

FINLAND - SPAIN

MATCH PREVIEW

Gamla Ullevi, Gothenburg

Monday 22 June 2009 - 20.45CET (20.45 local time)

Group B - Matchday 3



Over the next 24 hours thousands of rockers will depart Gothenburg following Sunday's eagerly-awaited AC/DC concert. Finland's Under-21 side will be reluctant additions to the exodus and Spain are determined to everything in their power to avoid a similar fate – but it may not be enough.

Lucky break

The likelihood of Spain pipping Germany to Group B's remaining semi-final place appears slender. They need to beat a team they have never before faced at this level, hope Germany lose to section-leaders England and engineer a four-goal swing to have any chance of progressing. That is two more determinants than Juan Ramón López Caro would like, yet he is determined his side will keep up their end of the bargain. "We have a chance but it will be difficult," he said. "Anything can happen in the other game where we need England to do us a favour, but we really need to concentrate on what we can control. We've been really unlucky in terms of converting our chances until now and I hope we'll get our good fortune against Finland."

Finland changes

For Finland, eliminated after defeats by England and Germany, this represents not only an opportunity to bow out on a high but also to get the measure of a side they will face again in 2011 qualifying. "Obviously that is a completely different campaign and will be, by and large, a whole new set of players," said Kanerva. "But mentally, showing the players and our fans that we can beat Spain would be huge." The Finnish team that turns out in November may actually contain a few familiar faces. One of four players in the squad eligible for the next finals in Denmark, Kanerva confirmed that goalkeeper Jukka Lehtovaara will start in place of Anssi Jaakkola, and Joona Toivio and Sevilla FC's Teemu Pukki may also join Jukka Raitala in the starting XI.

Patient game

A good sign, perhaps, for Spain, though López Caro believes it will make little difference. "Finland's strength lies with their collective ability and that is not going to change against us," said the former Real Madrid CF coach. "You cannot go all out attack because otherwise Finland will hurt us. We need to keep faith with our usual approach, play all over the pitch." With Kanerva making similar noises from the Finland camp, urging "patience" as his side attempt to end their maiden finals with a maiden win, it could become a waiting game. "We have to be wary of counterattacks, as they're very strong on the break," he added. "I expect Spain to be a lot more attacking than they have been – they have to score so many goals."

Encore?

The streets around Gamla Ullevi are awash with black t-shirts, long hair and a multitude of piercings as – with AC/DC in town – rockers from far and wide have descended on the city, putting the Goth back in Gothenburg. Yet with some 8,000 Finnish supporters expected on Monday night it is far from the only gig in town. Whether their beloved Suomi go out with a bang or Spain get their coveted encore remains to be seen.



Lehtovaara up for Spain challenge

Finland goalkeeper Jukka Lehtovaara has been content to play a supporting role so far, but as his side conclude their UEFA European Under-21 campaign against Spain in Gothenburg he is ready to take the lead.

Future

Anssi Jaakkola profited from an injury to first-choice custodian Tomi Maanoja to earn the No1 jersey for these finals, but he will hand it over to Lehtovaara – one year his junior – as coach Markku Kanerva looks towards qualifying for the 2011 championship. Kanerva's side have only pride to play for in their last Group B fixture and Lehtovaara is likely to be just one of four players born in 1988 or later likely to feature at Gamla Ullevi.

Treatment

The 21-year-old says he is "really looking forward" to making his competitive debut having looked on nervously as Jaakkola – his room-mate in Sweden – received treatment after being fouled by Germany's Marko Marin in the first half of Thursday's 2-0 defeat. "Luckily I didn't have to go on as it's never easy to go on as a substitute goalkeeper without a warm-up," he said. "Now I know I'm playing I will enjoy it more."

'No problem'

Lehtovaara, a regular for FC TPS Turku who was nominated for the Veikkausliiga Goalkeeper of the Year award in 2007, says "it's been no problem at all" only being a squad member thus far. "I've been trying to be as supportive and helpful to Anssi as possible. It's much more difficult to sit on the bench with your club as here you're in it together, representing your country. There's an excellent team spirit and I'm enjoying it."

Based in Spain

Lehtovaara was joined at the press conference on the eve of the match by Teemu Pukki, the youngest member of the squad and another expected to play a lead role in Finland's attempts to reach the 2011 finals from a testing qualifying group which includes Spain, the Netherlands and Poland. "I've been looking forward to this game as it's the biggest for me personally, but they're all special," said the 19-year-old, who plays his club football for Sevilla FC.

'Great choice'

Pukki is arguably Finland's most talented young player and won his first full cap against Japan in February before he had played for the U21s. Here in Sweden he has impressed from the bench in cameo roles against England and Germany, and would no doubt relish the opportunity to line up against Sevilla team-mate Diego Capel on Monday. How has his January 2008 move influenced his game? "There are no single things I can point to but overall it has made me a better player," he said. "It's been a great choice for me and I'm very happy."

Asenjo holding on to fading hopes

Spain's chances of reaching the 2009 UEFA European Under-21 Championship semi-finals receded dramatically following their 2-0 defeat by England, but Sergio Asenjo insists that "hope is the last thing we'll lose" as they prepare to face Finland in their final group game.

Minds focused

Goalkeeper Asenjo has been one of Spain's more impressive performers, winning Carlsberg Man of the Match honours in the goalless draw with Germany before catching the eye again against England, saving a James Milner penalty. Despite those displays, the side coached by Juan Ramón López Caro possess a solitary point and look bound for an early exit, needing a win against Finland, an England victory over Germany and a four-goal swing to erase the Germans' superior statistics and avoid elimination. "We're working very hard and have focused all our minds on winning our next match, hoping that luck is on our side and that in the other game England beat Germany," Asenjo told uefa.com. "As long as there's an opportunity, we'll fight for it."

Freshness lacking

The Real Valladolid CF player nonetheless admitted that Spain have "lacked freshness" so far, adding: "From an individual point of view, I've felt very good, but we came here as a group and as a group we've not been up to the level we showed in the qualifiers." No doubt partly due to that, Asenjo will certainly not be taking upcoming opponents Finland lightly, despite them having nothing but pride at stake after two defeats. "I imagine the Finns want to give a good account of themselves," he explained. "We're playing to survive and they'll certainly want to leave the tournament with a win."

'We'll give everything'

Those thoughts were echoed by CA Osasuna defender Nacho Monreal. "Finland are a good team," he told uefa.com. "They have nothing to play for, so they'll be out to enjoy themselves, even if they can't go through. Even so, they're going to make life very difficult for us. It's up to us to prove that we're the ones fighting for something. We know how difficult it's going to be, but as long as still have a mathematical chance, we'll give everything."

'Good impression'

Should Spain fall short Monreal will be one of many players left nursing regrets. "We had our minds set on being winners, had a great team and we had so much hope in this team," he said. "But we faced two national teams that, to be honest, I don't think are better than us. The problem is that our team hasn't given everything it's capable of and that's gone against us." At the very least, the 23-year-old is adamant that Spain bow out on a high, if bow out they must. "I think it's important for us to put on a good show in the last match to leave people with a good impression. It's a European Championship and most of us aren't going to go to another one because we'll be too old."