

AC Milan - Sevilla FC

MATCH PREVIEW

Louis II, Monaco

Friday 31 August 2007 - 20.45CET



Antonio Puerta was the only player on people's minds as Juande Ramos and Carlo Ancelotti spoke ahead of the 2007 UEFA Super Cup in Monaco.

Emotional tributes

The 22-year-old Sevilla FC midfielder's death on Tuesday has touched the entire football family, not just in Spain but across the world. Emotional tributes have come from every quarter and all have paid their respects to a homegrown talent who fully embodied his club's spirit in recent years, skill and passion in equal measure as they battled their way to the top table of European football.

Legacy

That Sevilla are represented at Friday night's high-profile curtain-raiser to the continental club season against the might of AC Milan owes much to Puerta and it is certain his legacy will linger. Two UEFA Cups, the chance to reclaim the UEFA Super Cup and the potential of a first crack at the UEFA Champions League, Sevilla will never forget what their gifted left-footer gave them on their inexorable rise.

'In our hearts'

In acknowledging that he and his players were in a "trance-like" state, Sevilla coach Ramos said: "Well, we don't want to forget him and we are not going to. Antonio Puerta will be with us throughout the season. He is not here physically but of course he will be present in our hearts and present in everything we do and we have to live with his memory."

Monday date

Sevilla have yet to play since Puerta's death, their UEFA Champions League qualifier at AEK Athens FC having been rearranged from Tuesday to next Monday. The coach, who has last year's UEFA Super Cup star man Daniel Alves available, said he would make a judgement based as much on "mental attitude" as physical fitness. "There is no need to motivate the team through words because they are going to play to the maximum to pay tribute to their friend."

'Very sad'

Sevilla's approach was endorsed by Milan, with the European champions' coach summing up the pervading mood. "The aim was to come here, have a great party and play a wonderful match in a great atmosphere but that is not the case now," Ancelotti said. "The match has to be played and we'll do so in a serious way and in the appropriate manner while respecting the grief of the football family and in particular the Puerta family as we're obviously all very sad."

High praise

The Italian emphasised that he expected Sevilla to show their togetherness at the Stade Louis II. "Sevilla's style is a secret to no one," he said. "They play as a team and are very compact and it's not by chance that they've won all the finals they've played in. They're strongly motivated and have a dynamic, aggressive style. They're one of the best teams in Europe."

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'Tremendous opponent'

Ramos was equally respectful of the Rossoneri. "Milan have everything," he said simply, although they will be without Paolo Maldini as the veteran defender is yet to recover from a knee injury. The coach added: "We have a tremendous opponent to contend with and what I hope is that we will play at our usual level, with joy and ambition." Joy and ambition. Two words that would be more than appropriate for the playing style of Sevilla's absent No16.

Tribute to be paid to Puerta

Thoughts at tonight's UEFA Super Cup match between AC Milan and Sevilla FC in Monaco will naturally be on Antonio Puerta, the Sevilla FC midfielder who died on Tuesday after suffering a heart attack playing for his club last weekend - and due tribute will be paid to the Spanish international at the Stade Louis II.

Black armbands

Both teams, Austrian referee Konrad Plautz and his colleagues will wear black armbands in memory of Puerta. In addition, it is planned that the players from the two teams will have Puerta's name on their shirts in addition to their own names. A minute's silence will be observed, and flags at the stadium will be flown at half-mast. UEFA, through its President Michel Platini and General Secretary David Taylor, have expressed their deepest sympathy at the club competition draw ceremonies in Monaco, with delegates standing in silence in the 22-year-old's memory.

Ambrosini expects moving experience

Massimo Ambrosini will lead out AC Milan for the UEFA Super Cup against Sevilla FC "with a heavy heart" following the death of the Spanish club's midfielder Antonio Puerta. "It's a strange feeling for me," said the Italian international. "I should be experiencing something wonderful and special personally but I cannot forget what has happened and it will be a moving experience playing tomorrow."

Opening goal

With a knee injury ruling regular captain Paolo Maldini out of the opening exchanges of the season, Rossoneri coach Carlo Ancelotti had little hesitation in handing the armband to the reliable midfielder. Ambrosini wasted little time in repaying that faith as Serie A kicked off at the weekend, scoring a 21st-minute opener at Genoa CFC before Kaká's two first-half goals completed a 3-0 victory. By that time, though, Puerta was in a critical condition in hospital having suffered a heart attack during Sevilla's Primera División defeat of Getafe CF. He never recovered and died on Tuesday.

Paying tribute

"We all feel grief and surprise at what has happened," said Ambrosini, an unsung hero of Milan's UEFA Champions League success last term. "It was up to Sevilla to make the decision to play the Super Cup and they decided to go ahead with it - perhaps this is the best way to pay tribute to Puerta. We must play in a committed way even if the match has lost some of its attraction, but we don't know what our mindset will be. It will be a very new experience for all of us - a victory or defeat will not have the same meaning as under normal circumstances."

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Plautz to take charge in Monaco

Austrian referee Konrad Plautz will take charge of the UEFA Super Cup between AC Milan and Sevilla FC at the Stade Louis II in Monaco on Friday.

Perfect antidote

Plautz will be accompanied by three compatriots – assistant referees Egon Bereuter and Markus Mayr, and fourth official Fritz Stuchlik. The 42-year-old foreman from the small Alpine town of Navis is an enthusiastic director and actor with a local theatre group – the perfect antidote to the hectic round of domestic and European matches in which he has participated in recent years.

Successful career

"Refereeing fascinated me in my childhood, and I started taking charge of matches as a teenager in 1984," he told uefa.com in a recent interview. "I looked up to such people as the Austrian referee Erich Linemayr for inspiration. I played as a right-back as a youngster, but I wasn't the greatest player to be honest and my interest in refereeing always took priority."

Memorable year

Starting with the youth sector, he began his rise through the ranks at regional level before heading into the Austrian national leagues. He said: "I gave myself the target of getting to the highest levels in ten years, and I managed to reach Bundesliga level in 1992 after six years, before getting my international badge in 1996." That memorable year culminated in Plautz being chosen to referee the UEFA European Under-16 Championship final between France and Portugal in Vienna.

Important games

Since then, Plautz has officiated at a host of important games. In 2005/06, he took the whistle for Arsenal FC's 1-0 first-leg victory against Villarreal CF in the UEFA Champions League semi-finals. A veteran of two FIFA World Cup qualifying campaigns, Plautz also has experience of UEFA European Championship qualifiers dating back to March 1999.

Past meetings

Plautz worked with both UEFA Super Cup contenders last term as they made their way to European titles – Milan in a 1-0 UEFA Champions League first knockout round second-leg success over Celtic FC in Italy in March, and Sevilla in the 2-2 draw against Tottenham Hotspur FC in their UEFA Cup quarter-final second leg in London in April. He kicks off the new campaign with 24 UEFA Champions League matches on his CV and now achieves his half-century of UEFA fixtures.

No stranger

Besides last season's Celtic encounter, Plautz is no stranger to Milan in the UEFA Champions League. On 14 August 2002, he oversaw their 1-0 first-leg victory against FC Slovan Liberec in the third qualifying round; on 19 October 2005, he refereed the Rossoneri's goalless home draw against PSV Eindhoven in Group E; and on 29 March 2006, he took charge of another Milan stalemate, away to Olympique Lyonnais in a quarter-final first-leg tie.

Thorough attitude

Plautz will prepare for Friday's game with his usual thoroughness. He said: "That doesn't mean you don't have butterflies in your stomach when you go out on to the field – I feel you need this to an extent to have the right motivation. You have to be totally present for 90 minutes. It's nice to be able to make a positive contribution to a match that is flowing, but you must never let your authority slip."