave England a 2-0 victory in the second leg of their play-off for the 2007 final tournament and completed a 3-0 overall success. Stuart Pearce, a loser to Germany in the semi-finals of the 1990 FIFA World Cup and EURO '96™, is expecting another fierce contest. "England versus Germany is a big, big fixture," the manager said. "I've lost two major semi-finals to very good German sides. I can't do much about that now; my players can. Germany are a high-energy side, two attacking full-backs and Özil has been outstanding up front for them. They're a big, powerful side and good on set-plays. They'll be a handful for us and a big test, but it's got to be a game the squad are looking forward to."

Strength in depth

Pearce, whose only injury concerns surround Gabriel Agbonlahor (calf) and Micah Richards (knee), has the luxury of knowing progress is assured regardless of the result and may opt to introduce players who have not featured so far. Winning, though, remains his priority. "Whatever the team is is irrelevant; I expect a big performance and to win. The squad have got a real collectiveness, a real sense of wanting to improve and that excites me. I'm pleased with what we've got but if you ask me can we get better – yes we can. Have the players got an attitude to get better? They certainly have. I want to keep the momentum that we're gaining."



Campbell excited by England chance

After a frustrating season at club level, Fraizer Campbell is relishing the opportunity to play a full part in England's challenge for the UEFA European Under-21 Championship.

Frustrating campaign

The Manchester United FC striker spent 2008/09 at Tottenham Hotspur FC but started just one Premier League match and managed only one goal. After the elation of his loan spell the previous season – when Campbell's 15 goals helped Hull City AFC win promotion to the top flight for the first time – it was a reminder of the harsh realities of life for a young player, a lesson Campbell has clearly absorbed. "It's been a tough season for me, frustrating – I've not played a lot of games but I'm playing for England now and getting some minutes on the pitch," said the man responsible for England's opening goal in Thursday's win against Spain that booked a semi-final place. "Hopefully I can get some more and it'll be a good end to the season."

'Great attitude'

Despite his struggles at club level the 21-year-old has cemented his place in Stuart Pearce's squad this term, and cameo roles in victories against Finland and Spain have only reinforced the England manager's admiration for the forward. "He's improving as an international player; in both matches he's come on and made a major contribution," Pearce said on the eve of the third and final Group B game against Germany. "His energy and commitment for the team cause is fantastic – he's very unselfish. He's been a major contributor to the U21 side but there's more to come from him as a player, at this level and in general. He's got an eye for goal and a great attitude to football, he wants to learn and be better and everything I've asked of him he's put into practice straight away. He's going in the right direction. His career's going to improve and improve."

'High standards'

Campbell's long-term future may lie with a permanent return to Hull, who had a reported €7.1m bid accepted by United at the start of the month, but for now the striker is solely focused on firing Pearce's squad to glory in Sweden. Only a draw is required for England to win the group – a result which would also secure a semi-final berth for Germany – but the message coming out of the England camp has emphasised that there will be no let-up in Halmstad. "This is a big game for us and we want to carry on doing well," said Campbell. "It's been a good tournament so far; I've come on in both games and we've won both. The team's been doing alright together but obviously we can do a lot better. We set high standards for ourselves and try to continue that in every game we play. We weren't great in the first game, we improved in parts in the second but there's still a lot more to come. Hopefully we can peak at the right time and go all the way."

Germany's Neuer keen to keep it clean

A point is all Germany require to reach the UEFA European Under-21 Championship semi-finals for the first time since 1982 yet Manuel Neuer is urging his side to adopt "a positive frame of mind" when they take on Group B leaders England in Halmstad.

'Ready to go'

The goalkeeper has kept clean sheets against Spain and Finland, and recognises another sterling effort will be needed if Horst Hrubesch's side are to book their place in the last four. "We're all in a very positive frame of mind," Neuer told uefa.com. "We're motivated, ready to go and will try everything to win the match. We have to show this right from the kick-off. We know England are strong on the counterattack and have a compact defence, which means they can change from defence to attack very quickly. We must be really careful to make sure we have numerical superiority when defending so they can't use their dangerous counterattacks."

Defensive excellence

One of two teams still to concede after two matches in Sweden, Neuer attributes Germany's impeccable defensive record to "working well together". When asked to elaborate, he replied: "We're very compact in defence and play very defensively, right from the front whenever the other team has the ball. We know what we have to do once they have possession; there's a reason why we haven't conceded a goal so far. The defence fits together very well; even the strikers work very hard in defence. We move very well to prevent scoring opportunities for our opponents. We're defending very well as a team, we're very compact. I'm confident this will be the case again, and hopefully in the matches ahead too. The defensive performance has been the key to our success up to now and will be [on Monday] as well."

'Never a friendly'

With Germany needing just a point to make sure of their place in the last four and England already assured of progress, there may be a danger of an anti-climax at Örjans vall, but not for Neuer. "It's never a friendly against Germany," said the FC Schalke 04 man. "The game still matters for England as well as they definitely want to win the group to play the second-placed team from the other section. They will be really giving it their all, and I think they don't really want to meet us again either." When mention was made of Germany's surprisingly poor record against England – of the sides' eight competitive meetings, England have lost only one, the first, back in 1982 – the goalkeeper remained unruffled. "I didn't know that statistic, but I've never played against England. It won't have any effect on our performance."