

GERMANY - ENGLAND

MATCH PREVIEW

Malmö New Stadium, Malmö

Monday 29 June 2009 - 20.45CET (20.45 local time)

Matchday 5 - Final



A week after drawing 1-1 in Group B, England and Germany meet again with the UEFA European Under-21 Championship title at stake.

Classic tie

It is a classic tie to decide a compelling tournament that began a fortnight ago in Halmstad and came to life here at the Malmö New Stadium with Sweden's breathtaking 5-1 rout of Belarus. Though the hosts' involvement was ended by England on Friday, the prospect of two great rivals vying for the trophy guarantees an enthralling climax. Not that England coach Stuart Pearce, a study in focus, was prepared to discuss the rich footballing history between these nations.

'No favourites'

"What's gone before is irrelevant," Pearce said at a joint press conference with his counterpart Horst Hrubesch. "The only history we want to create is tomorrow night." The Germany coach was more expansive when it came to last Monday's draw, but like Pearce believed it would have no bearing on the final. "England had some advantage over us at set-pieces, but I don't think that will have any influence," he said. "No team is favourite in a final. I'm convinced we're going to win, but in the end it's 50-50."

Pearce focus

If Hrubesch was delighted by Germany's third clean sheet in their 1-0 semi-final victory over Italy, Pearce endured a traumatic afternoon in Gothenburg. England threw away a 3-0 lead against Sweden before winning on penalties. Having survived that scare he is intent on finishing the job. "As a group we feel as though we've had no success. The only way to have any is to win tomorrow. That's the be-all and end-all. Success isn't coming away as a gallant loser."

'Great expectations'

With senior coaches Joachim Löw and Fabio Capello both expected to attend, success will also be measured by who makes the grade in the years ahead. A telling contribution here could make a lasting impression. The two countries also contested the 1982 final with England prevailing over two legs before recording their only other U21 triumph two years later. Germany, surprisingly, have never won this competition, and there is no better time as they bid to complete a hat-trick of titles following wins at U17 and U19 levels in the last ten months. "The players have battled through the tournament and go into the game with great expectations," Hrubesch said.

Suspensions

Hrubesch is likely to bring in striker Sandro Wagner for the suspended Ashkan Dejagah while captain Sami Khedira should return from injury. Marko Marin, however, did not train on Sunday because of an ankle problem. Pearce's hands are tied by suspension to goalkeeper Joe Hart and strikers Gabriel Agbonlahor and Fraizer Campbell. With attacking options limited, Theo Walcott may feature in an unaccustomed central role, either as a lone striker or flanked by James Milner and Adam Johnson in Pearce's preferred 4-3-3 formation. Pearce refused to say whether Joe Lewis or Scott Loach would keep goal, each having played a half against Germany in Halmstad.

'Strong side'

Jack Rodwell's goal in that match is the only one Germany have conceded. "We've got a very strong team with exceptional qualities, especially individually," Hrubesch said. "We've played some very good football at times and this might be one of the strongest sides ever to represent Germany at this level." They can prove it by becoming the first to land the title. Their old rivals, though, will have plenty to say about that.



Belief fuels Germany's rise

Belief can take a team a long way and for Germany captain Sami Khedira that means nothing short of winning the 2009 UEFA European Under-21 Championship.

Tenacity

The 22-year-old central midfielder is expected to return for Monday's showpiece meeting with England after missing the semi-final against Italy through injury. Watching from the sidelines he was impressed by how his side withstood a barrage of Azzurrini pressure before Andreas Beck's strike sealed victory. Germany's tenacity was also a hallmark of their qualifying campaign – they needed a last-minute goal to beat France in the play-off – and it is a trait key to their quest for a first U21 title.

Belief

"We have the desire and the confidence that we can win every big game," he said. "We believe everything is possible. Things did not go well against Italy in the first half and we could have gone behind, but we always knew we could beat them." Khedira praises coach Horst Hrubesch for instilling that spirit. "He often asks me as captain, and the other leading players, for advice. Because of that we all pull in the same direction and decide what's best for the team. He listens to our opinions but has the final say. He speaks with the players a lot, especially those who haven't played. He tries to motivate them and keep them in a good mood which is very important."

Defensive strength

Happy campers Germany certainly are. Hrubesch's side may not have caught the eye in the manner of hosts Sweden, but like the senior team they have been stunningly effective at tournament play. "Of course we can play better, but we have to look at what players are available and the team's strengths," Khedira said. "Our strength lies in defence. We stay very compact, so in attack we're perhaps not so outstanding, but we still have individuals who can decide a game."

'Lethal weapon'

Khedira can be just such a match-winner. In his first season with VfB Stuttgart, 2006/07, he scored the goal that decided the Bundesliga championship in their favour. He will have a pivotal role to play in Malmö. While England are likely to field a much-changed side from the one that drew 1-1 with Germany in the teams' final group match, Khedira expects a similar game. "They will still play good football and be very strong at set-pieces – their most lethal weapon. We have to learn from the game against them, play intelligently and stop them getting scoring chances. If we solve those problems, we'll cancel out their biggest strength." This is a chance Khedira is determined not to miss. "I don't know how many times I'll get the opportunity to play in an international final. We've shown we can win this tournament. Now we're in the final and have a big chance of taking home the trophy."

Memories of 2005 spur on Cranie

Martin Cranie may be among the less celebrated members of Stuart Pearce's squad but as the only player aged under 34 to have captained England in a UEFA final there is one distinction he holds above all his peers.

Famous names

The Portsmouth FC right-back wore the armband in the 2005 UEFA European Under-19 Championship showpiece against France, as a team featuring current U21 team-mates Mark Noble and Andrew Taylor lost 3-1 to France. That defeat means England are without a victory in an age-group tournament since Darren Caskey, now 34, led a side including Paul Scholes, Gary Neville, Sol Campbell and Robbie Fowler to U18 glory in 1993.

'Biggest game'

"When I was in the U17s we lost in the [2003] semi-finals and then we had the U19s so hopefully this is the year to go one better," said Cranie as he looked ahead to Monday's U21 final against Germany. "The U19 final is the biggest game I've played in, or maybe my debut for Southampton, but this game will top both of those."

Highs and lows

Cranie experienced the highs and lows of tournament football in Friday's semi-final against Sweden, helping England establish a three-goal lead by opening the scoring inside a minute before the hosts fought back magnificently, ultimately to lose on penalties. "We obviously made hard work of it," said the 22-year-old. "Because we had such a lead the gaffer warned us not to take our foot off the gas, but I think we sat back a bit and they came back at us. We've been practising penalties for the last two years and that obviously paid off."

'Very nervous'

The defender confirmed that he was "number eight" on Pearce's list of takers and also that he was "very nervous" as the shoot-out entered sudden death. A happier memory was his opening goal – his first in competitive football since registering for the U17s against the Czech Republic in 2003. "I can remember it well, as it was one of my first games for England," he said. "I don't get many goals so it was great to get on the scoresheet."

'Ecstatic'

Having been the losing captain in 2005, Cranie is determined to finally get his hands on a winners' medal when this competition concludes in Malmö. "We have to treat the final like any other game, without taking our foot off the gas this time," he continued. "It would mean everything to me to win it, the highlight of my career. I've never really won a medal so if we were to win it, I'd be ecstatic."