



2009 UEFA EUROPEAN WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

MATCH PREVIEW



England



Italy

Lahti Stadium, Lahti

Tuesday 25 August 2009 - 16.30CET (17.30 local time)

Group C - Matchday 1

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Italy await youth-inspired England

England coach Hope Powell is hoping to use the "boost" provided by the women's Under-19 team in Belarus last month as she prepares her side for the challenge of Italy in the opening Group C match of UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™.

Silverware

Victory against Sweden in the final of the UEFA Women's European Under-19 Championship in Belarus was England's first silverware in any continental competition since the men's U18s triumphed in 1993. Powell, the only coach here in her third straight European finals, revealed the triumph has inspired her squad to aim to emulate that success in Helsinki on 10 September.

'Great for the game'

"It amplifies the work we've done with all the squads and those younger players coming through and pushing the seniors," said Powell, who has a fully-fit squad available, with the inspirational Kelly Smith over her recent knee problems. "It's great for the game and a lot of the senior players who came through that youth system are really pleased. For the whole game in England it's been a big boost."

Group aim

Powell was in charge on home soil in 2005 when her side failed to progress beyond the group stage despite winning their opener against Finland. England are one of the teams fancied to provide a stern test to Germany, the holders, but Powell says the first goal is to advance from a section which also features Sweden and Russia. "Everyone will try and win their first game, as will we, but we'll also try to win our second and third game – initially it's about getting out of the group."

'Satisfied and proud'

While Italy, overtly at least, may not be setting their tournament goals as high as the three ski jump runs which loom large behind one of the goals at Lahti Stadium, Powell's counterpart, Pietro Ghedin, spoke with an air of confidence about the Azzurre's prospects. "We've been playing together for years," he told uefa.com. "My players have been very professional and they've improved with their respective clubs, not only with the national team. I am happy, satisfied and proud of them."

Watchful approach

Italy have four wins and a draw from five competitive encounters with England, a sequence of results which certainly gives credence to Ghedin's desire for his charges to play "with no fear". He is, though, wary of the threat posed by the team rated ninth in the world. "England have improved a lot recently," he said. "They're high up in the European rankings. I have seen them many times and I can say they definitely deserve that position. We have to be careful."

White relishing fresh challenge

Having overcome serious injury to be part of the England squad at UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™, fit-again captain Faye White is now "itching to get going" and help her team to victory against Italy in their Group C opener.

Recovery

The Arsenal LFC defender captained England at UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2005™ and in their run to the 2007 FIFA Women's World Cup quarter-finals but injuries have troubled her in recent years. After a serious knee problem it was only late in Arsenal's 2008/09 double-winning campaign that the 31-year-old was able to train but now she is willing and able to play her part in Finland.

Setbacks

"Would I have wanted to have played more? Yes, but I feel quite strong coming back," White told uefa.com. "The last couple of months when I've been back in training have been going well so I am used to overcoming big setbacks; I've done it before and no doubt I'll do it again."

'Gamble'

England manager Hope Powell admitted White's inclusion was "a gamble" but that the centre-backs determination to be included has enabled her to select "arguably the strongest squad we've had in my time". White, like Powell, is only initially focusing on qualifying from a section which also includes Russia and Sweden. "We feel confident we'll get out of the group, which is our main aim, but we know we're going to have to put in good performances if we want to win the first game – we won't take anything for granted," she said. "We look at Sweden as the favourites [for the group], we view them as a strong team based on their previous tournament experience."

Past squads

Tournament experience is a thing many of the squad have in abundance; 17 of the of the 22-strong party played in the World Cup two years ago and 14 featured in the 2005 European finals on home soil. White, however, feels that is unlikely to afflict England this time and that they have all the ingredients to make sure they do not fall at the group stage for the third UEFA European Women's Championship in succession. "The difference between now and 2005 is our experience," White said. "A lot of the players here now were in the squad back then so some of the youngsters such as Katie Chapman and Fara Williams have now been in three major tournaments – that's a big thing to draw on."

Panico predicting 'new' Italian era

As Italy captain, the most experienced member of the squad and the unquestioned leader on the pitch, 34-year-old Patrizia Panico knows better than most the influence coach Pietro Ghedin has had on the team as they prepare for Tuesday's UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ Group C opener against England.

'Naughtier'

Italy bowed out at the group stage in England four years ago with zero points, a disappointing return which prompted the Italian Football Federation to appoint Ghedin in place of Carolina Morace. Since then, Italy's fortunes have improved and Panico is confident of continuing that form in Finland. "Ghedin changed our mentality: I could say we're naughtier in a way, we have more personality," explained the ASD Torres Calcio striker. "We have always taken part in big competitions like this but we've never made that step forward we needed to obtain good results. Now it's the start of a new era in Italy and we hope women's football can attract more people than before."

Tournament experience

Panico is representing Italy in a UEFA European Women's Championship final tournament for the fourth time and, after finishing top scorer in Serie A for the ninth time in her career last season, all Italian eyes will be fixed on her at Lahti Stadium. "If you can give something more than your team-mates then you have to do it but I can't do anything without the help of the other players," she said. "Some of us are experienced, others are young, but even the new players have taken part in big tournaments with their clubs or with the Under-19 national team, so they can handle the pressure of big events."

'Weaknesses'

Italy have won four of their five competitive meetings with England, but Panico does not trust the statistics. "I honestly don't know if they have weaknesses," she continued. "We have studied their way of playing and they are strong on the flanks and also very good at playing short passes. Their midfield has improved a lot: once they played the Nordic way, with long passes, but now they play the ball really well. It's hard to find any weaknesses in their team, but we have our qualities as well and can be competitive against anybody. We want to reach the knockout phase at least, but to win the tournament is our highest aim."