

Sweden's Ibrahimovic Likely to Miss Euro-2016 Qualifier With Russia Through Injury

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Sweden soccer captain Zlatan Ibrahimovic attends a news conference at the Scandic Park Hotel in Stockholm Oct. 7, 2014.

With captain Zlatan Ibrahimovic likely to miss Sweden's crucial Euro 2016 home qualifier against Russia on Thursday, the battle to replace him offers a gloomy outlook for the future of Erik Hamren's side.

Sweden's record goalscorer is struggling with a tendon injury in his heel that has sidelined him for Paris St. Germain. Unlike his club side, however, the Scandinavians do not possess an Edinson Cavani to shoulder the burden of his absence.

Even worse, it is an early sign of what is to come if the 33-year-old Ibrahimovic does retire after the Euro 2016 finals in France, leaving an enormous pair of international boots to fill.

Against Russia, coach Hamren will most likely turn to Johan Elmander, a striker who failed

to sparkle during two spells in England's Premier League and is now plying his trade at Brøndby in Denmark.

Another option is Ola Toivonen, who also plays in France, but any similarities with Ibrahimovic end there.

He and Elmander both possess a tremendous work ethic, but lack the flashes of genius that Ibrahimovic has made his trademark, especially at the Friends Arena.

Surprisingly, Hamren resisted the temptation to call up Manchester City striker John Guidetti, who has got off to a flying start at Celtic since moving to the Scottish club on loan. Guidetti will instead join up with Sweden's Under-21 side.

Often credited by Ibrahimovic for turning him into a goal-scoring machine when they worked together at Juventus, Russia coach Fabio Capello arrives in Sweden knowing that, in the absence of his protege, the biggest threat they face might come from the poor pitch at the Friends Arena.

"I spoke to Kim Kallstrom, my Spartak Moscow team mate about the upcoming game," said midfielder Denis Glushakov. "He said that the pitch is not in great condition and this will create even more problems.

"The Swedes have a strong team, who like to fight. They have a number of tall players, who are good in the air. However, if we play to the best of our capabilities and give 100 percent then we should not have any problems," he added.

Russia top the group on three points, following an easy 4-0 win over Liechtenstein, while the Swedes are joint third with Austria after the two sides played out a hard-fought draw in their opening game in Vienna.

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