



2009 UEFA EUROPEAN WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

MATCH PREVIEW



Germany



Italy

Lahti Stadium, Lahti

Friday 4 September 2009 - 15.00CET (16.00 local time)

Matchday 4 - Quarter-finals

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Holders set for full throttle

Germany are ready to turn on the pressure against Italy in Friday's quarter-final at UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™, but the holders also know they risk punishment from a swift counterattack by the Azzurre.

Pressure points

Germany are bidding for a fifth consecutive European title and their demolitions of both France and UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2005™ finalists Norway in the group stage sent an ominous message to the rest of the tournament. Coach Silvia Neid has made no secret of the fact that she expects her side to bring the hammer down against Pietro Ghedin's side. However, Neid also knows that Italy have proved themselves a particularly resilient opponent at these finals, coming back from a goal down to beat ten-player England 2-1 and soaking up everything Russia had to offer before sealing a late 2-0 victory.

Italy danger

"They beat England and they beat Russia, though they were never the better side in either game," Neid said. "But they scored goals that came almost from nowhere and that's why you should never feel too safe against them, especially because Patrizia Panico and Melania Gabbiadini are incredibly dangerous. Of course, we'll be the team who will press and we expect to have a lot of the possession but they will try to exploit any mistakes on the counterattack. It won't be easy for us."

Strikers return

The task will be helped, though, by the return to fitness of their two key strikers – Birgit Prinz, who sustained an ankle knock in training on Monday, and Inka Grings, who suffered a knee injury as she scored the winner against Iceland a day earlier. Speaking on the eve of the game, assistant coach Ulrike Ballweg said Prinz "still has a slight pain in her ankle but it shouldn't be a problem for tomorrow" and was even more confident about Grings. "She trained on Wednesday at full intensity, so she'll be fine," she said.

Mission impossible

Italy coach Pietro Ghedin has no such injury worries, telling uefa.com: "Everybody's fit, I'm spoilt for choice." However, he also knows that Italy need to overcome their often bumpy starts to games at this tournament if they are to have any chance in what many have classed as a mission impossible.

Self-awareness

"On paper, it certainly looks that way, but we'll see. ... Up till now, we've been slow starters because we are actually a good side but we don't yet realise it. As the game goes on, though, we start playing better. So far, the first few minutes have almost always been a bit lethal for us – either in terms of conceding goals or being made to suffer," Ghedin said. "But if we can weather that, we should be in with a shout."

Germany's Behringer wary of Italy

Germany midfielder Melanie Behringer told uefa.com that the holders must not underestimate Italy when the two sides meet in the UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ quarter-finals on Friday in Lahti.

German run

Behringer, who plays on the right of Germany's attacking midfield three, is understandably full of confidence after Silvia Neid's side took a maximum nine points from the group stage, scoring ten goals as they continue a bid for a fifth straight title. She declared: "If we play our own game it will be very difficult for them to beat us, but we shouldn't underestimate any team. They beat England and Russia, we know they have a strong side."

Caution

Indeed Behringer believes Germany will need to be patient against Pietro Ghedin's charges, who are hoping for an upset that would take them through to the semi-finals for the first time since 1997, when they went on to reach the final. "All the teams here have improved their defensive game and I think Italy will play extremely defensively," Behringer said. "It will take some time to break through, but I am sure we will manage to score."

Facing club-mate

For the FC Bayern München player, the game will have an even more special significance, as Italy are likely to field her club-mate Carolina Pini. "We talked about the tournament a few weeks ago but she was still in doubt then, not knowing whether she would make the squad. We haven't had any contact here in Lahti yet," Behringer said.

Clinical finish

Being among the substitutes in the last group game against Iceland to avoid a second yellow card, Behringer is really looking forward to Friday's knockout contest, particularly as her last outing – in the 5-1 defeat of France – was more than a week ago. Despite the scoreline against Les Bleues, she is hoping for an improvement in terms of her personal performance, saying: "I have to be more clinical in front of goal and I have to improve my passing game."

Scoring options

As for the team in general, Behringer points to several reasons why Germany are the team to beat in Finland. "We are mentally much fresher than we were a year ago at the Olympics [where Germany won bronze], we are in good shape and we have more fun playing football again. Furthermore, we have different types of players who bring their special strengths to the game. I don't see any other team which has seven different players who can score."

Tona eyes upset for Germany

Italy's defensive lynchpin Elisabetta Tona told uefa.com she is fed up with hearing that Germany are bound to beat Italy in Friday's UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ quarter-finals and reckons the Azzurre can defy the form book.

True grit

The ASD Sassari Torres player is bracing herself for a demanding game against the European and world champions at Lahti Stadium, but refuses to believe the Azzurre have no chance of reaching their first semi-final at a UEFA European Women's Championship since 1997. "We know it will be tough, they're like a battleship," Tona said of the holders. "No matter how many trophies they've won they still want more, but we are not going to play thinking we will lose or hoping to get a draw, that's for sure. We must have the right belief, grit and determination."

Right start

The right approach on Friday will be particularly important for an Italy side who have failed to find their best form at the start of matches in Finland, but who have always improved and found the right tempo – notably going a goal down against ten-player England before winning 2-1. They are only too well aware that, against Germany, any slow start or minor error is likely to be punished by Silvia Neid's team. "We have to play at our best from the very first minute, we must close down all the spaces and not leave them a single inch free on the pitch," Tona said. "We know they will start at full speed and we have to do the same."

Goal threat

Tona is not only a key player in Italy's defence but can also be dangerous up front, as the 25-year-old proved during qualifying by scoring three times against Hungary and more recently here in Finland by playing a part in the opening goal during the 2-0 victory over Russia. Her first shot on target was only just stopped on the line by midfielder Ekaterina Sochneva, while her header drew a fantastic block from goalkeeper Elvira Todua – only for Melania Gabbiadini to find the net with the rebound.

Heart and soul

Though many believe Italy will simply be easy prey on Germany's way to a fifth consecutive continental title, Tona, who played at UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2005™, is convinced that Neid's team will have a battle on their hands. "Everybody thinks it's like a mission impossible, but nothing is impossible. We will try hard until the last minute of the game, we will give everything we have," Tona insisted. "We will fight with our heart and soul, and whatever else it takes to have a good game and to win. You never play to lose."