

It's Yet Europe for Busto and Villa

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With not a moment's rest: forty eight hours after the intoxicating thrills of the "PalaPanini" Stadium in Modena, it is too soon to expect the fans to start thinking about watching volleyball again; so, you can imagine what it is like for the players. But there's no alternative. On Tuesday and Wednesday, the European Cups return, and these are crucial challenges for Yamamay and MC-Carnaghi, who will obviously face them with quite different frames of mind. MC-Carnaghi will be going onto the court on Wednesday evening, at the "PalaBorsani" Stadium, aiming for immediate redemption, after their unexpected elimination from the Italia Cup; it won't be easy, because their opponents will be the steely Dinamo Moscow. But before that, it is the turn of Yamamay, who will already be playing, on 31 January (at 6 p.m.), on the court of the Polish team of Bielsko-Biala, for the first leg of the quarterfinals of the Women's Challenge Cup. This is yet another minefield for Yamamay, who have gracefully overcome every obstacle so far.

YAMAMAY – The party will have to wait. Just time for a toast in the motorway service station to celebrate the historic victory in the Italia Cup, and then off, towards Poland, where the Yamamay players already arrived on Monday afternoon, for the quarterfinals of the Women's Challenge Cup, which, in fact are the eighth finals, as there will also be the Challenge Round against the teams eliminated from the Champions League (possible opponents are the German Schweriner team). But for now, we need to think about Bielsko-Biala, the team from a town of 180,000 people, a stone's throw from the Czech border; the team has won 8 shields and 7 cups in Poland, but almost nothing in Europe. The Poles, who have always played national matches on Wednesdays, have scheduled the match with Yamamay for Tuesday, at 6 p.m., the worst time possible for a team that has just returned from the Championships in Modena. But that's normal, their rivals would have done the same; and it will continue this way while it is the teams (and not the CEV) who decide on the dates of matches. With no live TV broadcast, the second leg has been scheduled for Thursday 9 February, at 8.30 p.m., in the "PalaYamamay" Stadium.

The team trained by Mariusz Wiktorowicz is almost a complete mystery, with the exception of the ever-present ex Liesbet Vindevoghel (in the photo, wearing a DiMeglio jersey), the Belgian smasher who played in Busto Arsizio from 2003 to 2005. With her, there are, the American centre, Crimes, the national team player, Kaczorowska, the Japanese libero, Miyashiro, and few well-known names. There is also a mystery surrounding the performance of the Poles, who, in the eighth-finals, reversed the 0-3 loss in Ekaterinburg, with a sensational 4-0 victory, and in Poland, they have just recently been beaten in the semi-finals of the Cup, by Chiappini's Atom Sopot. For its part, Yamamay have to make up for the absence of Havlickova.

"This fantastic series can't last for ever," claims the Bielsko website, and some, in the Yamamay camp, have suggested a European "surrender"; with the qualifier for the Champions already in the bag, and a shield to win, the Women's Challenge Cup seems unnecessary. But according to Havelkova, the Yamamay players think quite differently ...

BKS Aluprof Bielsko-Biala-Yamamay Busto Arsizio

Bielsko-Biala: 1 Crimes, 3 Ciaszkiewicz, 4 Wojtowicz, 5 Frackowiak, 6 Wolosz, 7 Vindevoghel, 8 Kaczorowska, 10 Pelc, 12 Bamber, 13 Miyashiro (L), 14 Banecka, 15 Lichtman. Coach: Wiktorowicz
Busto Arsizio: 3 Lloyd, 5 Dall'Ora, 6 Leonardi (L), 7 Marcon, 8 Bauer, 9 Meijners, 10 Lotti, 14 Caracuta, 16 Havelkova, 17 Pisani, 18 Bisconti. Coach: Parisi.

Referees: Kaspar Timermanis (Latvia) and Sari Kolehmainen (Finland).

MC-CARNAGHI – The disappointment still hurts, and how? Seeing their hated rivals of the Yamamay team triumph in the Italia Cup, a trophy that, for the last two years, had been held by them, does nothing but increase the suffering of the blue-and-whites over their extraordinary defeat in the quarterfinals, against Piacenza. The defeat came at a time when Abbondanza's line-up seemed to have finally found continuity and faith in their abilities. But then, they had to start again from the beginning, and the climb is beginning at the top; on their path, in the eighth-finals of the Champions League, MC-Carnaghi have come up against the highly-rated opponent of Dinamo Moscow, one of the most successful teams in Europe, with 10 Championship Cups, and a number of Russian national players (Goncharova, above all), the Bulgarian, Yaneva, and the runner-up in the European Cup, Angelina Grun. A week ago, they must have said to themselves that MC-Carnaghi (see photo: Pincerato) had nothing to lose, but today, the double challenge (the first leg on Wednesday, 1 February, at 8.30 p.m. at the "PalaBorsani" Stadium; the second leg on 9 February, at 4.30 p.m.) has become essential for the blue-and-whites, who must get immediately back up, if they are to avoid a dangerous, downward spiral. The task is difficult, but not impossible; they should ask for information from Pesaro, who, in the initial stages of the Champions League, beat the Moscow team with a resounding 3-0. But they have to try, because if they win, in the quarterfinals, they will meet one of the two surviving Italian teams, Bergamo or Pesaro, neither of which is by any means unbeatable. The aim is to target the fielding, which, as often happens in the Russian teams, is not the most effective. For the blue-and-whites, the forced rest at least gave Berg and companions the chance to train with more continuity, and to try out a few new tactical solutions.

MC-Carnaghi Villa Cortese-Dinamo Moscow

Villa C.: 1 Carocci (L), 2 Stufi, 3 Perinelli, 4 Berg, 6 Pavan, 7 Guiggi, 8 Cruz, 9 L.Bosetti, 10 Pincerato, 11 Barborkova, 14 C.Bosetti, 15 Wilson, 17 Puerari (L). Coach: Abbondanza.

Dinamo: 1 Morozova, 3 Perepelkina, 4 Makarova, 5 Yaneva, 7 Kryuchkova (L), 8 Goncharova, 9 Ulyakina, 10 Matienko, 11 Chikrizova (L), 12 Ortiz, 14 Krivets, 15 Kozhukhova, 16 Merkulova, 17 Grun, 18 Novik. Coach: Kolcins.

Referees: Juraj Mokry (Slovakia) e Nikola Micevski (Macedonia).

DERBY – Good news for Yamamay and MC-Carnaghi from the meeting of the League. Authorisation has been passed for an exception to the regulations that claim that all matches on the last day of the Championship must be played at the same time, so the return derby between Yamamay and MC-Carnaghi can be brought forward, to Saturday 10 March, at 8.30 p.m. In the same meeting, it was also decided to move the League's headquarters from Bologna to Milan.

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redazione@varesenews.it