



2009 UEFA EUROPEAN WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

MATCH PREVIEW



Sweden



Russia

Turku Stadium, Turku

Tuesday 25 August 2009 - 19.00CET (20.00 local time)

Group C - Matchday 1

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Sweden fired by trophy dream

Sweden begin their UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ campaign against Russia on Tuesday with coach and players united in expressing a determination to end a barren 25-year spell since they last got their hands on the European title.

Final step

They won UEFA's first ever tournament for women's international teams – a precursor to the current competition – in 1984, and since then they have finished runners-up three times and reached the semi-finals on another three occasions. Now, as they prepare to get their latest bid up and running at Turku Stadium, Thomas Dennerby's side believe it is time to discard their 'bridesmaid' status.

'Our time'

"Sweden have been one of the best teams during all these years [since 1984], but of course we really want to have a go now," explained the coach. "It's time now [to win it]. The players say it and the coach also says it! We feel very good at the moment. We have had some small problems with injuries but it's going the right way now. We feel very well-prepared and it's a question now of waiting for the first game. For a long time it was very hard to score goals against Sweden, but in the last year we have done very well in attack."

'Strong team'

Dennerby's Russian counterpart Igor Shalimov admitted that Sweden are favourites for the Group C encounter and suggested his charges will adopt a counterattacking approach. "Sweden are a very serious opponent and one of the strongest teams in the world," he said. "It is important in a game when maybe the teams are not equal in force to start to play defensively but the game can then go any way. We will try and play on the counterattack and see what happens. Yesterday Denmark were the favourites in their game but it turned in such a way that Finland won. That is why we can win against any team."

Sweden defeat

Their last warm-up games offer an interesting slant on the encounter, with Russian confidence high after beating the Netherlands 1-0 and Sweden losing for the first time this year, 1-0 against Norway. That ended a run that had taken in defeats of Germany, Brazil and China, as well as their triumph in the prestigious Algarve Cup courtesy of a penalty shoot-out victory over the United States in the final. Dennerby denied that morale had been dented, however. "It was the natural reaction after a year without losing, plus Norway wanted to prove that their 5-1 defeat earlier in the year was not a true difference between the teams," he said.

Lindahl cool under fire

Sweden coach Thomas Dennerby had his entire squad gathered around one of the penalty areas as he made final preparations for their first UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ Group C game against Russia. As crosses were fed into the box, the forwards rained shots down on the goal. "The forwards look sharp", goalkeeper Hedvig Lindahl told uefa.com after the session, adding with a grin: "And so do the goalkeepers."

First choice

On a sun-drenched training pitch next to the Turku Stadium, the 26-year-old took turns with fellow keepers Kristin Hammarström and Ulla-Karin Rönnlund in facing the onslaught. Lindahl is certain to be Dennerby's first choice in goal against Russia on Tuesday, as she has been for the past four years.

Watching brief

Along with the rest of the squad, Lindahl was at the ground to witness the Netherlands' 2-0 defeat of Ukraine in Group A on Sunday, which whet her own competitive appetite. "It's exciting that the matches have started," she said. "It makes me want to begin the tournament and go out and play."

Opening losses

However, for Sweden, opening matches in major tournaments are not often the cause for much jubilation. The last time they won an opening fixture was at the 1997 UEFA European Women's Championship, long before Lindahl's own international career got underway with a debut appearance against England in 2002 and a run encompassing two continental final tournaments, three FIFA Women's World Cups and three Olympic Games.

Solution found

This time Sweden hope to prove they are over their opening-day jinx. "We've discussed it in the group, and I think we have a solution for it," Lindahl added. "Hopefully we won't lose the game because of us being nervous. If we lose, it should be because we play a better team on the day. But I think on a good day we should beat Russia."

Lucky omen?

History is not entirely against Sweden as they step out onto the Turku pitch on Tuesday, however. Twelve years ago, when on home soil Sweden last recorded a win in a championship opener, the opponents were also Russia.

Skotnikova sets her sights high

Russia captain Tatiana Skotnikova insisted that her team need to set only the highest goals as she looked forward to the start of their UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ campaign against Sweden in Turku.

Crucial role

Having last qualified in 2001, Russia returned to the finals following an away-goals play-off defeat of Scotland and Skotnikova played a crucial role in the achievement. Like goalkeeper Elvira Todua and striker Ksenia Tsybutovich, she played in all ten qualifying games, including the play-offs, and is hoping that there will be more than just the three group fixtures to add to that tally.

No pressure

"Our goals are very high at such tournaments and we need to achieve them," said Skotnikova, a veteran of the 2001 finals as well as two FIFA Women's World Cups. "It's very difficult to predict, but we want to qualify for the next stage. We need to respect every team and we do not have any pressure at all."

Mobile team

A midfielder with WFC Rossiyanka, Skotnikova also maintained that Russia know all about their opponents' strengths. "Sweden have a very mobile and quick team," she said. "It will be difficult for us but we will try to do our best."

'Great excitement'

They can expect a good following back home as well, with interest in women's football having grown after Igor Shalimov's team booked a place in the Finland tournament. Skotnikova said: "It is very good that we qualified for the final stage and many people in Russian follow women's football now. There is great excitement around the national team in the press and TV with the tournament approaching."

Dual role

The 30-year-old played against Sweden in the 2001 finals in Germany, when Russia lost 1-0, and she is willing to take any role to try to reverse that scoreline this time around. "We will try to play our own game and show how good we are," she said. "I can play as an attacking or holding midfielder, but I suppose I will play closer to our defenders. But of course it depends on the coach's decision."

Hiddink watches

Another coach with an interest in what happens will be the men's national team trainer Guus Hiddink, who visited one of Russia's training sessions before their recent 1-0 friendly win over the Netherlands. "I was very glad to see him at the training session," Skotnikova said. "He wished us luck and said that we should win against the Dutch because then he would be happy to say that in Russia even the women are playing football well."