

19. Kurt Zouma

Club: AS Saint Étienne

Date of Birth: 27th October 1994

Position: Defender

There are some individuals, who, after just five minutes of watching them, are already, clearly something special. At the insanely young age of 19, Kurt Zouma has done what many will never do – establish himself as a starter in a club challenging for major honours at the top level. Zouma is a versatile defender, who can play at centre back or full back with ease, and who has been courted across the continent as we approach the January transfer window, with some big European clubs vying for his signature. So, why does Kurt Zouma deserve this amount of attention?

Still just 19 years old, Kurt Zouma has not quite yet filled into his physical shape. He remains quite lean, and needs a little more time to develop the physical strength that is generally required to play at centre back at the top level. This slight lack of physicality is one of the main reasons why manager Christophe Galtier sometimes prefers to play Zouma at right back when the opposing forwards are particularly corporeal. Having said that, Zouma stands at a towering 6ft 3, so in the air he is a formidable prospect, due to a combination of his agility and his height.

Zouma is also blessed with a considerable amount of pace, which is not necessarily essential at centre back, but it is always a welcome bonus. His speed means that he makes the transition to full back when required relatively painlessly, whereas most modern centre backs would certainly struggle to remain as versatile. In addition, he is already a great reader of the game, despite his lack of experience, and is extremely comfortable on the ball. He will tend not to play long balls from defence; instead favouring the higher-percentage short passes into his midfielders. Whilst his confidence on the ball can occasionally backfire, he generally puts his ability on the ball to good use.

Having said that, Zouma has on occasion in 2013 showed that he is still very much a raw talent, and needs more years in the game to truly develop. In November of 2013, just a few months ago, he went into a full-blooded challenge on Sochaux's Thomas Guerber, which left his opponent with a broken leg and dislocated ankle.



The punishment from the governing body was swift and severe – a ten match ban which Zouma is currently serving. However, it is these kind of experiences from which strong characters are made, and the onus is now on Zouma to respond in the correct way. His challenge was typical of a player still finding their feet in the footballing world, but he must be mature enough to learn from his mistakes.

Generally, Kurt Zouma's 2013 has been a little stop and start, but he has still done enough to convince even the most respected minds that he is one of Europe's biggest up and coming stars. An ankle injury ruled him out for the first few games of the calendar year, but he was soon back at the heart of the St Etienne defence and was a crucial player in their run in at the end of last season. The highlight of those run of games was when Zouma started at centre back in the Coupe de la Ligue final against Rennes, which St Etienne won, whilst also keeping a clean sheet. It was one of Zouma's most impressive performances during his time at St Etienne as a professional footballer.

However, Kurt Zouma's 2013 truly peaked in the summer, when most other players were away from football. He was a crucial member of France's winning U20 team, who were crowned World Champions in July of 2013. He played every single minute of each of the knockout round matches, ensuring that France conceded just 3 goals in 4 matches, and even scored a goal himself in France's quarter final clash against Uzbekistan. He was one of the standout players in that France squad, and drew praise from most who watched him.

Overall, Kurt Zouma is one of French football's hottest properties. Even if he does leave the French league, which is looking increasingly likely, he will be a major player in France's future ambitions on a European or World Cup stage. The tall defender has been touted as one of the most exciting young players on a global level, and anyone who has watched him over the last calendar year can see why.

'That tackle was useless for all involved. I hope the sanction is just.'

Thomas Guerber

On Kurt Zouma's horror tackle- 7th November 2013

DID YOU KNOW? Kurt Zouma has a older brother called Lionel, who plays as a centre-back for Sochaux.