



2009 UEFA EUROPEAN WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

MATCH PREVIEW



Germany



Norway

Tampere Stadium, Tampere

Monday 24 August 2009 - 16.00CET (17.00 local time)

Group B - Matchday 1

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Committed to the future of European football

Old foes set for explosive opener

As Bjarne Berntsen noted in his press conference on the eve of Norway's UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ Group B encounter with Germany, there are "no secrets" between his side and the holders. Considering the number of times these two traditional giants of women's football have met in recent times, how could there be?

Mutual respect

The prize at stake the last time they crossed paths in a major tournament was a place in the final of the 2007 FIFA Women's World Cup. Two years earlier, of course, Germany clinched their fourth consecutive European title by defeating Norway 3-1 in the UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2005™ showpiece, the most recent of their ten meetings in the competition. Rather than contempt, however, familiarity has bred a great deal of respect where these two old foes are concerned, as Germany coach Silvia Neid attested: "Norway have always been big players in the women's game and we know they are very strong. We have a lot of respect for them."

Individual quality

"We are well aware that they beat a very good Sweden side 1-0 just last week and they have quality players all over the park. Some people are talking about this being a new Norway side. In some ways that's true, but they still have a lot of top players who played at the 2007 Women's World Cup, like Isabell Herlovsen, Trine Rønning, Ingvild Stensland and, of course, everybody knows about Solveig Gulbrandsen [Norway's top scorer in qualification with nine goals]. But we also know that they have some weaknesses and those are what we must exploit. We have trained hard here in Finland and everyone has been working towards this moment."

History beckons

For Berntsen's young team, this match provides the perfect opportunity to show they are ready to step out of the shadow of the renowned Norway sides of the 1990s and write their own names into their country's sporting history. While Germany have question marks over the fitness of key personnel Ariane Hingst and, in particular, Simone Laudehr, Berntsen has a full compliment of players at his disposal – and he is adamant there will be "no excuses" from his side if they fail to live up to their potential.

'Well prepared'

"We've been together since 27 July and had a really good spell in our pre-tournament camp," said Berntsen. "I can say that, after four weeks together, we are very well prepared. We played a very good match against Sweden and that helped our confidence. It was good for the team after some poor results over the winter. We're also feeling very welcome here in Finland and, so far, everything has gone to plan so we can have no excuses. Now we have the match to look forward against a team with whom we have no secrets. Germany are favourites, of course, but you never know what will happen in football."

Germany's Bresonik raring to go

"We just can't wait to get started," was how versatile midfielder Linda Bresonik summed up the mood in the Germany camp ahead of their UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ curtain-raiser against Norway in Tampere.

'Good feeling'

With months of preparation and anticipation almost over, and the tension reaching its zenith, Bresonik gave uefa.com an exclusive insight into her side's preparations. The UEFA Women's Cup winner is normally accustomed to forming a defensive midfield duo with Simone Laudehr, but her FCR 2001 Duisburg teammate is likely to miss the opener due to a pulled ligament in her right knee. Despite that blow, however, Bresonik is confident her country are well-placed to begin their title defence with victory. "We have a pretty good feeling in general and I also feel in good condition personally," she explained.

Crucial role

The 25-year-old possesses a versatility valued highly by coach Silvia Neid, who has praised her ability to operate "also as left or right-back", but since creative spark Renate Lingor retired after the Olympics in Beijing, her services have most commonly been required in more central areas. Indeed, Laudehr's probable absence has only increased the burden on Bresonik to make an impact against Norway, and the Essen native is aware of just how tough a task Germany face. "It's going to be a very hard-fought match between two strong teams and I expect a very even contest," she said.

Always prepared

Germany have spent the bulk of the past two months locked away in their pre-tournament training camp, and Bresonik believes Germany's attention to detail is a key component of their success on the international stage. "I wouldn't say we are better prepared than for other tournaments as we are always well-prepared," she explained. "It doesn't make a difference if it's a World Cup, the Olympics or a European Championship. The main thing is we are all in good shape and everything's fine."

Norway contenders

Given Bresonik's estimation of the team they defeated in the 2005 final and the last four of the 2007 FIFA World Cup, Germany will certainly need to be in excellent shape to come out on top at Tampere Stadium. "Personally, I see Norway among the favourites to win the tournament," she said. "Even if they've changed their tactical formation a little bit in switching from 4-3-3 to 4-4-2. We had a scout in Sweden last week to watch the game between them and Norway and we have already watched some video footage – and I am sure our win over them at the 2007 World Cup is still on their minds."

Kaurin eyeing an early upset

Norway's Leni Larsen Kaurin has tipped her side to flourish in the role of underdogs and pull off an early shock in UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ Group B on Monday when they meet Germany, the side that defeated them in the final four years ago.

Inside knowledge

Not only is the gifted 28-year-old winger among the more experienced members of Bjarne Berntsen's youthful squad, she also knows her country's upcoming opponents inside out. Norway's No11 has played her club football in Germany for the past two years with 1. FFC Turbine Potsdam and she also featured the last time these sides met in major finals, at the semi-final stage of the 2007 FIFA Women's World Cup.

New beginning

That game ended in a 3-0 victory for Germany and, in many ways, signaled the end of an era for Norway. A raft of key players – such as Ragnhild Gulbrandsen, Lise Klaveness, Camilla Huse and goalkeeper Bente Nordby – bowed out of international football in the aftermath of China 2007. A new generation has now arrived; unburdened, for the time being at least, by the expectation levels their illustrious predecessors took for granted. And Kaurin believes the current Norway side are primed to upset the odds by proving themselves worthy successors.

'Nervy' start

"Sure, we are not favourites, but we believe in ourselves," she told uefa.com. "It could be an advantage that people rate us as underdogs, but maybe we can come up from below and take Germany by surprise. It will be a nervy game for both sides; that's always the case at the beginning. No one will want to take too many risks so we'll have to see how the game develops. But I really hope we show what we can do.

Friendly rivalry

"Another thing is that there are no secrets between Norway and Germany. We have met a couple of times over the last few years. And, personally, I know many of their players very well. I even met my Turbine teammates Anja Mittag and Bianca Schmidt here in Tampere at the team hotel. Of course, Germany are a very compact team and they do a lot of things well, but I think we can break the code and find a way to deal with it."

Cause for optimism

Despite Norway's recent inconsistency, they did give a glimpse of their potential against tournament contenders Sweden just last week, when they clinched a 1-0 away win in their final warm-up match before UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™. And, for Kaurin, that outing provided further cause for hope. She added: "I think we proved against Sweden that, at our best, we can beat anyone. We need to perform well as a team – then everything's possible."