

# ITALY - SERBIA

## MATCH PREVIEW

### Olympia, Helsingborg

#### Tuesday 16 June 2009 - 20.45CET (20.45 local time)

#### Group A - Matchday 2



Italy coach Pierluigi Casiraghi may have cited Hamlet but his question was not so much "To be or not to be?" as "4-4-2 or 4-3-3?" ahead of his side's opening match against Serbia.

#### Dilemma

Casiraghi's squad spent a week in the Danish town of Elsinore, setting for the Shakespeare play, before arriving in Sweden and, according to the coach, they have considered a variety of options ahead of their first Group A fixture against a "dangerous" Serbia team. The dilemma for Casiraghi is whether to keep his front three of Robert Acquafresca – Italy's five-goal top scorer in qualifying – Mario Balotelli and Sebastian Giovinco or adopt a more secure 4-4-2 against opponents who defeated the Azzurrini 1-0 in their opening game at the 2007 tournament en route to reaching the final.

#### 'Big advantage'

"It's the first game and Serbia are a very high-level team, but you also have to bear in mind that this group of players have played a certain type of football for the last three years," Casiraghi said. "The important thing about playing with three forwards is it gives you a big advantage and a lot of possibilities when you have the ball and are attacking, especially with three players like Giovinco, Balotelli and Acquafresca. On the other side we don't want to get exposed at the back."

#### Serbian solutions

Casiraghi, a member of the Italy side beaten in the UEFA European Under-21 Championship semi-finals by Yugoslavia in 1990, was wary of the possible threat posed by Serbia's "trequartisti" or attacking midfielders. His Serbia counterpart, Slobodan Krčmarević, will want these players to deliver given the absence of striker Filip Djordjević, scorer of five qualifying goals, who flew back to Belgrade on Sunday with a foot fracture. Krčmarević said: "We have a little problem with our attackers but we have other very good players like [Zoran] Tosić, who is playing for Manchester United [FC], [Miralem] Sulejmani from [AFC] Ajax, Rade Veljović from [CFR 1907] Cluj, so we have many solutions."

#### Twelfth man

Krčmarević spoke of the "many quality individuals" Italy have, yet showed no sense of inferiority. "I think it is 50-50," said the coach, who anticipated the presence of a "12th man" inside Helsingborg's Olympia tomorrow with a large turnout expected from the sizeable Serbian community in this corner of Sweden. Whatever the outcome, Krčmarević hopes this will not be the only time his 'Eaglets' face Italy in the tournament. "My hope is to play against Italy tomorrow and to meet them again in the final," said Serbia's trainer, who will likely not risk defender Ivan Obradović, still recovering from an ankle problem.

#### Casiraghi wish

"Maybe it is not unrealistic even if there are so many great teams and players in this tournament," he added. As for Casiraghi, his wish is to avoid a repeat of that 2007 reverse in Nijmegen – a setback that ultimately cost the Azzurrini a semi-final place. "These are two completely different teams from two years ago," he said. "The fact the first game of the last championship was against Serbia in a certain way increases the pressure and the tension, but I think that could be something positive."



### **Motta out to settle score with Serbia**

Captain Marco Motta says Italy will be out for revenge when they open their bid for a sixth UEFA European Under-21 Championship title against Serbia in Helsingborg on Tuesday.

### **Making amends**

Motta was on the bench when Italy lost 1-0 to Serbia in their opening game of the 2007 finals in the Netherlands, and is keen to make amends in this Group A sequel. "That defeat still hurts. I remember we had plenty of chances to score but we missed them all and were punished by Serbia," said the 23-year-old defender. "Now we want revenge. Football is great because it often gives you a second chance. We weren't lucky last time but you don't just lose games because of bad luck. We made too many mistakes in front of goal. This time we must be more clinical."

### **Tournament favourites**

Tipped among the favourites in Sweden, Motta says his side cannot wait to get their tournament under way. "We're looking forward to getting started. We know we are a good team but we are eager to prove it on the pitch." Though his former U21 team-mates Davide Santon and Giuseppe Rossi have been promoted to Italy's senior squad for the FIFA Confederations Cup in South Africa, the right-back is "glad to be here and proud to be the captain of this great group". The Udinese Calcio player, who spent the second half of the season on loan at AS Roma, added: "I want to finish the job we began several years ago."

### **Strong attack**

With the likes of Mario Balotelli, Robert Acquafresca and Sebastian Giovinco up front, Italy are arguably stronger in attack this time around. Coach Pierluigi Casiraghi has admitted as much, conceding that two summers ago the side were possibly more talented in midfield. "I think they are an extra asset for us," Motta said of the front men. "They are fully aware that in modern football everyone has to make a few sacrifices and help out in defence." Casiraghi has had his squad watching Serbia matches on video, and Motta anticipates a tough opening to Group A, which also includes Belarus and hosts Sweden. "I can't say now if they are our strongest opponents," he said. "But they are a technical team who can play very good football and cause problems for any side. My main concern is how Italy perform – if we play our own game, we don't need to fear anyone."