



2009 UEFA EUROPEAN WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

MATCH PREVIEW



Netherlands



France

Tampere Stadium, Tampere

Thursday 3 September 2009 - 19.00CET (20.00 local time)

Matchday 4 - Quarter-finals

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Committed to the future of European football

Pauw planning France downfall

Vera Pauw says her Netherlands side have "been breaking through walls every other day" at UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™, and her charges will hope to dismantle another obstacle when they meet France in Tampere on Thursday to dispute a semi-final berth that would be unprecedented for both teams.

'Exciting moment'

The Oranje claimed second place in Group A thanks to victories against Ukraine and Denmark, while only slipping up against hosts Finland, and those wins propelled them into the knockout stage of a competition they have not graced since the format was modified in 1997. "The game tomorrow is the most important one ever for us," said Pauw. "We're breaking through walls every other day and the game against France will be another exciting moment to move forward."

France threat

Pauw can count on a fully fit squad going into the encounter – "surprisingly, given our three battles" – but she is well aware that whoever she picks can expect a busy evening keeping a lid on France's fluid attacking forays. "France are a very skilful team," she said. "They have a lot of pace in the team and a lot of movement, combined with creativity, which means it will be very difficult for us. But there'll be chances and as always we'll try to take our chances."

December friendly

The 46-year-old nonetheless has fairly recent experience of overcoming Les Bleues, having overseen a 2-0 triumph on French soil in December 2008, the last time the two sides met. "Last year was a friendly and we have to be honest," warned Pauw. "The core group of their team did not play in the first half. They came on halfway into the second so that makes a difference."

'Long time ago'

Her counterpart Bruno Bini, who is also free of injury worries "for the first time this tournament", was just as reluctant to read anything into that match. "It was an end-of-year game," he said. "The girls were going on holiday afterwards and we had lots of injured players and absentees, as did the Netherlands. Whenever you have to go back six or seven months, it's a long time ago. We won't draw any lessons from that game or the one we won in the Netherlands [4-1 in October 2007]."

Small details

Bini's charges booked their own progress by drawing 1-1 with Norway in their final Group B match to finish runners-up behind Germany, and like the Oranje they have not reached the knockout phase since the 1997 change of format. "This will be a high-level match and like all high-level matches, in men's and women's football, it will come down to small details," he explained. "The girls will need to be focused, but they're ready physically, mentally and in terms of technique."

Stevens hungry to show her class

Netherlands striker Karin Stevens feels she deserved to be dropped for her team's final Group A encounter at UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ but is determined to demonstrate her worth and help the Oranje reach the semi-finals against France.

Denmark performance

The 20-year-old came to Finland having scored three goals in the Netherlands' 4-0 aggregate success against Spain in the play-offs, but after being substituted against Ukraine and Finland she was left on the bench for the crucial encounter with Denmark. With the match still goalless at half-time, however, she was brought on for the second period and played her part in the eventual 2-1 victory that secured Vera Pauw's side runners-up spot in the section. "Against Ukraine and Finland, Chantal [de Ridder] came on and did better than me," said Stevens. "It's important for the team that the one who's best is playing and Chantal was the best then. But I think I did well when I came on and I've trained hard, just like the others."

Powerful defence

Still playing for the boys' team at SC Jekerdal when she made her international debut in 2006, she also feels she has the physical power to punish Les Bleues. "They're a good team with lots of fine individual players," she said. "They're more interested in keeping possession than playing a physical style but their defence is physically strong. That's always a problem for forwards, although you can tell by looking at me that I have my own physical qualities to bring to bear."

Penalty doubt

Whether she also boasts the mental strength to make the difference if the game goes to the wire remains to be seen. The prospect of a penalty shoot-out to decide who progresses hangs over this and the other knockout games, and while Bruno Bini's France claim not to have practised spot-kicks at all, Stevens admitted she cannot predict how she will react if there is still no winner after extra time. "I've scored a few penalties but I'll have to see when there's a lot of pressure whether I can still do it," she said.

Blanc at home with Les Bleues

Having made her major finals bow in France's last Group B outing against Norway at UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™, defender Delphine Blanc told uefa.com she is fitting in well as Les Bleues target a last-four berth against the Netherlands on Thursday.

Family support

The 26-year-old was given plenty of support in the 1-1 draw with Norway by her father, who first gave her a taste for football and who has taken time off work to follow her performances in Finland. "I was proud and then I was a little anxious because I haven't played that many games at such a high level," she said of the match at the Helsinki Football Stadium. "The support of our families is important – that's what makes us go forward. We heard them in the stands, we felt supported. It was important to us."

Different position

Employed in central defence for her club, Montpellier Hérault SC, Blanc nonetheless had to contend with playing out of position for her country. "With the national team, I play on the right side," she explained. "Given the physical state of the team, with Sandrine Dusang not totally recovered [and not in the squad], Corine Franco injured in the first game and Amandine Henry injured before – I knew that if I was playing, I would be on the side rather than in the middle. But I like this position."

Good atmosphere

She also feels a fully fledged squad member, despite earning only 12 caps since her March 2006 debut. "The atmosphere's good," she said. "There are different generations but we more or less know each other. We meet every weekend in the league and that makes integration easier."

Quarter-finals

The former Olympique Lyonnais and RC Saint-Étienne player knows a little less than many of her colleagues about the Netherlands, however, having not featured in the 2-0 home loss to the Oranje last December. "I don't know this team very well but I think they're within our reach," she said. "But in a football match, anything can happen. We have to get ready in order to qualify for the semi-finals. It would be really disappointing [to lose] because I think we have what it takes to do something good. We were very satisfied to progress. Now, as we're here, we might as well go all the way."