

Arsenal face crucial Uefa Champions League qualifier at Udinese

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger will have to rely on a patched up side as he looks to put a taxing few days behind him by securing safe passage into the Champions League group stage.

The Gunners take a 1-0 advantage to Udinese for the second leg of their play-off but will have to defend it without a number of key players.

Manchester City-bound Samir Nasri is absent while Jack Wilshere, Laurent Koscielny and Kieran Gibbs are injured.

Defeat would cost Arsenal about £20m.

And it would also compound a poor start to the season which has seen Arsenal pick up a solitary point from their opening two Premier League games, seen a player dismissed in both matches and also lost through injury and transfers arguably their three best players from last season in Cesc Fabregas, Nasri and Wilshere.

With the club yet to bring in high-profile recruits and facing a daunting trip to champions Manchester United on Sunday, the next few days have been described as being make or break for Wenger's side.

But the Frenchman, who has also had to serve a touchline ban and seen his club fined by the Football Association for failing to control their players against Newcastle, insisted he remains calm ahead of a trip to face a side who were the joint-second highest scorers in Serie A last season.

"I believe that's part of my job. I'm not at all destabilised by that," he said of the past few days.

"Overall, my job is to give my best to do well for my club and that's what I do with complete belief in the team and the players I have available.

"I think that's the best opportunity to show as well that we are good enough to fight for this club."

Those players available will include Emmanuel Frimpong, Alex Song and Gervinho despite their domestic suspensions while Robin van Persie will return having missed the first leg.

However, with Nicklas Bendtner and Abou Diaby also out, such is the apparent lack of strength in depth currently available to Wenger that Carl Jenkinson, a £1m summer signing from Charlton where he had played only a handful of games, could start at left-back.

Wenger will at least be able to watch from the touchline unlike in the first leg.

Uefa ruled that the Frenchman broke the terms of his touchline ban in that match at Emirates Stadium by communicating with his staff on the bench from the stands and handed him a further two-game suspension in Europe.

Arsenal's appeal to have the hearing after the match in Italy was successful and Uefa released a statement saying they will "take a decision in due time."

Theo Walcott's goal in the first leg last Tuesday ensures Arsenal go into the match with a slender lead, but their vulnerability this season has already been underlined by the 2-0 loss to Liverpool at the weekend, while Udinese themselves caused plenty of problems last week in London.

ARSENAL'S RECENT RECORD IN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

2011 - Round of 16

2010 - Quarter-finals

2009 - Semi-finals

2008 - Quarter-finals

2007 - Round of 16

Antonio di Natale, in particular, was a source of constant worry for the Gunners backline and they will again have to be wary of a striker who has top-scored in Serie A for the past two seasons.

And Wenger admitted: "We need a good, solid defensive performance.

"But we have experience in the Champions League and that's a good way to use it."

And Wenger's counterpart Francesco Guidolin played down any suggestion that it was a good time to play Arsenal, stating: "I do not think there is a crisis at Arsenal - they are used to playing under pressure and have always been able to react to difficult moments.

"We will have to be very good, not make mistakes and try to be sharp."

Provisional squad: Szczesny, Jenkinson, Vermaelen, Djourou, Sagna, Traore, Arshavin, Frimpong, Ramsey, Song, Rosicky, Walcott, Van Persie, Fabianski, Chamakh, Oxlade-Chamberlain, Gervinho, Miquel.

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