

# ITALY - GERMANY

## MATCH PREVIEW

### Olympia, Helsingborg

#### Friday 26 June 2009 - 20.45CET (20.45 local time)

#### Matchday 4 - Semi-finals



For all the history between Italy and Germany, the nations have never before met in a competitive Under-21 match. With a place in the final of the 2009 UEFA European U21 Championship at stake, they take their rivalry to a new level in Helsingborg on Friday.

#### 'Important games'

Italy defeated Germany in the 1982 FIFA World Cup final and in the semi-finals in 1970 and 2006. This game, though, means more to Azzurrini coach Pierluigi Casiraghi than any preceding ones. "There have been a few important matches between Italy and Germany, but this will be the one I remember most," the 40-year-old said. The same applies to both sets of players as they look to leave their mark on a competition Italy have dominated. The Azzurrini have won five of their eight previous semi-finals and the championship a record five times. They should also feel at home as they strive to add to that tally, having been based in Helsingborg and played all three Group A games at the Olympia. After two wins and a draw, Casiraghi wants more of the same. "We must have the same approach, the same mentality," he said.

#### Casiraghi impressed

Casiraghi, though, must make changes from the side that beat Belarus on Tuesday to claim top spot in the section. Striker Mario Balotelli returns from suspension – "I expect much of him because he can give so much" – but central midfielders Claudio Marchisio (suspended) and Paolo De Ceglie (injured) are unavailable. Antonio Candreva and Daniele Dessena are expected to replace them, with Casiraghi openly concerned about how the alterations to the heart of his midfield might effect the team's balance. After losing to Germany in a November friendly, he is also wary of the opposition. "They have an international outlook and quality players like Mesut Özil, Ashkan Dejagah and Marko Marin who can make the difference," he said. "It's a good mix of tactical awareness and the German mentality, combined with the quality and creativity of second-generation players."

#### Germany confident

Add to that extreme confidence. Germany progressed as Group B runners-up without fully hitting their stride, and coach Horst Hrubesch believes the best is yet to come from his charges. "We haven't shown everything up to now, only in patches," he said. "We're optimistic that we'll show our full potential against Italy. They are strong but we'll focus on our own qualities and believe we'll win."

#### Khedira doubt

Like Casiraghi, Hrubesch is forced into a reshuffle. Sebastian Boenisch should be back at left-back after overcoming an ankle problem, but holding midfielder Sami Khedira injured his right knee in Tuesday's draw with England and is a serious doubt. If he misses out, Fabian Johnson may feature on the right with Gonzalo Castro moving into the centre. Marin and Dennis Aogo should also return after dropping to the bench against England. Whatever the lineup, Hrubesch anticipates the same outcome. Germany have never won this competition and this generation is hungry for success. "This team is ready to work and eat dirt if necessary," he promised. "There is a good spirit and the players have grown together during the tournament. We want to win and have the right mentality."



### Boateng backs Germany's advance

There is nothing like a plan coming together and for Horst Hrubesch its success can be measured in Germany's goals against column. The coach has plotted his side's UEFA European Under-21 Championship campaign on the strength of their defence, and as he looked ahead to Friday's semi-final against Italy, it has given him reason to believe Germany's Swedish adventure will not be ending in Helsingborg.

#### Key to success

"The defence is one of our keys to success," he said. "They have prevented the opposition getting many scoring chances and have only conceded one goal. That was what we focused on in our preparations for the tournament." In a team without a recognised striker and struggling for fluency, Germany's defenders have stood out – and none more so than Hamburger SV centre-back Jerome Boateng.

#### Defensive strength

The 20-year-old has not just been an inspiration in the middle alongside Benedikt Höwedes; the pair have also been notable weapons in Germany's offensive armoury. Höwedes scored against Finland while Boateng supplied the pass for Gonzalo Castro's strike against England – a significant contribution in a side that has scored only three goals. At the back they have been even more impressive. Germany shipped the fewest goals of any team in qualifying, four, and are the most miserly side here with just one conceded in three matches.

#### Threat

If Italy's attacking triumvirate of Mario Balotelli, Robert Acquafresca and Sebastian Giovinco arguably pose the biggest threat to them yet, Boateng is unfazed. "We know all about them after beating them [1-0] in a friendly in November," he said. "They have great quality in attack, but we know they have weaknesses." Described as a "giant at the back" and "a natural leader" by former German international Christian Ziege, Boateng has also won high praise from Hrubesch, whose mentoring has seen the 1.90m defender grow in stature in Sweden. "I was very proud to hear [Hrubesch's compliments]," Boateng said. "It gives me a lot of confidence to know the coach trusts me. We talk a lot together and that is very important for a young player."

#### Cornerstone

Crucially, Hrubesch has found a settled role for Boateng who was used in variety of positions for HSV last term – he featured at right-back and as a holding midfielder more often than in his preferred centre-half role. No longer plugging gaps, Boateng is intent on making the most of this opportunity. "To reach the semi-final is a big thing for us," he said. "Now we've got through the group stage the pressure is off and we'll be able to play at our highest level. We are convinced we can get to the final."

## Dessena plans joyful tribute to De Ceglie

Italy midfielder Daniele Dessena is known for eccentric goal celebrations and should he register against Germany in Friday's semi-final at the 2009 UEFA European Under-21 Championship, he has promised something extra special for injured team-mate Paolo De Ceglie.

### De Ceglie disappointment

De Ceglie left the Italy camp on Wednesday after twisting his left ankle during the 2-1 win over Belarus the day before. Dessena, who once took his boot off and pretended to use it as a mobile phone after scoring, could take his place against Germany and will be keeping the Juventus player in mind. "I don't plan celebrations, I usually do whatever comes into my head, but I think the whole team will dedicate something to Paolo if we score," he said. With Claudio Marchisio also missing through suspension, the UC Sampdoria tyro will likely benefit from the reshuffle forced upon coach Pierluigi Casiraghi. "I don't know if I will play, but if Casiraghi looks around he will see me with my hand up. However, there are several players hoping to start. Whoever plays will give his best to help the team reach the final."

### Versatile

Flanking Casiraghi in Italy's pre-match news conference, Dessena laughed when the coach said the younger man would be happy to play even in goal. "I can adapt to different roles, I can come on as a substitute, it's not a problem for me," the 22-year-old said. "I have also scored a few goals. Somebody says they were all bad shots, but I think all goals are beautiful. I will try to score another against Germany." Asked whether he would prefer to face England or Sweden in the final should Italy progress, he replied: "I honestly don't care, but playing a final would be a great reward for two years' work. However, we have to focus on Germany. We have worked hard for this and want to make Italy the best in Europe."

### Confidence high

He added of the task ahead in Helsingborg: "Germany have quality players up front, and resolute defenders at the back. They close every space and are dangerous on the break. They are well-organised and always show their strength when it matters most, but our confidence has improved with our two victories [against Sweden and Belarus] and we are eager to show how good this squad is." If some of Italy's greatest triumphs at senior level have come against Germany, Dessena hopes to add another page to an illustrious history. "I was talking about that with Sebastian [Giovinco] the other day. We think it's destiny that we have to play the semi-final against Germany, as Italy did in the 2006 World Cup. We can still picture that victory, but this time we aren't watching on TV – we are the main actors and we will try to reach the final too."