

77. Florent Balmont

Club: LOSC Lille

Date of Birth: 2nd February 1980

Position: Midfielder

In every profession, somebody has the least glamorous job. The work that nobody wants to do because it is tedious and difficult, but usually vital. For Lille, Florent Balmont is that man.

The year of 2013 as a whole has seen Lille really return to form and Balmont has been a central part of that, much like he has been in Les Dogues' squad since he was acquired from OGC Nice in 2008. Through all the changes in the past few years at the club, Balmont has been an unremitting presence that has led Lille forward despite the extremely contrasting fortunes of the Stade Pierre-Mauroy club in previous years.

Whilst the first half of the 2012/13 season was mediocre for LOSC, with an embarrassing Champions League campaign and pitiful league outings, the second half saw Lille lose just four of their last 19 games, with Balmont being involved in all but one. They finished in sixth, just two points away from qualifying for the Europa League which ironically has certainly helped them have a better league campaign in 2013/2014 despite their then continental aspirations.

Cue an astonishing start to life under new manager Rene Girard who has succeeded in propelling Lille up to third with 19 games played. What is more impressive is that the side managed a run where they went 11 games without conceding a goal, a magnificent feat that included a win against much-fancied Monaco. Balmont, along with the impressive back four and the sublime Vincent Enyeama, all deserve huge credit for creating the league's best defence, having conceded just six times so far this season.

Balmont is a fiery character, looking to enrage the opposition with subtle fouls to provoke a reaction without being reprimanded for it by an official. Alongside this however, Balmont is surprisingly apt at regaining possession for his team despite his small height. He is very alert and is always looking for the opposition to make one slightly heavy touch to allow him to nip in and make the interception.



He adds to this by also being productive in not conceding fouls to disrupt play. Some defensive midfielders pile up fouls and yellow cards over a season but Balmont is actually fouled almost twice as much as he concedes a foul, which shows his knack of having immaculate timing, whilst also being seen as the centre-piece to starting any kind of counter attack.

In addition to this, unlike others in his position, he has an excellent delivery from wide positions which is more regularly seen in his corner or free-kick taking. His corner for Pape Souaré to score against Montpellier earlier this season displayed that he can loft a wonderful curved ball into the box that is begging to be buried by an on-rushing attacker.

An attribute which is however more widely associated with defensive midfielders, a low goal-scoring tally, is one that Balmont does possess, with just one goal to his name over the calendar year. A tidy finish against Lyon early in the year saw Balmont partake in some neat build-up play before being played in behind and having the composure to slot the ball home.

Whilst he is rarely a threat in front of goal, Balmont has produced four assists in 2013 showing how far he has come in being able to be creative and defensively solid at the same time. At 33, he may not have too many years of quality like his 2013 left and Lille will want to start looking for a replacement. However, whilst he is still knocking around Les Dogues will be aware of his vital importance. This fighting creative-defensive hybrid type of player is a rarity in France, but also in Europe; making Balmont a bit of an antique.

'Today our aim remains finishing 6th. We make our merry way without worrying about the rest.'

Florent Balmont

25th November 2013

#GFFN recommends: @Gibney_A: Editor at French Football Weekly, this LOSC fan has pursued his dream of French football journalism by moving in 2013 to Lille. With valuable insight and sharp, to-the-point views his writing is most entertaining. His commitment is almost unparalleled.