



2009 UEFA EUROPEAN WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

MATCH PREVIEW



Iceland



France

Tampere Stadium, Tampere

Monday 24 August 2009 - 19.00CET (20.00 local time)

Group B - Matchday 1

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Committed to the future of European football

Bini wary of Iceland menace

France coach Bruno Bini knows the margin between triumph and failure can be a fine one at the highest level, but he is confident his side can live up to their billing as dark horses for the UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ title – starting against Iceland at Tampere Stadium on Monday.

Lessons learned

Bini's charges stormed through the qualification phase with seven wins and just one defeat, yet the 54-year-old knows only too well that his side's solitary blemish came in a 1-0 defeat by Siggí Eyjólfsson's fellow Group B challengers. "We made mistakes in that game and we have since identified and corrected them," he said. "That showed because we beat them 2-1 in our second match in the qualifying section. It's true that Iceland were the only team to score against us, but it's not so important. They can score four against us tomorrow, as long as we score five.

'Good mix'

"We have a good mix of youth and experience in the team right now and we want to have the best competition possible. All the teams are even because the ball is round for everyone, but you never know what can happen in football. The ball can go one centimetre inside and you're a hero. The ball goes one centimetre outside and you're a zero. All we know is that we have three high-level games and the girls can be very happy about that."

Defence key

Both France and Iceland have a full complement of players fit for their opening encounter, but while Bini's side – who netted an impressive 31 goals in qualifying – are preparing to go on the offensive from the off, their opponents are set to adopt a much more cautious stance. The Frenchman's counterpart Eyjólfsson believes defensive solidity will be the key if his Iceland side, the country's first representatives at a major finals in men's or women's football, are to shock France once again.

Strength in unity

"Of course we intend to try for a repeat of the result in 2007, but it won't be that easy," Eyjólfsson said. "We know this is a totally different game and we will have to ensure we don't give away too many chances. If we can do that, then we know we can create at the other end. We don't build our strategy around individuals; we are a unit and that is where our strength lies. We'll work together from the start until the finish and, hopefully, we will be rewarded."

Captain Soubeyrand calls for strong start

France were among the first nations across the line in qualifying for UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ and Les Bleues captain Sandrine Soubeyrand is demanding just as much urgency to seal victory in a tricky opening Group B match against Iceland.

Bad memories

"When you start with a victory, it brings joy and happiness to the group of players," the 36-year-old midfielder explained. "It can create a really good squad dynamic and that can help later on." However, she knows very well that this match will not decide progress to the quarter finals. "Back in 2005 [at the UEFA Women's European Championship in England], we started with a victory and it was not enough," she continued. "We had a win, one defeat and one draw, but it still was not enough."

Different setup

The format of the competition was different then, though. There were just two groups and only the first two progressed to the semi-finals. This season, with three groups before the quarter-finals, the two best third-ranked sides can qualify. "If we lose [against Iceland] nothing will be decided, but we'll probably have to win against Germany and Norway," France's most-capped player added. "So, naturally, it's better to start with a victory."

Old rivals

One thing for sure is that they know their opponents very well. The sides met twice in qualifying, where Iceland became the only team to defeat France with a 1-0 home victory in June 2007, before losing narrowly 2-1 away in September the following year. "We know that we've been observed and we've observed as well but we're not going to reveal everything," continued the FCF Juvisy player. "They probably worked a lot since last year so we can't really plan any scenario. We don't know what can happen. Nothing is done yet."

'Huge success'

France coach Bruno Bini seems to have formed a cocoon around his team, where the players focus more on their own game than their opponents'. "We know Iceland's weaknesses and we know ours," says Soubeyrand. "Obviously, we'll try to correct ours. We really focus a lot on ourselves." The captain, however, regrets the lack of support in her homeland. "We know that by playing women's football we are not in the media spotlight very often but there's nothing we can do. Taking part in the competition is already a huge success. The public interest at home will come with good results."

Gunnarsdóttir geared up for Icelandic first

Iceland defender Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir is determined to help give fans in her homeland something to shout about as she and her team-mates prepare to kick off the country's first appearance at a major football finals.

Swell of support

FC Barcelona's Eidur Gudjohnsen, arguably the greatest footballer the Nordic nation has ever produced, recently captured the mood of the country when he spoke of the pride he felt after Iceland qualified for UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™. Now, with Siggí Eyjólfsson's charges ready to open their Group B account against France, Gunnarsdóttir is aiming to ensure her countrymen and women have even more reason to celebrate.

First test

"It really seems like the whole nation is behind the team and that's a great feeling," the Djurgårdens IF FF centre-back said. "A lot of people want us to do well and we'll give our best. Obviously, there are a lot of good teams in our section, but we're just thinking about one game at a time. First up it's France, who we all know are a very strong side. But we have defeated them before and we can take confidence from that."

Belief key

Iceland captain Katrín Jónsdóttir, meanwhile, insists that any success her country hope to enjoy against France will have to be built upon unshakable defensive foundations. "France have some very good creative players and they will try to hurt us," she explained. "It's very important that we keep our discipline and stick with our system. Everyone knows their role in our team and, if we can keep a clean sheet, we believe that we can score goals against anyone. That's the most important thing."