

Italia Prepares for the Republic of Ireland

Bryan Solomon (June 21, 2016)



With Wednesday's match against the Republic of Ireland approaching fast, we look at what we expect to see on the field between on team who already punched their ticket to the next round and another who needs a win to keep their dreams alive.



With their immediate future in the Round of 16 insured, Italy is set to play their final match of group E tomorrow against Northern Ireland in Lille. While Italy already has their spot reserved in the next round, they still have a lot to gain and lose in this next match.

Italy's roster does not possess the same star power as past Italian squads, but they do have depth, making this game a key opportunity to rest some of the team's more important and older players. Gianluigi Buffon, Giorgio Chiellini, and Daniele De Rossi are expected to be given a day off, with the younger Lorenzo Insigne and Federico Bernardeschi expected to play instead.

Although several key players are expected to rest, Italy head coach Antonio Conte will retain the 3-5-2 that has brought Italy success so far. Manchester United full-back Matteo Darmian is expected to return to the starting lineup after being replaced by Alessandro Florenzi for the Sweden match. Juventus striker Simone Zaza is also set to take Graziano Pelle's spot in the frontline.

Resting stars is always risky. Giving Italy's top stars time off will give Martin O'Neill's side a chance to create a famous upset. If they can recreate the first half they played against Sweden they may be able to steal a victory. Ireland is still not at full strength, however, with Stoke forward Jonathan Walters still ailing from an Achilles injury. While still aggravating him, Walters will not start but should still see time on the pitch.

If Ireland is expecting to play a relaxed Italian team, then they should be in for a surprise. Marco Parolo said that Conte, "has been hammering the Ireland match into us since the day after we beat Sweden."

Here are the expected starting lineups:

Italy starting lineup: Sirigu, Barzagli, Ogbonna, Darmian, Motta, Bernardeschi, Sturaro, Insigne, Florenzi, El Shaarawy, Zaza

Ireland starting lineup: Randolph, Coleman, O'Shea, Clark, Brady, McCarthy, Whelan, Hendrick, Hoolahan, Walters, Lon

Source: Bengue, James. "Italy vs Ireland Preview: Prediction, Team News, Live and Betting Odds." Evening Standard. N.p., 21 June 2016. Web. 21 June 2016.

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