



2009 UEFA EUROPEAN WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

MATCH PREVIEW



Netherlands



Finland

Olympic Stadium, Helsinki

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Group A - Matchday 2

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Committed to the future of European football

Finland wary of Dutch threat

Finland coach Michael Kåld ruled out any complacency when the host nation take on tournament debutants Netherlands in Wednesday's Group A game at UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™.

No underestimation

Though both teams started with a victory, with Finland grinding out a 1-0 win over Denmark and the Netherlands scoring early in a 2-0 defeat of Ukraine, Kåld's side have home advantage and the experience of having reached the semi-finals when they made their major tournament bow at UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2005™. But even though a win would take Finland through in first place if Ukraine do not defeat Denmark, Kåld is not underestimating the Oranje.

Starting afresh

"We were there for the first time in England in 2005 and we know exactly what it's like when you're playing in such a tournament for the first time and you get good results," Kåld said. "With Holland winning 2-0, they will get a lot of energy from that game which they will use here. We can't think that we're starting from the second half against Denmark – we have to start from 0-0 and do our job."

Wing play

Kåld praised the performance of winger Anna Westerlund in coping with the attacking threat from the flanks against Denmark and he expects her to have another busy game. "Holland also have very good wingers so we have to react that," he said. "We have our plans ready and the players know exactly what to do."

Pauw cautious

For the Netherlands, coach Vera Pauw was also taking nothing for granted after their fine start, though should they and Ukraine both pick up three points, the Oranje would be group winners. "It's a strange feeling because we've been calculating that after one game in our group you could go anywhere: you could go one way or you could stop," Pauw said. "When you look at the statistics, Finland beating Denmark was a surprising result – so it's a very open group."

Different tactics

The one certainty is that Pauw is preparing a revised system of play. "We're expecting a different kind of game from Finland," she said. "Ukraine like to sit back, whereas Finland like to attack and are more opportunistic. Finland are physically strong, they're good players ... and they use more long balls than Ukraine. They're more direct."

Kalmari threat

Pauw, who has used video footage to help prepare her side, also knows Finland well enough to be wary of forward Laura Österberg Kalmari, describing her as "outstanding." Pauw added: "She's calm on the ball, she is the guiding player of the Finnish team and she has very good vision."

Geurts gears up for Finnish test

Netherlands goalkeeper Loes Geurts is bracing herself for a tough, physical encounter with the host nation when they take on Finland in Group A at UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ on Wednesday.

Winning start

With both sides having opened with a win on Sunday, the Netherlands beating Ukraine 2-0 and Finland edging Denmark 1-0, the prospect of a decent run in the tournament is clearly up for grabs at Helsinki's Olympic Stadium. Geurts, who has been the Dutch No1 since 2006 and the retirement of record cap-holder Marleen Wissink, is aware she will need to draw on her experience in what promises to be a demanding game.

'Tough game'

"We know a few things about Finland, that they're physically strong and that it's going to be a tough game," said the 23-year-old AZ Alkmaar keeper. "But we're going to go for it. We've seen videos of them and I especially watched the strikers. I don't think it's a case of one or two players in particular, though; Finland are strong as a team."

Set-pieces

In particular, she saw the problems which Finland caused Denmark from free-kicks, notably the match-winning goal from Maija Saari, when what looked like a cross into the box ending up bouncing unchallenged into the back of the net. "We know that Finland are good at set-pieces and we are going to have to watch that," Geurts said. Having learnt her skills as a girl by playing against her three brothers, defending a roofed bus shelter, she is perhaps used to dealing with the unusual. "The box is my area, and I know what I have to take and what the defenders have to clear," she added.

Mäkinen finds new motivation

Finland captain Anne Mäkinen says her team cannot afford to dwell on their opening victory against Denmark when they take on the Netherlands with the possibility of winning UEFA WOMEN'S EURO 2009™ Group A.

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The hosts beat Denmark 1-0 on Sunday after moving up a gear in the second half and will be buoyed for their return to Helsinki's Olympic Stadium in front of their home fans. But the 33-year-old Mäkinen, with international experience stretching back to 1991, made it clear this was no time for the hosts to rest on their laurels as they seek a victory which would take them through if Ukraine do not beat Denmark.

New focus

"The key I think is to leave the last game behind, to concentrate on the next one and to recharge all the batteries," the 33-year-old said. "I think we've done that and most of the players are 100 per cent already. It's important that we bring back the game that we were playing in the second half against Denmark and continue from there."

Melis threat

Part of Mäkinen's job will be to try and muzzle the Netherlands' prolific striker Manon Melis, a familiar task for her as the two women both play their club football in Sweden – the Finn for AIK Fotboll and Melis for LdB FC Malmö. "I've met her a few times in Sweden," Mäkinen said. "She's a very fast goalscorer, dangerous – the worst kind of enemy to play against as a central midfielder. So it'll be a tough game to face her – and the rest of the team, of course."

Retirement postponed

Mäkinen will be there on Wednesday to face that challenge after deciding last November to emerge from international retirement, having initially called a halt to her Finland career in 2006. She has no regrets. "I'm here because I love football, not here because of money – there's no money in female soccer just yet. I'm here because of my inner motivation, the desire to keep getting better and better. And to give everything for the Finnish team."

Coaching potential

Looking further ahead, Mäkinen is considering a move into coaching when her playing days really do come to an end. Asked if she could picture herself as a coach, she said: "Maybe. I would like to be part of the game still when I finish playing, a coaching role would be suitable. Maybe not with the [senior] women's team, but something younger." Current Finland women's coach Michael Kåld needed only one word to answer the subsequent question, as to whether Mäkinen had the leadership qualities to make it in the dugout: "Absolutely."