

FC Shakhtar Donetsk - SL Benfica

MATCH PREVIEW

RSC Olympiyskiy Stadium, Donetsk

Tuesday 4 December 2007 - 20.45 CET

Group D - Matchday 6



They may be forced to wait on the result at San Siro to see if they progress, but coach Mircea Lucescu says his FC Shakhtar Donetsk side must keep their focus as they face an SL Benfica team vying for a UEFA Cup place.

Late setbacks

Shakhtar began their UEFA Champions League Group D campaign with back-to-back victories, yet a subsequent run of three defeats means they go into Matchday 6 needing to win and hope that already-qualified AC Milan beat Celtic FC. Should they fail to reach the knockout rounds, Shakhtar will look back with some regret. The Ukrainian Premier League outfit were holding Milan until midway through the second half in their last home game before eventually losing 3-0; and last week a last-gasp Massimo Donati strike denied them a share of the spoils at Celtic.

'Focus'

"Our biggest problem is that we tend to lose concentration at the key moments; when we conceded in the dying seconds in the Celtic match proves that," said Lucescu. "But I hope that will change and we will have luck on our side in the future. It is vital to maintain focus right until the very last seconds because even the slightest mistake can mean conceding a goal." They shipped none in Lisbon on 3 October when Jadson's goal earned Shakhtar the points, and a repeat outcome would ensure a UEFA Cup Round of 32 berth at the least.

Full strength

Lucescu only has eyes for the UEFA Champions League, however, and having cancelled their weekend fixture against FC Zorya Luhansk, his side have benefited from a well-earned rest. "We have no absentees. Dmytro Chygrynskiy, Zvonimir Vukić and Brandão had minor problems but all of them should be fit to play," said Lucescu, who also welcomes back Fernandinho from suspension. "We have to win but let's not forget that Benfica have the same goal. They produced top-class football in both games against Celtic and in their home tie with Milan. Benfica have improved and have gained some confidence."

'Extra motivation'

The Portuguese club require victory to snatch third position in the section and although they suffered their first Liga defeat of the season at the weekend to FC Porto, Lucescu believes the "loss will make Benfica angrier and give them extra motivation". It is a view echoed by his counterpart José Antonio Camacho, who said: "The Porto result has not affected the condition of our team. It is not a tragedy. We will take to the field focusing only on Shakhtar and getting the right result. We will be ready to show the best we have got to give."

'Key to success'

Camacho will be without the suspended Augustin Binya while Fábio Coentrão (knee) and Cristián Rodríguez (thigh) are injured. Néelson is also doubtful as he struggles with a thigh problem yet the Benfica coach insists there will be no excuses. "We will only settle for a win in Donetsk because that is our only chance of continuing in European competition this term," he said. "The key to success will be doing what we failed to do at home against Shakhtar – taking our opportunities."



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Slim chance sustains Shakhtar's Jadson

The burden of responsibility is weighing heavily on FC Shakhtar Donetsk shoulders as they enter their final UEFA Champions League Group D game against SL Benfica.

'Responsibility'

However, according to midfielder Jadson, the Ukrainian team will give everything to meet the challenge facing them on Tuesday at the RSC Olympiyskiy Stadium. "We have great responsibility on our shoulders and we will do our best to win," said the 24-year-old Brazilian.

'Still a chance'

Jadson is one of five Shakhtar players to have appeared in each of their nine UEFA Champions League matches this season, including qualifiers. They go into their tenth game needing a win, combined with a defeat for second-placed Celtic FC at AC Milan, to progress in the competition. "All the players realise how important this match is," said the former Clube Atlético Paranaense prospect. "We still have a chance to advance from the group, so we have to do all we can to get the win against Benfica."

Portuguese flair

Draw and Shakhtar, third in the group, will qualify for the UEFA Cup's spring campaign; lose, however, and Benfica will overtake them to take the consolation prize. "Benfica have a good squad of players and their top man, for me at least, is Rui Costa," said Jadson of the visitors. "I know the ability of Portuguese players, but our job will be to prevent them showing it and to stop them playing the kind of football they are capable of."

Lisbon winner

Jadson, who is in his fourth season at Shakhtar, will welcome back fellow midfielder Fernandinho from suspension: it was his compatriot who provided the assist for Jadson's winner in the 1-0 success at Benfica on 3 October. At the time the Donetsk club had a maximum six points; three straight losses since then have left them with a great onus on Matchday 6 which only victory will lift.

Benfica hope to achieve new goal

Despite seeing their chances of progress in the UEFA Champions League dashed by a goal scored over 2,000km away last week, and a proud unbeaten domestic run ended by FC Porto on Saturday, SL Benfica travel to FC Shakhtar Donetsk more in expectation than hope. "We have to forget these defeats, put any negative thoughts aside, and win a UEFA Cup berth," said defender Luisão.

Two points adrift

The Eagles thought they had done enough to keep their Group D aspirations alive last Wednesday after drawing 1-1 against AC Milan in Lisbon, only for a late Celtic FC winner against Shakhtar to leave Benfica playing solely for a place in the UEFA Cup. Two points adrift at the bottom of the section, only an away victory will suffice if they are to remain in Europe in the new year. "Things haven't gone well for us this week," said midfielder Rui Costa. "Let's see if we can get the victory we need in Ukraine on Tuesday."

Wasted chance

After pushing Milan all the way – with Rui Costa particularly impressive against his former club – Benfica suffered a first Portuguese Liga reverse since November 2006 when Ricardo Quaresma's super goal settled the weekend summit meeting in the champions' favour at the Estádio do Sport Lisboa e Benfica. "We played a bad game," continued Rui Costa. "Porto took early control of the match and were stronger than us. In the second half we played more with our hearts than our heads. We wasted a great chance to reignite the championship and are now up against it."

'Motivation'

It is an even sorer story for Benfica in the UEFA Champions League, especially as Shakhtar could yet advance with a win provided Milan, who are already through, see off Celtic at San Siro. "We played to win against Milan and played some quality football despite failing to beat them," Luisão said. "We'll play with the same desire on Tuesday and I hope we'll get the right result this time. We're not afraid of the cold weather, but have to think about our rivals' players. It will not be easy but the team is in excellent condition. There are no problems with motivation as it's very simple – only a win will do."