

# SWEDEN - ITALY

## MATCH PREVIEW

### Olympia, Helsingborg

#### Friday 19 June 2009 - 16.00CET (16.00 local time)

#### Group A - Matchday 2



Sweden celebrates the longest day of the year on Friday with traditional 'Midsommar' festivities. Pickled herring and salmon washed down with schnapps will be on the menu as well as dancing around the maypole. The maypole is a symbol of fertility, and joint-Sweden coach Jörgen Lennartsson will hope his attack proves as fecund as in their opening match against Belarus when they meet Italy in Helsingborg targeting the semi-finals of the UEFA European Under-21 Championship.

#### No pressure

The hosts defeated Belarus 5-1 in Tuesday's Group A opener and a victory against the Azzurrini, who drew 0-0 with Serbia on the same day, would guarantee a place in the last four and make the midsummer revelry complete. Lennartsson, though, insisted Sweden would not be getting ahead of themselves. "I don't think it will be a problem keeping our feet on the ground," he said during a joint press conference with Italy coach Pierluigi Casiraghi. "We know what it's all about. In a tournament like this everything can change very quickly, but we're in a great position so we don't feel any pressure."

#### No secrets

The two sides drew 1-1 in a friendly in Trieste in February, and Lennartsson said that while he would not be revealing his lineup, it was "not a match about secrets as we know each other too well". He added: "Italy have a completely new midfield and we also have a few different players, but I think we know everything about Italy and Italy know everything about us. I don't think it will be decided by tactics – the performance of the players on the day will be crucial." Lennartsson, who has no injury concerns, will expect much of striker Marcus Berg, who scored a hat-trick against Belarus. Asked if he would exchange the FC Groningen player for Italy's own highly rated forward, Mario Balotelli, the coach said he was happy with what he had. "They are two great strikers, but I think Balotelli has a more individual style, while Berg plays more for the team so I think he fits better in our side."

#### Improvement

Casiraghi, who joked with and hugged the smiling Lennartsson during the conference, said he felt Swedish football had improved considerably in recent years. "They have changed a lot, especially the tactical and technical aspect. I think it's mostly down to the many immigrants in Sweden. I saw the game against Belarus and they had two forwards but also the striker [Pontus] Wernbloom playing in midfield and attacking midfielders like Rasmus Elm and Emir Bajrami in the lineup. Their formation was very attack-minded."

#### Forward thinking

With captain Marco Motta and midfielder Claudio Marchisio likely to shake off knocks in time to start, Casiraghi will have a full squad available, allowing him to continue with his three-pronged attack. "I've seen the other games in the tournament and the other teams play with one or two forwards," he said. "We're playing with three so we have to keep an eye on defence as well. I was very pleased with the way our attackers helped the defence against Serbia. I hope to see the same attitude again because this game will decide our future in the tournament."



### Wernbloom raises Sweden's pulse

Midfield dynamo Pontus Wernbloom is the opposite of a typically ice-cool Swedish sports icon such as Björn Borg or Annika Sörenstam. While they are known for their reserve and control, the 22-year-old is a bubbly livewire who lets his feelings out, on and off the pitch.

#### Upbeat

"I guess I'm a manic depressive or something," Wernbloom says, letting out a trademark bellowing laugh that belies any serious concern over his mental health. He is talking at the team hotel in Bastad, where the majority of the press are hovering around Marcus Berg, hat-trick hero against Belarus. Berg is sitting on a plush sofa, while Wernbloom and a few team-mates take their place behind wooden tables in the lobby to speak to the remaining reporters. Still with a wide grin, he adds: "One minute I'll be furious, the next I'll just laugh."

#### Boundless energy

Anyone who has watched Wernbloom play will know what he means. Swedish football fans have grown accustomed to seeing him buzz around the field with seemingly boundless energy and passion, jumping into any challenge, physical or verbal. Dutch supporters will soon get to know him too as he joins champions AZ Alkmaar after the tournament. They will likely take quickly to the approachable youngster from Kungälv outside Gothenburg. "I find it boring when athletes don't show their feelings," says Wernbloom. "Everyone claims to love their sport, so why not show it? Of course there's pressure at this level, but you've got to have fun as well."

#### 'Get physical'

Wernbloom's ball-winning was crucial to Sweden's success against Belarus on Tuesday and he will relish the test that Italy's Serie A stars pose on Friday. "We won't beat them on an individual level, but we can do it as a team. But we can't waste as many passes as against Belarus and the Italians won't give us as many chances either." The Azzurrini may also have most of the possession in Helsingborg, but that does not bother Wernbloom. "As long as they pass the ball around their back line, at least 50 or 60 metres from our goal, I'm fine with it. But when they start to approach our final third we need to get physical."

#### 'Tease and annoy'

Wernbloom, 23 next Thursday, will not be shirking a challenge. He was happy to step up and score from the spot in a 1-1 February friendly draw with Italy, and though a striker by trade he has successfully taken on the central midfield berth asked of him by coaches Tommy Söderberg and Jörgen Lennartsson. Capped twice at senior level, he is also ready for some verbal sparring if it will help Sweden's cause. "I like to tease and annoy opponents," he says. "That's the way I play. I'll use it against Italy if needed to make them lose focus, though our own game remains the key to success." For a man who wears the words 'Veni, vidi, vici' tattooed down his left arm, it should not take much to get under the Italians' skin.