

44. Idrissa Gueye

Club: LOSC Lille

Date of Birth: 26th September 1989

Position: Midfielder



Generally speaking, the rest of the continent seems to consistently overlook some of Ligue 1's most promising and effective defensive midfielders. This hypothesis could not fit 24-year-old Lille defensive midfielder Idrissa Gueye any better.

The Senegalese hustling and bustling central player was able to burst onto the Ligue 1 scene properly for the first time in 2013 thanks to the consistent injury problems that faced fellow defensive midfielder and Lille captain Rio Mavuba over the course of the calendar year.

Several seasons working in the shadows of French household footballing names in the form of Benoit Pedretti, Rio Mavuba and Florent Balmont painted a consistently frustrating picture for the Diambars graduate, arguably Senegal's greatest footballing academy in terms of producing talent, with the likes of Patrick Vieira and friend of Get French Football News and Sochaux's defensive midfielder Joseph Lopy having frequented the institution. A period of three seasons without exposure to first team football is difficult, no matter how gifted you are because it destroys belief and confidence, even at an early age when it is to be expected, and Gueye's quiet nature off the field will certainly have contributed to the lack of conviction he was showing between 2009 and 2012 in terms of overhauling the likes of Balmont from the starting XI.

Either way, it did not matter because when Gueye was given his chance, he more than took it. Very much your archetypal machine of a defensive midfielder, Gueye's work rate may well be greater than that of his team mates competing for the same spot in the starting XI but he is perhaps not as efficient when it comes to stopping opposition attacks from forming. Although Gueye has shown some dominant displays and a great awareness for his teammates positionally in terms of kick-starting attacking moves from the heart of the midfield, his attempts to do the defensive donkey work required is not always completed as neatly as it should be for a side that flirted with Champions League qualification places last season and will certainly be doing so again over the course of this campaign. A performance against PSG in January of 2013 stands out, when he appeared shake and conceded several fouls in compromising areas of the field.

Athletic and imposing in terms of build, his game style is not dissimilar to that of PSG's midfield maestro Blaise Matuidi. Although Gueye has been regularly selected by new Lille boss René Girard this season, missing all but one Ligue 1 encounter of this season's campaign at the end of 2013, the former Olympian's (represented Senegal in London 2012 in the football discipline) roll was criminally understated in Les Dogues' run of eleven Ligue 1 games unbeaten running until a defeat to Bordeaux in December 2013.

Gueye was most likely not given the credit he deserved because he was not making last-gasp challenges like Simon Kjaer nor was he pulling off acrobatic save after acrobatic save like Victor Enyeama. No, instead Gueye was rushing forward to stop opposition moves from the source- the midfield area. His anticipation of what his opponent will attempt to achieve next is a sharply refined skill long ahead of his still youthful age in footballing terms of 24. With this ability, Gueye can charge passes down and intercept the ball in an area where, to the naked eye, there does not appear to be imminent danger. This was one of Lille's understated ways of achieving such defensive solidity in the first half of the 2013/2014 campaign.

His huffing and puffing was awarded in July of this year with him being offered a five-year contract extension by his employers Lille. The very offer in itself was a huge commitment made by a historically financially-troubled football club and showed just how valued Gueye had become in just a period of 6 months when he lurched from the shadow of Rio Mavuba.

The future for Idrissa Gueye is most likely something he is not thinking about. He has yet to play a full season at the core of the Lille squad and will look to enjoy Les Dogues' quest for Champions League football next season as we enter 2014. Lille fans will tell you his destined to replace the tired legs of players like Mavuba and Balmont, but give it another year or so and Gueye will no longer be lurking in the shadows of European football, if he chooses not to that is. His talent is unquestionable.

'No player wants to sit on the bench. I never let my unhappiness be known.'

Idrissa Gueye

29th November 2013

#GFFN recommends: @FRFootballWill and @FRFootballMax. Two French football analysts working for Football Radar. Between them, they have almost every Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 match covered in terms of commentary.