



2009 UEFA EUROPEAN WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

MATCH PREVIEW



Russia



Italy

Olympic Stadium, Helsinki

Monday 31 August 2009 - 18.00CET (19.00 local time)

Group C - Matchday 3

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Pressure on for Italy and Russia

Italy and Russia meet at Helsinki's Olympic Stadium on Monday knowing that following disappointing defeats on Friday the pressure is on to reach the quarter-finals from UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ Group C.

Tasks

The Azzurre, having beaten England 2-1 in their opener, lost 2-0 to Sweden while Russia held a two-goal lead against Hope Powell's side only to lose 3-2 and remain without a point. A draw would take Italy through, either in second or third place, while Russia have to win and possibly by a big margin, depending on the result between Sweden and England in Turku.

Russia praised

While Italy are currently second, having beaten the side that last defeated Russia, coach Ghedin is cautious. "Russia deserve a better position in the table, they played quite well against England even though they lost," he told uefa.com. "They could have done better, but also Italy could have done something more. We conceded two early goals to Sweden and we shouldn't have done it, we could have avoided that."

Ambition

With a fully-fit side, he is not thinking about settling for a point. "If we draw we are through, but we don't have to think about that; if we play looking for a draw, we will lose," he said. "We must try to win, then we will see what happens on the pitch. We only want to reach the quarter-finals and if we do, I think we can say we did a great thing. Even if we don't qualify I have to compliment my players for what they were able to show here."

Revival

Russia coach Igor Shalimov, who has a full-strength side and has hinted that he may make changes, has had the job of picking up his squad after the heartbreaking loss to England. "After two defeats in a row the main thing was to tell the players that nothing terrible has happened," he said. "We still have a chance of progressing. There is only one game left in the group stage and it will be the decisive one. We must win but [on Saturday] we tried to calm down and relax a little bit."

Normal approach

Warning of Italy's strength on the counterattack, Shalimov will treat this game as any other despite potentially needing a convincing win. "I will not order my players to get a big margin of victory because it is difficult to tell how the match will go," he said. "We need to be ready to take the initiative and put our opponents under pressure."

Gama game for Azzurre advance

From the high of beating England 2-1 in their UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ opener to the low of the 2-0 defeat by Sweden in their second Group C fixture, Italy have experienced it all but 20-year-old defender Sara Gama is confident they can book a quarter-final place when they take on Russia on Monday.

Win wanted

A draw would be enough to progress, either in second place to meet Germany or third to take on hosts Finland, but Gama – part of the Italy team that won the 2008 UEFA European Women's Under-19 Championship final – wants more than just a point. "We don't have to think about just getting a draw," she told uefa.com. "We are feeling good, both physically and psychologically."

Successful summer

The Azzurre have a lot to live up to in Finland considering the achievements of other Italian female athletes this summer, the swimmers outdoing the men in the FINA World Championships in Rome and tennis player Flavia Pennetta reaching the top ten of the WTA ranking. Indeed, if Pietro Ghedin's side advance to the knockout phase, they will have outdone Marcello Lippi's Azzurri, eliminated in the FIFA Confederations Cup group stage. "We don't feel rivalry with them, instead we are sorry about their early elimination," Gama said. "We don't have to think about these things, we can only say we're happy for our colleagues who have done great things this summer."

Tough opposition

What they have to think about is making sure they are not outdone by Russia at Helsinki's Olympic Stadium. "We saw their [3-2] loss against England and I have to say that they played better than in their previous match against Sweden, they improved," Gama said. "They are a strong team that is improving and won't make our life easy."

Calculations

A rampant Germany side could be next up yet Gama is loath to look too far ahead with progress still to be confirmed. "We don't have to think about who we could meet in the next stage, of course it would be a positive thing not to meet Germany but we have to concentrate on our match now," Gama said. "In any case, even Finland would be tough opponents."

Danilova playing through the pain

When the 16-year-old Elena Danilova struck for Russia in the 2003 FIFA Women's World Cup quarter-final against Germany, she seemed set to become one of the biggest talents in the game.

Injuries

Over the following three seasons Danilova enhanced her already burgeoning reputation still further by setting goalscoring records in the UEFA European Women's Under-19 Championship, which her side won in 2005. However, torn cruciate knee ligaments suffered in 2007 kept her out of the international set-up until this July, returning in time for UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™. "I had two operations, the last one in 2008," she told uefa.com. "It was difficult for me to recover. It was hard mentally. I do not have enough match practice. I am trying to find my best form, but I am only 70 per cent ready."

Defeats

Russia could require Danilova's goalscoring prowess in their must-win encounter with Italy on Monday. After losing 3-0 to Sweden and 3-2 to England – a game in which Danilova was withdrawn just before the break after a two-goal lead swiftly became a deficit – Russia must defeat the Azzurre to have any chance of advancing to the quarter-finals from Group C. The 22-year-old striker is aware things have not been going to plan. "In our first game against Sweden we were very nervous but in our next match we had some misunderstandings," she said. "We sat too deep in defence – we left big gaps between the lines."

Substitute

Danilova returned to WFC Rossiyanka this year after a spell in the United States with FC Indiana and showed good form in the recent UEFA Women's Champions League qualifiers. Although she started against England, she suspects she would be more effective coming off the bench. "Right now I am not at my best," she said. "The coach made the right decision not to put me in the starting XI. I will bring more benefit if I play 20 to 30 minutes. It is better than just to barely move on the pitch throughout the whole 90 minutes but, still, I am ready to start."

Morale low

However, morale has been hit by the two defeats. "We have lost two games and feelings are not so good," she said. "We are a little bit upset." Nevertheless, Danilova does believe they have already faced their toughest challenge of the section. "I think that the strongest team in our group are Sweden. They are a very experienced and disciplined team. Germany and Sweden stand out at this tournament."