



2009 UEFA EUROPEAN WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

MATCH PREVIEW



England



Netherlands

Tampere Stadium, Tampere

Sunday 6 September 2009 - 18.00CET (19.00 local time)

Matchday 5 - Semi-finals

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Committed to the future of European football

England alert to Netherlands threat

England manager Hope Powell acknowledges that her side will start as favourites in Sunday's UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ semi-final against the Netherlands, but she insists there will be no question of anyone taking Vera Pauw's team lightly in Tampere as they attempt to win a place in Thursday's decider against Germany or Norway.

Surprise package

The Oranje have been the surprise package in Finland, reaching the last four courtesy of a cast-iron defence and efficiency in front of goal, though they needed a penalty shoot-out to dispose of France in the quarter-finals after a goalless draw, having beaten Ukraine and Denmark in the group stage. England ousted hosts Finland 3-2 in a thrilling last-eight tie and beat the Netherlands twice in 2007 FIFA Women's World Cup qualifying but Powell knows it will be no easy task for her nation to reach their first final in this competition since she herself played in the inaugural 1984 decider.

Challenge

"I think it would be a lie if I didn't think people were expecting us to win it, simply because we're higher ranked than the Dutch and everyone was looking at them and thinking they wouldn't be at this stage," said Powell. "We know what we're up against: the few times we've played the Dutch it's been very, very difficult and the last time we actually lost to them [to a Manon Melis goal in a March 2007 friendly in Swindon], so we're not taking anything for granted."

'Tough game'

The Netherlands are making their women's final tournament debut while no England player remains from their most recent European last-four encounter, when they lost to Germany over two legs in 1995. "For both teams, it's their first time in a semi-final of a competition at senior level," added Powell. "It means a lot to both teams to go through. It's going to be challenging. We're not underestimating anything."

Realistic assessment

England will be without captain Faye White after she fractured and dislocated her cheekbone against Finland, though right-back Alex Scott could return from a groin problem. Netherlands coach Pauw is expecting the hardest of challenges whoever lines up in white. "It will be another tough game for us – very tough," said Pauw, who has a full squad to pick from. "We rate England higher than Denmark and France at the moment with the way they play, with a lot of movement, creativity and interchanging of positions. We need to be at our absolute top to beat them. If we're not able to play to our top level like we did [against France] we don't have much of a chance. That's just a realistic point of view."

Business as usual for Melis

Netherlands striker Manon Melis says she and her team-mates are not about to change their methods now as they prepare to take on England in the UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ semi-finals on Sunday.

Players focused

Contesting their first final tournament in this competition, the Oranje have defied expectations to book themselves a place in the last four, defeating Ukraine and Denmark in the group stage before eliminating France on penalties to reach the semis. These are high times for the Netherlands squad, who have been rewarded with state salaries for their efforts, but Melis insisted that now is not the time to let minds wander. "It was difficult to focus yesterday but we are focused again now and we will have time to enjoy what we've achieved after the tournament," she said.

'No extra pressure'

The potential for nerves to fray must be high ahead of the meeting with England in Tampere, however Melis stressed that the Netherlands will approach the match as they would any other. "There's no extra pressure," she said. "We'll do our thing and prepare as usual. I've experienced no different atmosphere within the team, but it's important that there's more media attention now."

'No difference'

The laid-back LdB FC Malmö forward is also unperturbed by the prospect of coming up against one of the finest talents in women's football, Kelly Smith. "She's a leader on the field, but for me it makes no difference," Melis said. "Every match is important and the game is about eleven players against eleven." Her country's second highest goalscorer of all time, Melis is likewise drawing no encouragement from her experience of hitting a winning goal against England in Swindon in a March 2007 friendly. "That's not how I think about it," she said. "This is a new game and we have to start again."

Chapman relishing her big day

While other players might be dreading the occasion or anxiously counting down the hours to kick-off, England midfielder Katie Chapman cut a relaxed figure as she said she is "looking forward" to Sunday's UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ semi-final with the Netherlands.

More to come

The Arsenal LFC player has enjoyed a good tournament, despite having to fill in at the back on more than one occasion, and she hopes to still be smiling after the high-stakes match in Tampere. "It will be the biggest [game of my career] and I'm quite looking forward to it, actually," she said. "I excited that we've come this far. I just hope we progress from this. We want to go out there and give it our best performance. We don't feel we've played our best at the moment and we feel we have more to come. Hopefully we'll prove that."

Attacking threat

Finding a way through the Netherlands defence proved too difficult a task for France in the quarter-finals, but Chapman is confident England have what it takes to score against any opponents. "I think we just need to be patient and not panic," she said. "We just have to play our game. We'll work out a way to break them down. If we play quickly and play our game – the way we play on the floor – then I can't see that we'll have a problem."

Penalty preparations

Should she and her team-mates fail to find the back of the net, the match could of course be settled on penalties. That proved France's undoing on Thursday, with the Netherlands having prepared more thoroughly for the possibility of spot-kicks, but Chapman believes England would have nothing to fear from a shoot-out, explaining: "We're looking to win within the 90 minutes and we don't want it to go to penalties, but if it comes to that we've got good penalty takers in the team and we've practised quite a lot, so we can be quite confident."