



**GFFN**

**YOUR 42-PAGE LIGUE 1 2014/15 SEASON GUIDE**

**Ligue 1 2014/2015: Your Guide to the Season Ahead**

**Get French Football News**

## **A Note from the Editor:**

From Copacabana beach to the Stade Auguste Delaune: Ligue 1 kicks off again on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August when Reims host back-to-back champions Paris Saint Germain in the first encounter of the new season. The summer brought with it one of the most wholesome World Cups in recent history, where Ligue 1 stars both thrived and blossomed. Whether you were marveling at David Ospina or Guillermo Ochoa between the sticks, noting the potential of Serge Aurier or appreciating the sheer brilliance of James Rodriguez, it seemed that wherever one turned; the spirit of France's top flight was being embodied by some of its most emblematic characters.

While the majority of the aforementioned stars will undoubtedly move on this summer, Ligue 1 is not standing still. Zlatan Ibrahimovic is ready to lead PSG to Champions League glory, regardless of the supposed limitations that Financial Fair Play regulations have imposed on the Ligue 1 champions. The seasonal managerial merry-go-round has gone some way to reshuffling the pack and Willy Sagnol, Marcelo Bielsa, Hubert Fournier, Claude Makélélé, Leonardo Jardim and Jean Luc Vasseur have all been handed fresh starts at various outfits.

A new campaign brings with it three new sides. Ligue 1 welcomes back an eclectic bunch of former stalwarts with open arms in Metz, Caen and Lens. The latter club had the last laugh during a summer that may well be remembered for the administrative headaches that the French football watchdog the DNCG were causing, initially refusing Antoine Kombouaré's men entry into France's top flight.

The quest for continental football this season is expected to be tougher, with the prospect of a rejuvenated Marseille side after the injection of South American work ethic and style under the new, Bielsa-led regime.

As always, there is so much more to enjoy than just the race at the top. Philippe Montanier's Rennes have undergone a remarkable squad overhaul, Lorient continue to recruit intelligently and RC Lens will be hoping that they can make 2014/15 a comeback to remember with the backing of Azerbaijani mogul Hafiz Mammadov set to eventually bring even more foreign investment to this rapidly growing league.

There is always uncertainty at the start of a season, but I cannot help but feel all the more excited by the sheer amount of unanswered questions: How will PSG's Brazilian centre-back pairing fare? Are Monaco about to fall apart? Can St Étienne and Lille occupy the rest of the top four again or will Bielsa work his magic for Marseille? What of the quiet Hubert Fournier at OL? Buckle up; we're in for a hell of a season. It's time to take Ligue 1 seriously.

Christian Nourry, Get French Football News.

## AS Monaco: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Marc Aurele Caillard	GK	French	20	2013/2014	-
Danijel Subasic	GK	Croatian	29	2011/2012	Hajduk Split
Seydou Sy	GK	Senegalese	18	2014/2015	AC Milan
Martin Sourzac	GK	French	22	2012/2013	-
Layvin Kurzawa	LB	French	21	2010/2011	-
Elderson Echiejile	LB	Nigerian	26	2013/2014	Sporting Braga
Ricardo Carvalho	CB	Portuguese	36	2013/2014	Real Madrid
Aymen Abdennour	CB	Tunisian	24	2014/2015	Toulouse FC
Andrea Raggi	CB	Italian	30	2012/2013	Bologna
Borja Lopez	CB	Spanish	20	2013/2014	Sporting Gijon
Jeremy Labor	CB/RB	French	22	2012/2013	-
Fabinho*	RB	Brazilian	20	2013/2014	Rio Ave
Abdou Diallo	RB	French	18	2014/2015	-
Jerome Phoho	RB	French	21	2012/2013	-
Geoffrey Kondogbia	DM	French	21	2013/2014	Sevilla FC
Tiémoué Bakayoko	DM	French	19	2014/2015	Stade Rennais
Jeremy Toulalan	CM	French	30	2013/2014	Malaga
Anthony de Freitas	CM	French	20	2014/2015	-
Joao Moutinho	CM	Portuguese	27	2013/2014	FC Porto
Morgan Kamin	CM	French	20	2014/2015	-
Aadil Assana	CM	French	21	2012/2013	-
Lucas Ocampos	AM/LW	Argentinian	20	2012/2013	River Plate
Yannick Ferreira Carrasco	LW/RW	Portuguese	19	2012/2013	-
Nabil Dirar	RW	Moroccan	27	2011/2012	FC Bruges
Dimitar Berbatov	ST	Bulgarian	33	2013/2014	Fulham FC
Valere Germain	ST	French	24	2011/2012	-
Falcao	ST	Colombian	28	2013/2014	Atletico Madrid
Anthony Martial	ST	French	18	2013/2014	Olympique Lyonnais
Gaetano Monachello	ST	Italian	20	2013/2014	Olympiakos Nicosia
Edgar Salli	ST	Cameroonian	21	2011/2012	-
Lacina Traore	ST	Ivorian	24	2013/2014	Anzhi
Leonardo Jardim	Manager	Portuguese	40	2012/2013	Sporting Lisbon
Dimitri Rybolovlev	President	Russian	47	2011/2012	-

\*Fabinho is on a season long loan from Rio Ave

## AS Monaco: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	2nd	80	Emmanuel Riviere (10)
2012/2013	Ligue 2	1st	76	Ibrahima Toure (18)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	8th	52	Ibrahima Toure (10)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	18th	44	Chung Yung Park (12)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	8th	55	Nene (14)

## AS Monaco: Likely XI



## AS Monaco: Squad Analysis

A new season and a new manager for AS Monaco. They entered the 2013/2014 campaign confident that they could ruffle Paris Saint Germain's feathers sufficiently in order to make the Ligue 1 title race at least interesting. Unfortunately, they were wrong in that department, but they did display efficient football under Claudio Ranieri where James Rodriguez notably shone. Not to mention the fact that they obtained their record ever points total in Ligue 1 and qualified for the Champions League. Somehow, that did not appear to be enough for a disgruntled board at the end of last season and Ranieri was duly dismissed. The Monegasques were linked with Zinedine Zidane and got the less known Leonardo Jardim instead, with the aim being to play more attractive football than under their previous Italian coach. Despite the high-profile departure of James Rodriguez to Real Madrid the side remains quietly confident.

### Strengths:

ASM may have lost a world class player, but there are certainly more than a few that remain who will continue to grace the Stade Louis II with their presence this campaign. The prospect of the experienced heads of Falcao and Dimitar Berbatov combining with unstoppable young talent in the form of Anthony Martial and Lucas Ocampos truly indicates the attacking potential that Jardim has at his disposal. Combine this with the rearguard action that Jeremy Toulalan provides and the energy and dynamism of Geoffrey Kondogbia alongside the creativity of Joao Moutinho, and you have an excellent case for the most potent combined midfield base and attack force in the league and one that the rest of Europe will certainly fear.

### Weaknesses:

The fact that Ricardo Carvalho remains a central figure in the defence at the age of 36 suggests that more investment is needed before the transfer window is up. The addition of the steely Aymen Abdennour and the departure of Eric Abidal will help, but one questions whether the Moroccan can make up for his Portuguese partner's lack of pace. With Nicolas Isimat Mirin most probably on his way out, they have simply no depth in terms of central defensive options. Goalkeeper Danijel Subasic proved his quality last season, but the fullback combination of Layvin Kurzawa and Fabinho, however exciting it might be, remains inexperienced and one worries about how they will fare against established Champions League opposition.

### Key Man: **Falcao**

Falcao's 2013/2014 season with AS Monaco was one to forget and is the sole reason why he is spending another campaign with the Ligue 1 side: nobody was willing to take him in Spain or England. The Colombian was unlucky to receive a long-term injury during a Coupe de France match in January, but often cut a forlorn and frustrated figure on the pitch for Claudio Ranieri. He needs to find sufficient drive and passion to unearth his goal scoring form again in order to put his career back on track.

### Verdict:

The sale of James Rodriguez showed that AS Monaco's "big club" attitude is partially for show and that they are happy to sell their best players in order to recoup fees. The feeling that money is no object for the club has certainly dissipated following this summer's events. The appointment of a more low-profile coach in Leonardo Jardim certainly comes with its own advantages, and the club's pre-season has been undeniably encouraging. The genius in ASM's squad simply cannot be ignored and they should repeat last season's performance. **2<sup>nd</sup>**

## AS Saint Etienne: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Stephane Ruffier	GK	French	27	2011/2012	AS Monaco
Jessy Moulin	GK	French	28	2011/2012	-
Baptiste Valette	GK	French	21	2013/2014	Montpellier HSC
Jonathan Brison	LB	French	31	2011/2012	AS Nancy Lorraine
Florentin Pogba	LB	French	23	2012/2013	Sedan
Paul Baysse	CB	French	26	2013/2014	Stade Brestois 29
Loic Perrin	CB	French	28	2003/2004	-
Moustapha Sall	CB	Senegalese	28	2011/2012	US Goree
Francois Clerc	RB	French	31	2012/2013	OGC Nice
Ismael Diomande	DM	Ivorian	21	2012/2013	-
Jeremy Clement	CM	French	29	2011/2012	PSG
Renaud Cohade	CM	French	29	2012/2013	Valenciennes FC
Fabien Lemoine	CM	French	27	2011/2012	Stade Rennais
Benjamin Corgnet	AM	French	27	2013/2014	FC Lorient
Franck Tabanou	LW	French	25	2013/2014	Toulouse FC
Max Gradel	LW	Ivorian	26	2011/2012	Leeds United
Romain Hamouma	RW	French	27	2012/2013	SM Caen
Kevin Monnet-Paquet	RW/LW	French	25	2014/2015	FC Lorient
Allan Saint-Maximin	RW	French	17	2013/2014	-
Mevlut Erding	ST	Turkish	27	2013/2014	-
Christophe Galtier	Manager	French	47	2009/2010	Aris Salonika
Bernard Caiazzo	President	French	60	2009/2010	-
Roland Romeyer	President	French	68	2010/2011	-

## AS Saint Etienne: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	4th	69	Romain Hamouma (9)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	5th	63	Pierre Emerick Aubameyang (19)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	7th	57	Pierre Emerick Aubameyang (16)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	10th	49	Dimitri Payet (13)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	17th	40	Emmanuel Riviere (8)

## AS Saint Etienne: Likely XI



## AS Saint Etienne: Squad Analysis

After the departure of talismanic forward Pierre Emerick-Aubameyang away from Les Verts last summer, nobody quite believed that they would be able to maintain their claim for a top six finish over the course of 2013/14. Christophe Galtier showed yet again that his perceived brilliance knows little to no bounds and ASSE went one step further than in the previous season to secure a qualifying play-off tie for entry into the Europa League. The Loire club will likely have the added difficulties of juggling continental duties with Ligue 1 weekends this season and the squad is rather thin in appearance, with the window fast closing.

### Strengths:

As previously mentioned, manager Christophe Galtier is drawing praise left and right for his seemingly effortless ability to motivate and control his squad whilst remaining tactically versatile when forced to adapt due to departures and injuries. Kurt Zouma may have gone for good, but ASSE retain one of the most impassable central defensive partnerships in Sall and Perrin that the league has to offer. Combine that with their strength in depth in the centre of the park paralleled with the damage that Romain Hamouma can inflict when given the ball and St Etienne look absolutely no weaker than this time last term.

### Weaknesses:

While Galtier may have a very compact and able Ligue 1 squad at his disposal, Les Verts lack that extra quality to go the next step and mount at least a small challenge to the overall title. They are also thin in terms of numbers and desperately need cover in the left back position (where natural midfielder Tabanou has been converted) and at the heart of the defence. Erding is very much a form player and ASSE also need a Plan B in that forward position.

### Key Man: [Loic Perrin](#)

We chose Loic Perrin simply because of the calibre of his performances last season that culminated in him being chosen for the preliminary France World Cup squad. The captain is an exemplary leader and adds a seamless layer of stability which ensures that even when Saint Etienne appear to be having a poor day offensively, they will not be picked off at the back. He is experienced and gifted enough to be able to nurture the talents of the vast selection of auspicious youngsters in the squad as well. Despite the lack of certainty in the back four at the time of writing, specifically in terms of Saint Etienne's full backs, Christophe Galtier will more than hope that Perrin and Sall can make up for them with their pluckiness and accuracy in terms of tackling, especially from behind and in a position of weakness.

### Verdict:

Depth remains a serious issue for Saint Etienne and one that Christophe Galtier will hope that the board can rectify before the month of August is up, especially given the lack of quality in the fullback areas. The Europa League will likely do more to hinder their Ligue 1 campaign than galvanise it, but after the previous two seasons it has become difficult to doubt the potential and consistency of this side. With a passionate fan base and a tremendously vibrant stadium in the form of the Stade Geoffroy Guichard, French football will have one of its most hearty representatives on the continental stage should Les Verts' Europa League campaign amount to something. **4th**

## EA Guingamp: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Hugo Guichard	GK	French	22	2011/2012	-
Jonas Lössl	GK	Danish	25	2014/2015	FC Midtjylland
Mamadou Samassa	GK	Malian	23	2008/2009	-
Reynald Lemaitre	LB	French	31	2012/2013	AS Nancy Lorraine
Dorian Leveque	LB	French	24	2010/2011	Boulogne sur Mer
Jeremy Sorbon	CB	French	30	2013/2014	SM Caen
Gregory Cerdan	CB	French	31	2011/2012	Le Mans
Benjamin Angoua	CB	Ivorian	27	2014/2015	Valenciennes FC
Christophe Kerbrat	CB	French	28	2011/2012	Plabennec
Lars Jacobsen	RB	Danish	34	2014/2015	FC Copenhagen
Baissama Sankoh	RB	French	22	2011/2012	-
Mustapha Diallo	DM	Senegalese	28	2009/2010	ASC Diaraf
Laurent Dos Santos	DM	Brazilian	21	2013/2014	-
Julien Cardy	DM	French	32	2014/2015	AC Arles Avignon
Younousse Sankhare	CM	French	24	2013/2014	Dijon FCO
Lionel Mathis	CM	French	32	2009/2010	Sochaux
Claudio Beauvue	AM	French	26	2013/2014	Chateauroux
Thibault Giresse	LW	French	33	2009/2010	Toulouse FC
Sylvain Marveaux*	LW	French	28	2014/2015	Newcastle United
Tiecoro Keita	LW/ST	Malian	20	2014/2015	-
Ladislav Douniama	RW	Congolese	28	2012/2013	FC Lorient
Karim Achahbar	ST	Moroccan	18	2014/2015	-
Mustapha Yatabare	ST	Malian	28	2011/2012	USBCO
Ronnie Schwartz	ST	Danish	24	2014/2015	Randers FC
Mana Dembele	ST	Malian	25	2013/2014	Clermont Foot
Christophe Mandanne	ST	French	29	2012/2013	Dijon FCO
Rachid Alioui	ST	Moroccan	22	2011/2012	-
Jocelyn Gourvennec	Manager	French	42	2010/2011	La Roche VF
Bertrand Desplat	President	French	44	2010/2011	-

\*Sylvain Marveaux is on a season long loan from Newcastle United

## EA Guingamp: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	16th	42	Mustapha Yatabare (11)
2012/2013	Ligue 2	2nd	70	Mustapha Yatabare (22)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	7th	55	Anthony Knockaert (11)
2010/2011	National	3rd	80	Thibault Giresse (21)
2009/2010	Ligue 2	18th	43	Gilmar (5)

## EA Guingamp: Likely XI



## **EA Guingamp: Squad Analysis**

En Avant de Guingamp were unquestionably one of the greatest surprise packages that French football had to offer last campaign as they stumbled their way to the Coupe de France title, overcoming bitter rivals Rennes in the process. Their feat has been justly rewarded with an automatic place in this season's Europa League group stage, and manager Jocelyn Gourvennec will hope that he can prolong the fairytale of success for the fans based in a town with a population of little over 7,000 as we enter a new campaign.

### Strengths:

A backhanded criticism perhaps, but Guingamp's greatest strength is arguably the constant belief and commitment that they displayed in virtually every competitive fixture last season. Their manager Jocelyn Gourvennec has the confidence of knowing that he has a squad that respects him at his disposal. Considering their lack of funding, EAG have undergone an intelligent summer recruiting campaign that has seen them tap into the Danish market most notably. If Gourvennec can accomplish the implementation of Ronnie Schwartz and Mustapha Yatabare as a complimentary striking partnership, then their primary attack force is arguably more dangerous than any other of the teams that are expected to finish in the bottom half of the table.

### Weaknesses:

Ultimately, the club lacks a sufficiently creative central midfielder who can provide the front two with an adequate amount of chances to push on and win matches. This combined with the fact that the defence remains error-prone and physically weak demonstrates the range of imperfections that Guingamp continue to unfortunately retain. The departure of Fathi Atik, who was undisputedly the club's most creative attacker last term, will at least initially hit hard.

### Key Player: **Mustapha Yatabare**

Yatabare remains Guingamp's key component if they are to accomplish some form of Ligue 1 success this season. Two seasons ago, he made 35 appearances for Guingamp and scored 23 goals, then making him Ligue 2's top overall scorer. He has proven with the 11 goals he scored last term that he can transfer his goal-poaching instincts onto French football's most elite stage. Importantly, he has added the ability to be more unpredictable with the runs he makes along the opposition back four in recent times, which, matched with his pace and obvious yet startling power, will cause the majority of Ligue 1 defences serious problems, so long as he continues to work to be more clinical in front of goal. He must however have a better mental grip of himself. All too often last season he became frustrated with himself or the team, which affected the side's overall performance.

### Verdict:

The Europa League campaign could become a potentially deadly distraction for Guingamp at the beginning of this 2014/15 season. Any side that has not experienced the added difficulties that come with juggling Thursday night Europa League action with a weekend fixture will take time to adjust to their more copious schedule. The positives for Guingamp are however certainly more numerous than they were ahead of last season. They have been able to retain the services of a fantastic man manager in Jocelyn Gourvennec and have recruited cost effectively. Sylvain Marveaux on loan from Newcastle could prove to be a real bonus. **13th**



## Evian TG FC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Johann Durand	GK	French	33	2002/2003	-
Bertrand Laquait	GK	French	37	2009/2010	Charleroi
Jesper Hansen	GK	Danish	29	2013/2014	FC Nordsjaelland
Benjamin Leroy	GK	French	25	2014/2015	Tours FC
Jesper Juelsgaard	LB	Danish	25	2014/2015	FC Midtjylland
Aldo Angoula	CB	French	33	2008/2009	USBCO
Jonathan Mensah	CB	Ghanaian	24	2011/2012	Udinese
Cedric Mongongu	CB	Congolese	25	2011/2012	AS Monaco FC
Cedric Cambon	CB	French	27	2008/2009	Litex
Daniel Wass	RB	Danish	25	2012/2013	SC Benfica
Kassim Abdallah	RB	Comorian	27	2013/2014	Marseille
Youssef Sabaly*	RB/LB	French	21	2013/2014	PSG
Djakaridja Kone	DM	Burkinabe	28	2012/2013	Dynamo Bucharest
Olivier Sorlin	CM	French	35	2010/2011	PAOK Salonika
Fabien Camus**	AM	Tunisian	29	2014/2015	KRC Genk
Cedric Barbosa	LW	French	38	2009/2010	FC Metz
Nabjib Baouia	LW	French	22	2013/2014	-
Nicolas Benezet	RW	French	24	2013/2014	Nimes
Gianni Bruno	ST	Belgian	22	2014/2015	LOSC Lille
Nicki Bille Nielsen	ST	Danish	26	2014/2015	Rosenborg BK
Clarck N'Sikulu	ST	French	22	2013/2014	LOSC Lille
Zakariya Abarouai	ST	French	20	2014/2015	-
Pascal Dupraz	Manager	French	51	2012/2013	Croix de Savoie
Joel Lopez	President	French	53	2013/2014	-

\*Youssef Sabaly is on a season long loan from PSG

\*\*Fabien Camus is on a season long loan from KRC Genk

## Evian TG FC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	14th	44	Kevin Berigaud (10)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	16th	40	Saber Khilfa (13)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	9th	50	Yannick Sagbo (10)
2010/2011	Ligue 2	1st	67	Yannick Sagbo (9)*
2009/2010	National	1st	82	-

\*Youssef Adnane also scored 9 goals in 2010/2011

## Evian TG FC: Likely XI



## Evian TG FC: Squad Analysis

Evian were a frustrating side to watch last season, inconsistently blowing hot and cold, but doing enough of the former to secure top flight status again this season; their fourth consecutive season in Ligue 1. Pascal Dupraz's men faced the very real threat of relegation last time out, saving themselves on the very final day of action by trouncing Sochaux to banish Les Lionceaux to Ligue 2 instead. While the tangible possibility of losing some of their key players will continue to linger over Les Roses' heads until the month of August is out, they have been able to improve their squad considerably during the transfer window thus far.

### Strengths:

A characteristic that can certainly be associated with Evian, based on last season's showing, is the ability to step up their game when it really matters. Take their final day victory over Sochaux or their convincing win over PSG last season as evidence for the latter point. Pascal Dupraz has made necessary tweaks over the last twelve months, which will no doubt benefit Evian in the forthcoming campaign. First and most notably was his decision to make Jesper Hansen number one in place of the fumbling Bertrand Laquait. The signings of Gianni Bruno and Nicki Bille Nielsen provide added pace, but, most importantly, options in that most forward of positions, with the hope of compensating for the departure of Kevin Berigaud, whose goals were crucial last term. Nicolas Benezet, a former Ligue 2 starlet, has had a season to settle into Ligue 1 life and ETG's faithful will rightfully be expecting more from him in the wide areas. Fabien Camus adds experience and a focal point from which Evian should be able to implement their counter attacking style more effectively.

### Weaknesses:

Evian have seen casualty after casualty in the defensive midfield area of the field this summer, and they look decidedly easy to break apart, especially through the centre of the park. Dupraz's insistence in keeping Olivier Sorlin in the first team must depress Evian fans. The 35 year old was tremendously susceptible to losing possession time and time again last year and it is to the team's detriment that they insist on keeping him as captain for this season. Jonathan Mensah and Cedric Mongongu are players who continue to show flashes of defensive prowess, but only flashes. The former has however had an impressive World Cup with Ghana by his standards and ETG will hope that the relatively young Mensah can seamlessly bring his form from Brazil into Ligue 1. Both men must improve on last season's half-baked activities for Evian to stand a chance this time around. More worryingly is the fact that Evian's anticipated marquee signing in the form of Nielsen has a reputation in Denmark as being a serious troublemaker. So much so, that he is presently involved in an assault case back in his homeland.

### Key Player: Cedric Mongongu

Now, it is clear to that Mongongu is perhaps not the most talented player that Evian currently possess, but the club's potential survival and retention of a Ligue 1 place for 2015/2016 hinges greatly on his performances and consistency this season. The 25 year old played a pivotal role in Monaco's Ligue 1 accomplishments during his four seasons at the Principality but he has failed to replicate that form consistently since he moved to Evian in 2011. He is a daunting centre back who, despite his obvious size has surprisingly good mobility, is comfortable enough with the ball at his feet to make incisive passes out of the back of Evian's defence. It is vital that Evian's back four is performing to the best of its ability this season.

### Verdict:

They may have a defence that is generally complacent about its ability, but Dupraz has recruited intelligently to try and compensate from the obvious goal void that Kevin Berigaud's departure would have caused. Again, one worries about the spinelessness of Evian's midfield, but the squad's experience in Ligue 1 relegation dogfights should save them yet again. **16<sup>th</sup>**

## FC Lorient: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Benjamin Lecomte	GK	French	23	2010/2011	-
Fabien Audard	GK	French	36	2004/2005	Toulouse FC
Florent Chaigneau	GK	French	30	2011/2012	Le Poiré Sur Vie
Raphael Guerreiro	LB	French	20	2013/2014	SM Caen
Vincent Le Goff	LB	French	24	2014/2015	Istres
Lamine Kone	CB	French	25	2010/2011	Chateauroux
Bruno Ecuele Manga	CB	Gabonese	26	2010/2011	Angers SCO
Wesley Lautoa	CB	French	26	2011/2012	CS Sedan
Yohann Wachter	CB	French	22	2013/2014	-
Cheick Toure	CB	Ivorian	21	2013/2014	Bourg-Peronnas
Pedrinho	RB	Portuguese	29	2011/2012	Academica
Lamine Gassama	RB	Senegalese	24	2011/2012	Lyon
Mathieu Coutadeur	CM	French	28	2011/2012	AS Monaco
Rafidine Abdullah	CM	French	20	2013/2014	Marseille
Remi Mulumba	CM	French	21	2012/2013	-
Pierre Lavenant	CM	French	18	2014/2015	-
Alain Traore	AM	Burkinabe	25	2012/2013	Auxerre
Sadio Diallo*	AM	Guinean	23	2014/2015	Stade Rennais
Enzo Reale	AM	French	22	2012/2013	Olympique Lyonnais
Mathias Autret	AM	French	23	2010/2011	Stade Brestois
Walid Meslouh	AM/ST	Algerian	28	2014/2015	Havre AC
Maxime Barthelme	LW	French	26	2010/2011	RC Paris
Bryan Pele	LW	French	22	2013/2014	-
Yann Jouffre	RW	French	30	2007/2008	EA Guingamp
Valentin Lavigne	RW	French	20	2014/2015	-
Jordan Ayew	ST	Ghanaian	22	2014/2015	Marseille
Fabien Robert	ST/LW	French	25	2011/2012	-
Giles Sunu	ST	French	23	2011/2012	Arsenal FC
Benjamin Jeannot	ST	French	22	2014/2015	AS Nancy
Julien Quercia	ST	French	27	2011/2012	Auxerre
Vincent Aboubakar	ST	Cameroonian	22	2013/2014	Valenciennes FC
Sylvain Ripoll	Manager	French	42	2014/2015	-
Loic Fery	President	French	40	2009/2010	-

\*Sadio Diallo is on a season long loan from Stade Rennais

## FC Lorient: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	8th	49	Vincent Aboubakar (16)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	8th	53	Jeremie Aliadiere (15)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	17th	39	Kevin Monnet Paquet (6)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	11th	49	Kevin Gameiro (22)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	7th	58	Kevin Gameiro (17)

## FC Lorient: Likely XI



## FC Lorient: Squad Analysis

After eleven years at the helm, Lorient manager Christian Gourcuff announced that he would not be extending his adventure with the club after a dicey fall-out with President Loic Fery. Their split had already been brewing for two years, but climaxed as Les Merlus continued to sell some of their most promising players. Regardless of Gourcuff's qualms, the club remains in very good shape to push on from their fantastically achieved eighth placed finish last term. Loic Fery has replaced Gourcuff internally with former assistant manager Sylvain Ripoll, harbouring the hope that the same, eye-catching, attacking football can be deployed as the club enters a new era.

### Strengths:

Some of Lorient's short passing game paralleled with their swift counter attacking brilliance was wonderful to watch last season, an ethos that Christian Gourcuff spent years trying to perfect. Their style of football was unique last campaign and helped to identify themselves as a top ten side. The leader at the back, Bruno Ecuele Manga, remains an extraordinarily key part of the overall club and is a universally respected member of the Ligue 1 community. The addition of Jordan Ayew from Marseille was something of a coup for Les Merlus, with the player having solicited interest from teams across Europe. It perhaps goes to show just how strong and recognised Lorient's brand of football has become in France of late. Ripoll has also managed to see sense in handing Benjamin Lecomte the number one jersey, a man who is by far the most self-assured goalkeeper at the club's disposal.

### Weaknesses:

With some very canny signings and an emphasis on building a squad centred on youth, FC Lorient's team looks to be in really promising shape ahead of the forthcoming campaign. They do lack a classic Ligue 1 defensive midfielder, one whose game is built primarily around his physicality; a deficiency that often sees the back four come under repetitive fire during matches. The departure of Kevin Monnet Paquet to Saint Etienne will hurt, but only temporarily. Christian Gourcuff's previous fixation on playing overrated youngster Bryan Pele will be something that Ripoll should seriously evaluate and the long-term injury to Maxime Bartheleme leaves them temporarily talentless down that left wing.

### Key Player: [Vincent Aboubakar](#)

Another transfer window and another brilliant piece of business from Lorient. The Cameroonian front man was picked off the then Ligue 1 rivals Valenciennes for nothing; after three awful years with VA during which he scored only nine times in over seventy appearances. A fresh start was seemingly all that the 22 year old required, scoring 16 times in 24 appearances with Lorient in his opening season with the club and capping the campaign off by finishing third in the race for the 2013/2014 Ligue 1 golden boot award. His combined level of physicality and rapidity on the ball is unparalleled by practically any other Ligue 1 striker and while his balance and shot accuracy remain a work in progress, the player has had an explosive 2013/2014, something which he was unfortunate not to be able to galvanize at the World Cup with Cameroon, playing for a calamitous and ironically named Indomitable Lions side in Brazil. Cameroon's loss may yet be Lorient's gain, as, despite serious interest from multiple European sides, the club remains confident that they can retain their man for an additional full campaign.

### Verdict:

One widely expects Lorient to replicate both their attractive style of play and their impressive run of Ligue 1 top ten finishes throughout the 2014/2015 campaign. Sylvain Ripoll may be entering the fray as an unknown entity, but he holds in his hand arguably the best squad that Les Merlus have had at their disposal for the last five years. The newfound ambition and steel that Lorient are expected to showcase should see them go one place better than last season. **7th**

## FC Metz: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Johann Carrasso	GK	French	26	2013/2014	Stade Rennais
Anthony M'Fa Mezui	GK	Gabonese	23	2010/2011	-
David Oberhauser	GK	French	23	2014/2015	ATA Arad
Ali Bamba	LB	Ivorian	23	2013/2014	Le Mans
Gaetan Bussmann	LB	French	23	2010/2011	-
Jeremy Choplin	CB	French	29	2013/2014	SC Bastia
Jose Luis Palomino	CB	Argentinian	24	2014/2015	Argentinos Juniors
Sylvain Marchal	CB	French	34	2013/2014	SC Bastia
Guido Milan	CB	Argentinian	27	2012/2013	Atalanta
Chris Philipps	CB	Luxembourgian	20	2012/2013	-
Daniel O'Shaughnessy	CB	Finnish	19	2013/2014	-
Medric Deher	CB	French	19	2014/2015	-
Jonathan Rivierez	RB	French	25	2014/2015	Havre AC
Romain Metanire	RB	French	24	2010/2011	-
Guirane N'Daw	DM	Senegalese	30	2014/2015	Asteras Tripolis
Cheick Doukoure	DM	French	21	2014/2015	FC Lorient
Ahmed Kashi	DM	Algerian	25	2012/2013	Chateauroux
Romain Rocchi	DM	French	32	2013/2014	AC Arles Avignon
Mayoro N'Doye	DM	Senegalese	22	2012/2013	-
Bouna Sarr	AM	French	22	2011/2012	-
Fadil Sido	AM	Burkinabe	21	2014/2015	-
Kevin Lejeune	LW	French	29	2012/2013	Tours FC
Yeni N'Gbakoto	RW	Ivorian	22	2009/2010	-
Maxwel Cornet	RW	Ivorian	17	2014/2015	-
Diafra Sakho	ST	French	24	2012/2013	Boulogne
Kwame Nsor	ST	Ghanaian	22	2013/2014	Kaiserslautern
Thibaut Vion	ST	French	20	2013/2014	FC Porto
Juan Falcon	ST	Venezuelan	25	2014/2015	Zamora FC
Albert Cartier	Manager	French	53	2012/2013	Eupen
Bernard Serin	President	French	63	2009/2010	-

## FC Metz: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 2	1st	76	Diafra Sakho (20)
2012/2013	National	2nd	70	Diafra Sakho (23)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	18th	42	Mathieu Duhamel (10)
2010/2011	Ligue 2	17th	45	Mathieu Duhamel (10)
2009/2010	Ligue 2	4th	56	Papiss Cisse (8)

## FC Metz: Likely XI



## FC Metz: Squad Analysis

Les Grenats were far too strong for anybody to conceivably stop them in Ligue 2 last season and fully deserve a shot in France's top tier. Another French club with a fantastic youth setup, boss Albert Cartier will be hoping that exuberance can save them in what will be a very difficult relegation battle. Without a sudden burst and flurry of late transfer window activity, their Ligue 1 adventure may well be short-lived.

### Strengths:

There are only a handful of players who have the necessary ability to be playing Ligue 1 football this season. Left-back Gaetan Bussmann is very talented considering his tender age and can also pose a significant threat from set pieces. Another individual who more than merits French top flight status this campaign is manager Albert Cartier, who has won them back-to-back promotions in just two seasons in charge. There is also a lot of raw attacking talent coming through the ranks. One looks at the likes of Yeni N'Gbakoto and Fadil Sido as examples, but how they will fare in Ligue 1 is very much anyone's guess at this early stage in their respective careers.

### Weaknesses:

The central defensive partnership of Jeremy Choplin and Sylvain Marchal is astoundingly slow and uninspiring, which will undoubtedly force Cartier's side to defend from deep and hope to hit sides on the counter attack. Guirane N'Daw's return to Ligue 1 may go some way to tightening the side up defensively, but his ball retention skills continue to leave a lot to be desired for. To make matters even worse, Metz have been hit with multiple injuries ahead of the campaign and the squad will be nowhere near a full bill of health when Ligue 1 kicks off on the second weekend of August.

### Key Player: Diafra Sakho

Talismanic would be the only word befitting when describing the effect Diafra Sakho has had on Metz in the last two seasons. Despite the player's claims at the end of last season that he was going to move on from Les Grenats, the club denies having received a single offer for him. 43 league goals in the last two seasons, albeit against weaker opposition in Ligue 2 and National respectively, is not a statistic to be sneered at. Sakho is a frighteningly well rounded forward, who is both powerful in the air and shoulder-to-shoulder but additionally one who has the necessary pace to enable him to play just off the last defender. What is perhaps yet more surprising is his technical capacity that often bewilders standing defenders to the point of no return. The question is not will Diafra Sakho be a success in Ligue 1, but rather will Metz be able to hold on to him for sufficiently long enough in order for him to make the decisive difference which could decide whether or not Les Grenats remain in Ligue 1 come this time next year.

### Verdict:

In a league where the level of overall ability is rapidly rising, where the nature of the competition is becoming more and more brutal, it is hard to see Metz standing a chance. They may well be exciting to watch, especially if they keep hold of Diafra Sakho, but they will concede far more goals than they will be able to muster up themselves. It could be close, but relegation seems the likely reality. **18th**

## FC Nantes: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Remy Riou	GK	French	26	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Erwin Zelazny	GK	French	22	2009/2010	-
Maxime Dupe	GK	French	21	2011/2012	-
Nassim Badri	GK	French	20	2014/2015	-
Olivier Veigneau	LB	French	29	2011/2012	Duisburg
Papy Djilobodji	CB	Senegalese	25	2009/2010	Senart-Moissy
Kian Hansen	CB	Danish	25	2014/2015	Esbjerg fB
Oswaldo Vizcarrondo	CB	Venezuelan	30	2013/2014	Lanus
Anthony Walongwa	CB	French	20	2014/2015	-
Issa Cissokho	RB	Senegalese	29	2011/2012	-
Chaker Alhadhur	RB/LB	Comorian	22	2011/2012	-
Koffi Djidji	RB	French	21	2011/2012	-
Birama Toure	DM	Malian	22	2012/2013	-
Remi Gomis	DM	Senegalese	30	2013/2014	Levante
Lucas Deaux	DM	French	25	2012/2013	Stade de Reims
Jordan Veretout	CM	French	21	2011/2012	-
Amine Oudrhiri	AM	Moroccan	21	2013/2014	Red Star FC
Alejandro Bedoya	AM	American	27	2013/2014	Helsingborgs IF
Saad Trabelsi	AM	Tunisian	22	2013/2014	-
Vincent Bessat	LW	French	28	2011/2012	Boulogne
Johan Audel	LW	French	30	2013/2014	Stuttgart
Georges Kevin N'Koudou	RW	French	19	2013/2014	-
Serge Gakpe	ST	Togolese	27	2011/2012	AS Monaco FC
Itay Shechter	ST	Israeli	27	2013/2014	Hapoel Tel Aviv
Ismael Bangoura	ST	Guinean	29	2012/2013	Al Nasr
Fernando Aristeguieta	ST	Venezuelan	22	2013/2014	Caracas FC
Michel Der Zakarian	Manager	Armenian	51	2012/2013	Clermont Foot
Waldemar Kita	President	Polish	61	2007/2008	FC Lausanne

## FC Nantes: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	13th	46	Filip Djordjevic (9)
2012/2013	Ligue 2	3rd	69	Filip Djordjevic (20)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	9th	51	Sylvain Wiltord (8)
2010/2011	Ligue 2	13th	47	Filip Djordjevic (12)
2009/2010	Ligue 2	15th	45	Jean Claude Darcheville (6)*

\*Stephane Darbion and Tenema N'Diaye also scored 6 goals in 2009/2010

## FC Nantes: Likely XI



## FC Nantes: Squad Analysis

Les Canaris' 2013/2014 campaign was very much a tale of two halves. They were placed as high as fourth at one point during the opening two months of the championship, where Issa Cissokho, Papy Djilobodji and Filip Djordjevic all shone brightly. By the turn of calendar year however, their star striker Djordjevic was injured and began to make noises about leaving the club. Sadly for Nantes, this coincided with a general downturn in form and what had been a season full of promise quickly turned into one of midtable mediocrity. To make matters worse, Nantes have been unable to recruit any players this summer after their transfer embargo was confirmed, leaving the club in very real danger of a 2014/15 relegation battle.

### Strengths:

The departure of Filip Djordjevic aside, manager Michel Der Zakarian has a handful of talented players who proved their respective abilities in Ligue 1 last season at his disposal. The central defensive partnership of Papy Djilobodji and Kian Hansen will be a major plus point for Les Canaris this time around, with both men possessing physical strength as well as impressive tactical awareness. Serge Gakpe, whether he was deployed as a right-winger or as the lone striker, was terrific at times last term and, with his mazy runs and stunning shot, he is one of the most dangerous Ligue 1 attackers on his day.

### Weaknesses:

Unfortunately, star striker Filip Djordjevic's exit for Lazio this summer leaves the club without an established front man and his absence through injury was more than felt in the second half of last season's campaign. With only four league victories in 2014, it is clear that Nantes are missing a certain sort of attacking inspiration and their transfer embargo has blocked them from rectifying that problem. The man billed to replace the free-scoring Serb is Itay Shechter, who couldn't manage a single goal in eleven appearances last season... Players like Lucas Deaux and Jordan Veretout disappointed a little last term in often failing to grapple control of that central midfield area, but perhaps too much expectation was placed upon their shoulders in the first place.

### Key Player: [Issa Cissokho](#)

It was initially difficult to elect the man who might make the difference for Nantes, but fullback Issa Cissokho could do exactly that. The 29 year old's heartwarming story about hustling in France's low leagues throughout his career and then finally blossoming on the main French footballing stage epitomised FCN's early run of fine form last season. An unstoppable force down that right flank when bustling forward, Cissokho is often caught short and out of position when his side is forced to defend. His saving grace is the determination and grit he possesses to rush back to make a sliding challenge from behind. He is also one of the most senior players in the current squad, and will have a duty to try and keep morale as high as possible in what will surely be a hard-fought season for Les Canaris.

### Verdict:

For a side that was so heroic at times last season, it seems cruel to condemn them to relegation solely on the basis that they have been barred from making improvements to the squad this summer, but the problems are far deeper than that. The attacking quartet that Der Zakarian has at his disposal this season proved over the course of the previous campaign that, for the most part, they failed to click. Les Canaris must hope that Djilobodji and Hansen can form a special partnership in defence that successfully repels the onslaughts that they may be facing during Ligue 1 this term, because the defensive midfield sector has already proved that it is not capable enough to deal with the majority of the opposition that they will come up against in 2014/15. They will likely be saved by the failings of others around them. **17th**



## Girondins de Bordeaux: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Azbe Jug	GK	Slovenian	22	2010/2011	Maribor
Cedric Carrasso	GK	French	32	2009/2010	Toulouse FC
Jerome Prior	GK	French	18	2014/2015	-
Maxime Poundje	LB	French	21	2011/2012	-
Lucas Orban	LB	Argentinian	25	2013/2014	Tigre
Nicolas Pallois	LB/CB	French	26	2014/2015	Chamois Niortais
Ludovic Sane	CB	Senegalese	27	2009/2010	-
Marc Planus	CB	French	32	2002/2003	-
Julien Faubert	RB	French	31	2012/2013	Elazigspor
Mariano	RB	Brazilian	28	2011/2012	Fluminense
Andre Biyogo Poko	DM	Gabonese	21	2011/2012	US Bitam
Jaroslav Plasil	CM	Czech	32	2009/2010	Osasuna
Clement Badin	CM	French	21	2014/2015	-
Gregory Sertic	CM	Croatian	24	2010/2011	-
Abdou Traore	CM	Malian	26	2008/2009	-
Valentin Vada	AM	Argentinian	18	2014/2015	-
Younes Kaabouni	AM	French	19	2014/2015	-
Wahbi Khazri	LW	Tunisian	23	2014/2015	SC Bastia
Jussie	LW/ST	Brazilian	30	2012/2013	RC Lens
Nicolas Maurice-Belay	LW	French	29	2011/2012	FC Sochaux
Hadi Sacko	LW	French	20	2012/2013	-
Henri Saivet	RW/AM	French	23	2010/2011	-
Diego Rolan	ST	Uruguayan	21	2012/2013	Defensor
Emiliano Sala	ST	Argentinian	23	2011/2012	-
Cheick Diabate	ST	Malian	26	2009/2010	-
Thomas Toure	ST	French	20	2014/2015	-
David Djigla	ST	Beninese	18	2014/2015	-
Willy Sagnol	Manager	French	37	2014/2015	France U21s
Jean Louis Tiraud	President	French	63	1996/1997	-

## Girondins de Bordeaux: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	7th	53	Cheick Diabate (12)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	7th	55	Henri Saivet (8)*
2011/2012	Ligue 1	5th	61	Yoann Gouffran (14)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	7th	51	Anthony Modeste (10)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	6th	64	Wendel (11)

\*In 2012/2013, Cheick Diabate and Yoann Gouffran also scored 8 goals.

## Girondins de Bordeaux: Likely XI



## **Girondins de Bordeaux: Squad Analysis**

President Jean-Louis Tiraud dismissed manager Francis Gillot at the end of last season in an attempt to inject a spark into what has been an often lifeless and lacklustre Bordeaux side. While Les Girondins have made good progress in terms of ridding the “Bore-deaux” tag off of their backs, during a campaign where Nicolas Maurice-Belay most notably shone, it was seemingly a case of too little too late. Gillot’s lack of tactical creativity sealed his fate, despite FCGB finishing a respectable 7<sup>th</sup> place. Step forward Willy Sagnol for his first taste of club management, the man who rejected the Lyon job to join this southwestern side.

### Strengths:

The lack of continental football this term may displease the Bordeaux board in terms of additional prize money, but it will undoubtedly aid Willy Sagnol’s men in performing healthily in Ligue 1. There are several impressive features about this Bordeaux squad, most notably goalkeeper Cedric Carrasso, who, on his day, is more impassable than any other top-flight player between the sticks. Combine his weekly heroics with a fantastically strong midfield which contains two unique talents in Gregory Sertic and the bustling Andre Biyogo Poko and Bordeaux have a promising base for an extremely successful 2014/2015 campaign. The addition of Wahbi Khazri to pair Nicolas Maurice Belay in that attacking midfield trio should prove to be as good Ligue 1 business as any this summer.

### Weaknesses:

Despite the aforementioned positives, Bordeaux simply lack the firepower to score goals. Cheick Diabate’s prolonged injury status keeps fans guessing from game to game whether they’ll see the powerful and dominant Malian forward or the disinterested and clumsy one. He is a frustrating attacker who seriously lacks composure and is not yet able to carve out his own opportunities for himself. His unreliability forced Gillot to bring in Guillaume Hoarau last season, who sadly did little more than his colleague upfront and performed instead as if he was still gracing the Chinese league with his presence. The situation must infuriate Bordeaux because their attacking midfield line is filled with intelligent and hardworking individuals. Les Girondins’ other area of concern is at the heart of the defence. Somehow, Lamine Sane is being tipped to become the club’s next captain, when the error-prone defensive midfielder-come-centre back has been trying to coin a move to the Premier League for over two years now. Should this decision be confirmed, it bluntly cannot spell positive premonitions for Willy Sagnol’s tenure at Bordeaux.

### Key Player: [Gregory Sertic](#)

This Frenchman has talent. Sertic is not renowned for scoring week-in, week-out but when he does find the back of the net, he provides precious moments for Bordeaux fans to savour for weeks after. Strikes last September and November against Lorient and OGC Nice respectively were nothing short of mouth-watering, the latter goal being especially impressive, with astonishing drive and accuracy behind the ball to score one of the very first goals for an opposition team in OGC Nice’s brand new Allianz Riviera stadium. Sertic’s omnipresence in the Bordeaux side over the course of the last season was nothing short of inspiring, as Mr Consistent made certain that Les Girondins were never completely overrun by opposition in league matches. He keeps a cool head among some colleagues with rather fiery personalities. Bordeaux’s midfield metronome will go from strength to strength this season.

### Verdict:

There is a universal sense of intrigue surrounding the Stade Chaban-Delmas as to what exactly it is that Willy Sagnol will do differently to take Bordeaux to the subsequent level, from a top ten side to a team that is challenging for the right to play continental football next season. Unfortunately, it is likely to take much longer than one season for the former France U21 coach to make his mark. **9<sup>th</sup>**

## LOSC Lille: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Vincent Enyeama	GK	Nigerian	31	2012/2013	Hapoel Tel Aviv
Steve Elana	GK	French	34	2012/2013	Stade Brestois 29
Pape Souare	LB	Senegalese	24	2012/2013	-
Simon Kjaer	CB	Danish	25	2013/2014	Wolfsburg
David Rozehnal	CB	Czech	34	2011/2012	Hamburg
Marko Basa	CB	Montenegrin	31	2011/2012	Lokomotiv Moscow
Djibril Sidibe	RB	French	22	2012/2013	ESTAC Troyes
Sebastien Corchia	RB	French	23	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Franck Beria	RB	French	31	2007/2008	FC Metz
Jonathan Delaplace	DM	French	28	2013/2014	Zulte Waregem
Souahilo Meite	DM	French	20	2012/2013	Auxerre
Rio Mavuba	DM	French	30	2008/2009	Villarreal
Florent Balmont	CM	French	34	2008/2009	OGC Nice
Idrissa Gueye	CM	Senegalese	24	2010/2011	-
Emmanuel Debordeaux	CM	French	21	2014/2015	-
Corentin Halucha	CM	French	19	2014/2015	-
Marvin Martin	AM	French	26	2012/2013	FC Sochaux
Marcos Lopes*	AM/LW	Portuguese	18	2014/2015	Manchester City
Ryan Mendes	RW/ST	Cape Verdean	24	2012/2013	Havre AC
Ronny Rodelin	RW/ST	French	24	2011/2012	FC Nantes
Salomon Kalou	ST	Ivorian	28	2012/2013	Chelsea FC
Nolan Roux	ST	French	26	2011/2012	Stade Brestois 29
Divock Origi**	ST	French	19	2013/2014	-
Rene Girard	Manager	French	60	2013/2014	Montpellier HSC
Michel Seydoux	President	French	66	2001/2002	-

\*Marcos Lopes is on a season long loan from Manchester City

\*\*Divock Origi is on a season long loan from Liverpool FC

## LOSC Lille: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	3rd	71	Salomon Kalou (16)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	6th	62	Salomon Kalou (14)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	3rd	74	Eden Hazard (20)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	1st	76	Moussa Sow (25)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	4th	64	Pierre Alain Frau (13)*

\*Yohan Cabaye and Gervinho also scored 13 goals in 2009/2010

## LOSC Lille: Likely XI



## LOSC Lille: Squad Analysis

Although the style of football may have changed under Rene Girard, there must be very few Lille fans that could have been disappointed with the former Montpellier boss's first season in charge of Les Dogues. There were a myriad of positives to draw from Lille's third place Ligue 1 finish, where Vincent Enyeama, Marko Basa and Simon Kjaer all shone superbly. What is more, the sheer abundance of relatively young talent in the squad means that while Lille will remain a selling club for years to come unless their financial situation drastically changes, the impending campaign has the potential to be just as successful for the northern club.

### Strengths:

The efficacy of Lille's defence last season was unquestionably the primary reason for their consistent league success. The Kjaer-Basa partnership was the key to an incredible twenty-one league clean sheets, but perhaps more impressive were Enyeama's heroics between the goalposts. The Nigerian international very nearly broke the league record for most minutes without conceding, but Bordeaux destroyed that ambition in one of the final league games of the 2013 calendar year. The midfield three of Florent Blamont, Idrissa Gueye and Rio Mavuba has just about everything one could wish for: experience, energy, intricate passing ability and all three men are born fighters. If Rene Girard can give this midfield trio a chance, injuries permitting, with a string of games early on this season then it has the potential to be one of the best in the French top flight. A long-term injury to Rio Mavuba last term meant that this was barely feasible for the 2013/2014 campaign. The signing of Sebastien Corchia, who is undoubtedly the best young French right-back, will provide Les Dogues with an exceptionally measured defender who can provide another dimension to the attack when bombing down that right hand flank. Pape Souare also did fantastically well to fill the large shoes left after Lucas Digne's departure and remains one of the brightest left-back prospects in the league.

### Weaknesses:

Salomon Kalou. The man may have scored 14 league goals last season, but anybody who cares to watch will see that the Ivorian's halfhearted, uninspiring performances go no where near to justifying the disproportionately large wage packet he earns compared to his colleagues. The lack of attacking midfield and forward options last season meant that goal scoring was by far Lille's biggest problem. The return of Ryan Mendes and the fantastically canny loan signing of Marcos Lopes should however go some way to quelling those concerns. The other issue is squad depth for Lille, especially in the central defensive position. A long-term injury to either Basa or Kjaer could potentially throw Les Dogues' campaign into disaster zone, with only the lethargic David Rozenthal in the squad as a replacement.

### Key Player: **Vincent Enyeama**

How Vincent Enyeama was not named UNFP goalkeeper of the year in the annual French football awards ceremony we will never know. The Nigerian's stunning consistency due to his formidable reflexes and thus shot-stopping ability made him an extremely difficult wall for Ligue 1 opposition to circumvent last season. The statistics back our claims up: Enyeama conceded just 26 goals in 38 league games during 2013/2014. Lille were perhaps fortunate that so many goalkeepers performed exceptionally during the World Cup, otherwise the amount of suitors knocking down the door for Enyeama's services this summer would have been far greater. The player is likely to only stay for another season and Les Dogues must take full advantage of that fact in the Champions League. It is difficult to accept anything other than calling Vincent Enyeama the best goalkeeper who is currently gracing Ligue 1 with his presence.

### Verdict:

Overall, Lille's squad is stronger, but will probably struggle to overcome the more established continental sides that they will likely come up against in the Champions League group stages, should they even make it that far. An early exit from European action and full focus on maintaining third position behind Ligue 1's biggest spenders would be ideal. **3<sup>rd</sup>**

## Montpellier HSC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Laurent Pionnier	GK	French	32	2007/2008	-
Geoffrey Jourden	GK	French	28	2006/2007	-
Jonathan Ligali	GK	French	23	2010/2011	-
Siaka Tiene	LB	Ivorian	32	2013/2014	PSG
Hilton	CB	Brazilian	36	2011/2012	Marseille
Nicolas Saint-Ruf	CB	French	21	2013/2014	RC Lens
Abdelhamid El Kaoutari	CB	Moroccan	24	2008/2009	-
Daniel Congre	CB	French	29	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Dylan Gissi	CB/RB	Swiss	23	2014/2015	Olimpo
Yassine Jebbour	RB	Moroccan	22	2013/2014	Stade Rennais
Mathieu Deplagne	RB	French	22	2011/2012	-
Joris Marveaux	DM	French	31	2008/2009	Clermont Foot
Bryan Dabo	DM	French	22	2012/2013	-
Benjamin Stambouli	CM	French	23	2010/2011	-
Paul Lasne	CM	French	25	2014/2015	AC Ajaccio
Jamel Saihi	CM	Tunisian	27	2006/2007	-
Jeffrey Assoumin	CM/CB	French	21	2013/2014	-
Jonas Martin	CM	French	24	2011/2012	-
Jean Deza	AM	Peruvian	21	2014/2015	CDU San Martin
Morgan Sanson	AM	French	19	2013/2014	Le Mans
Anthony Mounier	LW	French	26	2012/2013	OGC Nice
Karim Ait Fana	LW	Moroccan	25	2006/2007	-
Souleymane Camara	RW	Senegalese	31	2008/2009	OGC Nice
Djamel Bakar	RW	French	25	2013/2014	AS Nancy Lorraine
Kevin Berigaud	ST/AM	French	26	2014/2015	Evian TG FC
Victor Montano	ST	Colombian	30	2013/2014	Stade Rennais
Quentin Cornette	ST	French	20	2013/2014	-
Rolland Courbis	Manager	French	60	2013/2014	USM Alger
Louis Nicollin	President	French	71	1977/1978	-

## Montpellier HSC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	15th	42	Remy Cabella (14)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	9th	52	Younes Belhanda (10)*
2011/2012	Ligue 1	1st	82	Olivier Giroud (21)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	14th	47	Olivier Giroud (12)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	2nd	66	Victor Montano (11)

\*Souleymane Camara also scored 10 goals in 2012/2013

## Montpellier HSC: Likely XI



## Montpellier HSC: Squad Analysis

2013/14 was back to reality for Montpellier after President Louis Nicollin's failed experiment with Jean Fernandez was only just rectified by Rolland Courbis with MHSC finishing 15<sup>th</sup>: their lowest position for over five seasons. The departure of the club's breathtaking golden boy Remy Cabella to le Toon leaves Montpellier without the attacking midfield maestro who at times carried them through fixtures last term. The prospects remain bleak for the club, with Nicollin recently admitting that he would be happy if the club finished just one place higher than last time around.

### Strengths:

After an increased focus in developing a proper youth setup in recent years, the project seems to have paid off. The likes of Benjamin Stambouli and Remy Cabella have had the luxury of receiving a lot of exposure to Ligue 1 football at such an early age. While one may have departed and the other with one foot currently, firmly out of the door, the future is still bright. Morgan Sanson and Jean Deza are two starlets who certainly have the skill-set to make a difference for MHSC and making up for the goals that Remy Cabella provided last term. We can only expect more from these promising youngsters this time out as they already played a significant role in the Montpellier squad last season.

### Weaknesses:

The defence is frankly shambolic and ill disciplined. Daniel Congre and Hilton's historically calamitous defensive partnership often sees one or the other sent off after a lapse in concentration. Their immobility and heavy touch at this stage of their respective careers really must be questioned. The addition of relative unknown Dylan Gissi may provide some renewed hope in that department however. Upfront, they lack a striker and it remains unseen as to where exactly new signing Kevin Berigaud will be positioned in the attacking lineup. Mbaye Niang's goals and inventiveness will be sorely missed, regardless of his off the pitch antics.

### Key Man: [Morgan Sanson](#)

It might be seen as far too early to be calling upon the former Le Mans teenager to make the step up and fill the shoes of Remy Cabella, but Morgan Sanson has all the qualities to do exactly that. A player who is certainly partial to the odd mazy run down either flank, Sanson's pass selection steadily improved over the course of his first season in France's top flight. When given the opportunity, he also has a fantastic shot on him. Montpellier should be applauded for their excellent planning for the departure of Cabella, because they have a man ripe and ready to directly replace him and at such a tender age too.

### Verdict:

Make no mistake; this season is likely going to get ugly for Montpellier. While Rolland Courbis is a feisty manager who very much mirrors the characteristics of his President Louis Nicollin, he heads into the 2014/2015 campaign with a lack of firepower, some youngsters with potential but no real proven ability on the Ligue 1 stage and a characteristically disorganised defence that is renowned for picking up red card after red card. Like several of the other more established sides, their Ligue 1 experience should carry them through another insignificant campaign. **14th**

## OGC Nice: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Yoan Cardinale	GK	French	20	2014/2015	-
Joris Delle	GK	French	24	2012/2013	FC Metz
Mouez Hassen	GK	French	19	2012/2013	-
Timothee Kolodziejczak	LB	French	22	2012/2013	Olympique Lyonnais
Jordan Amavi	LB	French	20	2013/2014	-
Kevin Gomis	CB	French	25	2011/2012	Naval
Mathieu Bodmer	CB/CM	French	31	2013/2014	PSG
Gregoire Puel	RB	French	22	2012/2013	-
Lloyd Palun	RB	Gabonese	25	2011/2012	Trinite SFC
Moussa M'Bow	RB/CB	Senegalese	22	2012/2013	-
Romain Genevois	RB/CB	Haitian	26	2012/2013	Tours FC
Stephan Raheriharimanana	DM	Madagascan	20	2013/2014	-
Didier Digard	DM	French	28	2011/2012	Middlesborough
Nampalys Mendy	DM	French	22	2013/2014	AS Monaco FC
Fabien Dao Castellana	DM	French	21	2012/2013	-
Julien Vercauteren	CM	Belgian	21	2014/2015	Lierse SK
Niklas Hult	CM	Swedish	24	2014/2015	IF Elfsborg
Mahamane Traore	CM	Malian	25	2011/2012	FC Metz
Valentin Eysseric	AM	French	22	2012/2013	AS Monaco
Eric Bautheac	LW	French	26	2012/2013	Dijon FCO
Jeremy Pied	RW	French	25	2012/2013	Olympique Lyonnais
Alexy Bosetti	ST	French	21	2012/2013	-
Xavier Pentecote	ST	French	27	2011/2012	Toulouse FC
Dario Cvitanich	ST	Argentinian	30	2012/2013	Ajax
Neal Maupay	ST	French	17	2012/2013	-
Claude Puel	Manager	French	52	2012/2013	Olympique Lyonnais
Jean Pierre Rivere	President	French	57	2011/2012	-

## OGC Nice: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	17 <sup>th</sup>	42	Dario Cvitanich (8)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	4 <sup>th</sup>	64	Dario Cvitanich (19)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	13 <sup>th</sup>	42	Fabian Monzon (8)*
2010/2011	Ligue 1	17 <sup>th</sup>	46	Eric Mouloungui (8)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	15 <sup>th</sup>	44	Loic Remy (14)

\*Anthony Mounier also scored 8 goals in 2011/2012

## OGC Nice: Likely XI





## OGC Nice: Squad Analysis

After an incredible 2012/2013, it was always going to be difficult for Les Aiglons to top their fourth placed finish in last season's campaign. Claude Puel's front man Dario Cvitanich's awful downturn in form was certainly a factor in the club's sudden demise, but the departure of Renato Civelli last summer hit Nice far harder and left a hole in their defence. An attack unable to score goals and a leaky defence combined made for tough viewing for the OGCN faithful last term, and the 2014/15 campaign promises little improvement.

### Strengths:

The positionally widespread youth talent that Les Aiglons have at their disposal is OGC Nice's only saving grace, especially in attack, although they were unable to really put their potential into practice last season. 17-year-old Neal Maupay has extraordinarily exciting talent and was unfortunate to miss the majority of last season through injury. Valentin Eysseric and Alexy Bosetti should also emerge from the shadows in the next twelve months when Nice's nerve will be put to the test in staving off the threat of relegation. Left back Jordan Amavi is also a fantastically polished player considering he has just turned twenty and will more than replace Timothee Kolodziejczak should he eventually depart as expected this summer.

### Weaknesses:

The squad is still fairly inexperienced, but that is not the main problem. OGC Nice have failed to find a replacement for Renato Civelli at centre back and now have very limited options in that position. The conversion of former central midfielder Mathieu Bodmer has only worked to some extent and both Romain Genevois and Kevin Gomis remain error prone. The impending arrival of Souleymane Diawara will add some necessary stability, but the man lacks pace. They also lack a recognised leader, with the departures of two of the most experienced squad members in David Ospina (Arsenal) and Nemanja Pejcinovic (Lokomotiv Moscow). Claude Puel also continues to insist on picking his son Gregoire to play at right back when it has been obvious for months that the lethargic and twitchy Frenchman is not yet cut out for Ligue 1 level. He was booed heavily in Nice's recent pre-season friendly vs Barcelona. Claude Puel's decision to deploy a formation which involves a loan striker must also be questioned, with neither Dario Cvitanich nor Neal Maupay being adequately physical or aerially dominant enough in order to make such a decision effective, at least in terms of carving out eventual goal scoring opportunities. To make matters worse, at the time of writing, OGC Nice are dealing with what can only be described as a goalkeeping crisis. Joris Delle has suffered a serious injury and the untested 19-year-old Mouez Hassen is currently the only squad member available in the aforementioned position.

### Key Man: **Dario Cvitanich**

The Argentinian has shown two sides in his first two seasons on the French Riviera. The passionate, goal thirsty striker with the desire to single-handedly change matches was the revelation of 2012/2013 and largely responsible for Nice's historic 4<sup>th</sup> placed finish. In 2013/2014, we saw a vastly different Dario Cvitanich, one who cut a forlorn and dejected figure; one who refused to make the necessary runs and one who continuously lamented about returning to Argentina on social networking platform Twitter. Nice face the very real threat of relegation this season and as one of the most senior players in the squad, Cvitanich is directly responsible for making the difference once again upfront. Early indications in pre-season have not been positive.

### Verdict:

The project at OGC Nice remains quietly ambitious, even if that is not immediately clear whilst looking at the current squad. Vast sums of money have been spent on their lavish new stadium the Allianz Riviera and now a new youth development complex. It is up to Cvitanich and co. to keep the fans smiling during this otherwise difficult period. **15<sup>th</sup>**



## Olympique de Marseille: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Julien Fabri	GK	French	20	2014/2015	-
Brice Samba	GK	French	20	2012/2013	Havre AC
Steve Mandanda	GK	French	29	2008/2009	Havre AC
Benjamin Mendy	LB	French	20	2013/2014	Havre AC
Jeremy Morel	LB	French	30	2011/2012	FC Lorient
Nicolas N'Koulou	CB	Cameroonian	24	2011/2012	AS Monaco FC
Lucas Mendes	CB	Brazilian	24	2012/2013	Coritiba Foot Club
Baptiste Aloi	CB	French	20	2012/2013	-
Brice Dja Djédjé	RB	Ivorian	23	2013/2014	Evian TG FC
Rod Fanni	RB	French	32	2010/2011	Stade Rennais
Laurent Abergel	RB/CB	French	21	2013/2014	-
Mario Lemina	DM	French	20	2013/2014	FC Lorient
Alaixys Romao	DM	Togolese	30	2012/2013	FC Lorient
Giannelli Imbula	DM	French	21	2013/2014	EA Guingamp
Benoit Cheyrou	CM	French	33	2007/2008	Auxerre
Florian Thauvin	AM/RW	French	21	2013/2014	LOSC Lille
Foued Kadir	AM	Algerian	30	2012/2013	Valenciennes
Maxime Loez	AM	French	16	2014/2015	-
Dimitri Payet	LW	French	27	2013/2014	LOSC Lille
Romain Alessandrini	LW	French	25	2014/2015	Stade Rennais
Alexander N'Doumbou	LW	Gabonese	22	2012/2013	-
Andre Ayew	LW	Ghanaian	24	2009/2010	-
Morgan Amalfitano	RW	French	29	2011/2012	FC Lorient
Modou Sougou	RW	Senegalese	29	2012/2013	CFR Cluj
Michy Batshuayi	ST	Belgian	20	2014/2015	Standard Liege
Andre Pierre Gignac	ST	French	27	2010/2011	Toulouse FC
Marcelo Bielsa	Manager	Argentinian	59	2014/2015	Atletico Bilbao
Vincent Labrune	President	French	43	2011/2012	-

## Olympique de Marseille: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	6 <sup>th</sup>	60	Andre Pierre Gignac (16)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	2 <sup>nd</sup>	71	Andre Pierre Gignac (13)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	10 <sup>th</sup>	48	Loic Remy (12)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	2 <sup>nd</sup>	68	Loic Remy (15)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	1 <sup>st</sup>	78	Mamadou Niang (18)

## Olympique de Marseille: Likely XI



## Olympique de Marseille: Squad Analysis

Marcelo Bielsa will take charge of the self-proclaimed most popular football club in France this season, after a dire previous campaign culminated in the sacking of the uncharismatic and answerless Elie Baup as OM continued to slip down the Ligue 1 table. There is a real sense of anticipation surrounding his appointment, with the hope that his unique brand of South American football blended with an extremely hard-working training ethic can go some way to challenging the likes of PSG at the top of the table once more. The high profile departure of soon-to-be club legend Mathieu Valbuena also marks the end of an era for Marseille.

### Strengths:

Marseille's attacking lineup has the potential to become nothing short of inspiring, at least when it comes to homegrown talent. Florian Thauvin and Romain Alessandrini are two of the most exciting French wingers who, when properly motivated, have the ability to ravish Ligue 1 defences, creating opportunity after opportunity over the course of 90 minutes. If Dimitri Payet can be correctly guided after an insignificant debut season with OM, then he can complete what could shape up to become a stunning attacking trio behind likely lone striker Andre Pierre Gignac, who, despite his mobility issues, can strike the ball extremely well. Bielsa also has a very exigent deeper-lying midfield trio to utilise should he wish, with youngsters such as Mario Lemina and Giannelli Imbula arguably now ready for regular Ligue 1 game time.

### Weaknesses:

For Marcelo Bielsa's gutsy 5-1-3-1 formation to be truly effective, he simply needs more central defenders. While he has shown in pre-season that the conversion of Alaixys Romao from defensive midfield to this position has been successful, the conversion of others including Jeremy Morel (left-back) remain failed experiments. Many people are divided over the immediate impact that Marcelo Bielsa can have, after such an abysmal last season where Marseille failed to qualify for continental football for the first time in ten years. Bielsa's big personality and brutal training sessions often divide opinions among the squads that he manages. After a couple of poor results, one questions the Argentinian's ability to motivate the team, especially as he is currently unable to speak practically any French.

### Key Player: [Florian Thauvin](#)

The controversial attacking midfielder remains one of the hottest properties on the European market and one of the most dangerous offensive players in Ligue 1. After forcing through a move to Marseille last season without having even played a competitive match for his then "new" side Lille, Thauvin needed to prove that he had been worth all the fuss that President Vincent Labrune had made in terms of completing the transfer. Eight league goals and three assists in one's debut season is nothing to sniff at, but his rapidity, dynamism and excellent shot have generated a player who would be able to handle any league in the world with ease. At the age of just 21, Thauvin must look to stay out of the media as much as possible and focus on his football. If he does that, there is a real prospect of him being included in the France squad for Euro 2016.

### Verdict:

Make no mistake, the introduction of Marcelo Bielsa will, overall, have a positive impact on the results that Olympique de Marseille produce in the coming seasons, and his top-to-toe revolution from the youth academy upwards will create a lasting legacy which OM will reap the rewards from for years to come. The signing of Michy Batshuayi is also a coup considering the high interest from across Europe. Bielsa's tactical outlook should however worry Marseille fans, as there is a very great tendency for sides to overrun OM in the centre of the park. Defensively speaking, OM were calamitous at times last season and those problems will not immediately dissipate, even if Souleymane Diawara may have finally departed. **6th**

## Olympique Lyonnais: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Anthony Lopes	GK	Portuguese	23	2011/2012	-
Mathieu Gorgelin	GK	French	23	2011/2012	-
Lucas Mocio	GK	French	20	2014/2015	-
Jeremy Frick	GK	Swiss	21	2013/2014	-
Henri Bedimo	LB	Cameroonian	30	2013/2014	Montpellier HSC
Mouhamadou Dabo	LB	French	27	2011/2012	Sevilla
Louis Nganioni	CB	French	19	2013/2014	-
Bakary Kone	CB	Burkinabe	26	2011/2012	EA Guingamp
Milan Bisevac	CB	Serbian	30	2012/2013	PSG
Lindsay Rose	CB	French	22	2014/2015	Valenciennes
Samuel Umtiti	CB	French	20	2011/2012	-
Mehdi Zeffrane	RB	French	21	2012/2013	-
Corentin Tolisso	RB/RM	French	20	2013/2014	-
Christophe Jallet	RB	French	30	2014/2015	PSG
Gueida Fofana	DM	French	23	2011/2012	Havre AC
Jordan Ferri	DM	French	22	2012/2013	-
Maxime Gonalons	CM	French	25	2009/2010	-
Nabil Fekir	CM	French	21	2011/2012	-
Sidy Kone	CM	French	22	2012/2013	-
Steed Malbranque	CM	French	34	2012/2013	-
Arnold Mvuemba	CM	French	29	2012/2013	FC Lorient
Clement Grenier	AM	French	23	2008/2009	-
Yoann Gourcuff	AM	French	29	2010/2011	Bordeaux
Fares Bahlouli	AM	French	19	2013/2014	-
Nabil Fekir	AM	Algerian	20	2013/2014	-
Rachid Ghezzal	LW	Algerian	22	2012/2013	-
Gael Danic	LW	French	32	2013/2014	Valenciennes
Alassane Plea	RW	French	21	2012/2013	-
Alexandre Lacazette	RW	French	23	2009/2010	-
Clinton N'Jie	RW	French	20	2013/2014	-
Yassine Benzia	ST	French	19	2012/2013	-
Mohamed Yattara	ST	French	21	2012/2013	-
Hubert Fournier	Manager	French	46	2014/2015	Stade de Reims
Jean Michel Aulas	President	French	65	1987/1988	-

## Olympique Lyonnais: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	5th	61	Alexandre Lacazette (15)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	3rd	67	Bafetimbi Gomis (16)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	4th	64	Lisandro Lopez (16)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	3rd	64	Lisandro Lopez (17)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	2nd	72	Lisandro Lopez (15)

## Olympique Lyonnais: Likely XI



## Olympique Lyonnais: Squad Analysis

Jean Michel Aulas's obsession with developing the best youth setup in France is finally paying off. The money-hungry President is always looking for ways to make Lyon profitable after several seasons without silverware. Without a doubt, Lyon have some of the most exciting French youngsters at their disposal. After initially struggling to get there, Lyon secured the chance to qualify for this season's Europa League campaign, finishing runners up in the Coupe de la Ligue to the mighty PSG. The squad remains fairly thin in terms of numbers, and the departures of Bafetimbi Gomis and Jimmy Briand plan to be countered by the introduction of youngsters rather than actually signing proven talent from elsewhere. Former manager Remi Garde called it quits at the end of last season, but Jean Michel Aulas has astutely replaced him with an extremely like-minded individual in the form of Hubert Fournier, who will undoubtedly look to develop the ethos that his predecessor had already been forming for several seasons.

### Strengths:

As mentioned, the quality of the young players coming through the Lyon system is more exciting than ever before. In Samuel Umtiti and Lindsay Rose (who was cannily signed from Valenciennes this summer), who have played equally large roles in France's youth international sides in recent years, Lyon have two centre backs who can become international stars. The retention of Alexandre Lacazette (ST) and Maxime Gonalons (DM) is a fantastic vote of confidence in the Lyon project and in new boss Hubert Fournier, and the pair will continue to add quality in two crucial roles for Lyon as the guardian of the defence and the goalscorer. While neither Clement Grenier nor Yoann Gourcuff are particularly dependable (for various reasons), they have the ability to, on their day, change games in Lyon's favour. Young goalkeeper Anthony Lopes, who was wisely given the number one spot by the now departed Remi Garde, is a seriously underrated player between the sticks and was unlucky to miss out on Portugal's World Cup squad this summer.

### Weaknesses:

Probably the most obvious weakness to this Lyon outfit is the lack of available strikers in the squad. With the departure of Bafetimbi Gomis, Hubert Fournier is placing his trust in the unproven Mohamed Yattara to lead the line, whilst deciding it would be best to deploy the pace and brilliance of Alexandre Lacazette in a supporting role. Yattara may have had an excellent pre-season, but few Ligue 1 clubs would be brave enough to leave a man of his age and lack of professional appearances in charge of scoring the majority of the necessary goals this campaign. The centre back pairing of Milan Bisevac and Bakary Kone is often chaotic. The pair repeatedly get in each others way when it comes to defensive duties and neither are all that apt in ridding the ball from the opponents feet. However, both are extremely competent in accurately passing the ball to a teammate when under pressure or otherwise. The long-term injury to Gueida Fofana leaves Lyon a little thin in the central midfield area and any other injuries could cause serious selection headaches for Fournier- the team is inexperienced enough as it is.

### Key Player: [Alexandre Lacazette](#)

The pacey striker-come-winger Alexandre Lacazette is set to imminently pledge his future to the club by signing a contract extension, and it is certainly just as well for Lyon. For several seasons now, Lacazette has been one of Ligue 1's most frustrating talents, showing glimmers of brilliance but never really bringing all the necessary ingredients to the pitch at any one time. 2013/2014 was however a different matter entirely for the Frenchman, who proved with his 15 league goals that he can be relied upon as a man to make a supreme difference. His pace and trickery is now almost equally matched by intelligent decision-making and fantastic shooting ability. Some worry about the potential for Alexandre Lacazette to be only a one-season wonder, and he has the chance to prove his critics wrong in the forthcoming campaign. In truth, he is not yet ready to leave the Ligue 1 side, and must repay OL for the consistent faith that they have shown him.

### Verdict:

It is very easy to assume that Lyon are worse off after the departure of Bafetimbi Gomis, but in fact the squad is collectively more experienced and thus robust, despite the alteration of manager. Lyon's reputation may have taken a hit in recent times, but their performances on the pitch should do the talking.

**5<sup>th</sup>**

## PSG: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Nicolas Douchez	GK	French	34	2011/2012	Stade Rennais
Mike Maignan	GK	French	19	2013/2014	-
Salvatore Sirigu	GK	Italian	27	2011/2012	Palermo
Mory Diaw	GK	French	21	2013/2014	-
Maxwell	LB	Brazilian	32	2011/2012	FC Barcelona
Lucas Digne	LB	French	21	2013/2014	LOSC Lille
Thiago Silva	CB	Brazilian	29	2012/2013	AC Milan
David Luiz	CB	Brazilian	27	2014/2015	Chelsea FC
Marquinhos	CB	Brazilian	20	2013/2014	AS Roma
Zoumana Camara	CB	French	35	2007/2008	AS Saint Etienne
Gregory van der Wiel	RB	Dutch	26	2012/2013	Ajax
Serge Aurier*	RB	Ivorian	21	2014/2015	Toulouse FC
Thiago Motta	DM	Italian	31	2011/2012	Inter Milan
Blaise Matuidi	DM	French	27	2011/2012	AS Saint Etienne
Clement Chantome	CM	French	26	2006/2007	-
Yohan Cabaye	CM	French	28	2013/2014	Newcastle United
Marco Verratti	CM	Italian	21	2012/2013	Pescara
Adrien Rabiot	CM	French	19	2012/2013	-
Javier Pastore	AM/LW	Argentinian	25	2011/2012	Palermo
Lucas	RW	Brazilian	21	2012/2013	Sao Paulo
Jean Christophe-Bahebeck	RW	French	21	2011/2012	-
Ezequiel Lavezzi	ST	Argentinian	29	2012/2013	Napoli
Edinson Cavani	ST	Uruguayan	27	2013/2014	Napoli
Zlatan Ibrahimovic	ST	Swedish	32	2012/2013	AC Milan
Hervin Ongenda	ST	French	19	2013/2014	-
Laurent Blanc	Manager	French	48	2013/2014	France
Nasser Al Khelaifi	President	Qatari	40	2010/2011	-

\*Serge Aurier is on a season long loan from Toulouse FC

## PSG: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	1st	89	Zlatan Ibrahimovic (26)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	1st	83	Zlatan Ibrahimovic (30)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	2nd	79	Nene (21)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	4th	60	Nene (14)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	13th	47	Melvut Erding (15)

## PSG: Likely XI



## PSG: Squad Analysis

CHAMPION MON FRERE ENCORE! Were the words of Lucas Moura after PSG officially secured the Ligue 1 title against Rennes (a match that they ironically lost, but results elsewhere made it mathematically impossible for Monaco to maintain their feeble challenge), and in doing so les Parisiens were crowned champions for the second time in a row. The heavy investment from the Qatari group QSI spearheaded by Nasser Al Khelaifi has completely transformed PSG into a team who fully expect to challenge all the way for the Champions League title this campaign. The appointment of Laurent Blanc initially disappointed the PSG faithful, but his ability to instill a new attacking freedom into his side ensured that the club was winning matches attractively, which had not necessarily been the case under Carlo Ancelotti.

### Strengths:

On paper, PSG have a mouth-watering squad. Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Edinson Cavani have a second chance this season to form possibly one of the greatest striking partnerships football has ever seen. The latter player has been enduring a period of discontent, but les Parisiens are hoping that he can put his personal problems behind him to make the impact that his price tag demands. Behind that pair stands the exigent midfielder of the moment Blaise Matuidi who has been praised by pundits across the globe for his consummate work rate, defensive intelligence and eye for a pass. Alongside him plays the young Italian who, disciplinary issues aside, is generally accepted to be 'the next Andrea Pirlo' in Marco Verratti. Although he has a bad temperament at times, his raw talent in picking out the inch-perfect pass consistently paralleled with the delightful creativity he possesses which inspires his teammates makes him one of the most hotly tipped youngsters in the game. If this was not enough, PSG also have the man that is widely considered to be the best centre back in the world in their team, Thiago Silva: a man whose talents need no explaining.

### Weaknesses:

There are several players, Edinson Cavani included, that have yet to live up to expectations in the French capital. Lucas Moura, the bustling winger, has struggled since arriving 18 months ago to be accepted by the other members of the attack force in the squad as a reliable supplier, despite the fact that the Brazilian achieved ten league assists last term. Defensively, PSG can be caught out at the back against high calibre opposition, which will likely be heightened should Lucas Digne replace Maxwell in the left-back position, because of the Frenchman's tendency to consistently bomb forward. The decision to award Thiago Silva with the captaincy remains questionable, with many claiming that the Brazilian fails to motivate the squad adequately for the smaller and seemingly less significant Ligue 1 encounters. The signing of the erratic David Luiz for such an inflated transfer fee has caused serious concern with him being set to directly replace the departed Alex at the heart of that defence.

### Key Player: [Zlatan Ibrahimovic](#)

There is just something about him. At 32, many would have forgiven the man famously known as Zlatan for easing up as he strolls into the final seasons that he will imaginably muster; yet he just keeps getting better. Whether it was his knack for the spectacular last season, evidenced by the fantastic scorpion back-heeled goal against SC Bastia or his ability to overcome his own ego to play in a deeper role to accommodate Edinson Cavani, the big Swede just continued to impress. Questions remain over his ability to be decisive in crucial fixtures, but he was not given the chance to achieve his Champions League dream last time round after picking up an injury that kept him out of PSG's squad for their second leg against Chelsea. Make no mistake, he is appropriately motivated to right that wrong in 2014/15.

### Verdict:

There is simply no question that PSG will win the Ligue 1 title again this season, not necessarily because their own squad is in better shape but because other teams have taken significant hits. What happens in the Champions League for les Parisiens will be far more interesting. **1<sup>st</sup>**

## RC Lens: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Rudy Riou	GK	French	34	2012/2013	FC Nantes
Samuel Atrous	GK	French	24	2010/2011	-
Remy Bonne	GK	French	25	2012/2013	Uzes
Ludovic Baal	LB	French	28	2011/2012	Le Mans FC
Loick Landre	CB	French	22	2013/2014	PSG
Ahmed Kantari	CB	Moroccan	29	2013/2014	Stade Brestois
Alaeddine Yahia	CB	Tunisian	32	2008/2009	OGC Nice
Jean-Philippe Gbamin	RB	Ivorian	18	2013/2014	-
Alassane Toure	RB	French	25	2009/2010	Toulouse FC
Patrick Fradj	RB	French	22	2012/2013	-
Pierre Ducasse	DM	French	27	2011/2012	Girondins de Bordeaux
Pierrick Valdivia	CM	French	26	2012/2013	CS Sedan
Wylan Cyprien	CM	French	19	2013/2014	-
Jerome Lemoigne	CM	French	31	2012/2013	CS Sedan
Benjamin Bourigeaud	CM	French	20	2013/2014	-
Lalaina Nomenjanahary	LW	Madagascan	28	2011/2012	CS Avion
Alharbi El Jadeyaoui	LW	Moroccan	27	2013/2014	Angers SCO
Deme N'Diaye	LW	Senegalese	29	2012/2013	AC Arles-Avignon
Pablo Chavarria	RW	Argentinian	26	2013/2014	RSC Anderlecht
Yoann Touzghar	ST	French	27	2012/2013	Amiens
Adamo Coulibaly	ST	Ivorian	32	2013/2014	Debrecen VSC
Baptiste Guillaume	ST	Belgian	19	2013/2014	-
Antoine Kombouare	Manager	French	50	2013/2014	Al Hilal FC
Gervais Martel	President	French	59	2013/2014	-

## RC Lens: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 2	2nd	65	Yoann Touzghar (12)
2012/2013	Ligue 2	12th	45	Yoann Touzghar (11)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	12th	48	David Pollet (11)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	19th	35	Issam Jemaa (5)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	11th	48	Toifilou Maoulida (10)

\*Pierrick Valdivia also scored 11 goals in 2012/2013

## RC Lens: Likely XI





## RC Lens: Squad Analysis

It was a summer full of uncertainty for RC Lens as they continued to fight the French football financial watchdog DNCG regarding their Ligue 1 legitimacy, with serious questions being asked about the apparent holes in their financial accounts. At the time of writing, the uncertainty about their top-flight status is set to dissipate, but RCL now face a run against the clock to make the necessary signings to successfully battle for Ligue 1 survival (they had been, up until this point, banned from acquiring players).

### Strengths:

It is difficult to write a preview for a team that is likely to look rather different when the transfer window finally closes at the end of the month. One thing is for sure, in manager Antoine Kombouare Lens have an experienced coach who has shown his success at Ligue 1 level and who is not afraid to make big decisions to get what he wants (he decided to boycott pre-season until the club was finally admitted into France's top flight). In Pablo Chavarría and Alharbi El Jadeyaoui, they have some intelligent wingers, who, while they might not be blessed with exceptional pace, are technically gifted enough to supply a main striker with enough chances to keep the team up. Young central midfielder Wylan Cyprien has his first chance to properly showcase the immense potential that he harbours in what is expected to otherwise be a rather lethargic trio in the centre of the park.

### Weaknesses:

As it stands, the current squad is weak, make no mistake about that. Yoann Touzghar is most probably not up to the task of leading a Ligue 1 side and his style of play is unlikely to reap the necessary goals required to keep RCL from immediate relegation. They lost only two games at their home stadium the Bollaert-Dellis last season that boasts a fantastic atmosphere, but due to reconstruction works for Euro 2016, the Sang et Or club have been temporarily kicked out to a stadium in Amiens and the Stade de France, which would unsettle any squad. The club desperately needs to sign a goalkeeper after a move for Alphonse Areola fell through and Loïck Landre remains the only central defender who is capable of keeping up with the mix of physicality and pace that Ligue 1 desires from defensive players these days. In short, there is a general lack of quality, in whichever position one looks to analyse.

### Key Man: **Loïck Landre**

The former Paris Saint Germain central defender was given a chance to kick start his career under the wing of his previous mentor Antoine Kombouare. He has all the necessary attributes to become a prominent Ligue 1 central defender, but his lack of concentration can often cost RCL dearly. If he can become more masterful with his control of the ball, then this will match excellently with the pace and power that he already possesses. The man from Aubervilliers now needs to repay Lens for the faith that they have entrusted in him. He can make all the difference this campaign, especially given how tight Ligue 1 is expected to be in the bottom eight positions.

### Verdict:

Our prediction for RC Lens may come across as a little positive, but we maintain that, all being well, their squad will have improved considerably, both in terms of talent but also depth, by the end of the August month. With a competent manager and a passionate fan base, they should prove to be a fantastic re-addition to the Ligue 1 set up. **12th**



## SC Bastia: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Alphonse Areola*	GK	French	21	2014/2015	PSG
Jean Louis Leca	GK	French	28	2013/2014	Valenciennes FC
Thomas Vincensini	GK	French	20	2013/2014	-
Julian Palmieri	LB	French	26	2012/2013	Istres
Mathieu Peybernes	CB	French	23	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Francois Modesto	CB	French	35	2013/2014	Olympiakos
Sebastien Squillaci	CB	French	33	2013/2014	Arsenal FC
Drissa Diakite	RB	Malian	29	2013/2014	Olympiakos
Gilles Cioni	RB	French	30	2010/2011	-
Apodi	RB	Brazilian	27	2014/2015	Queretaro
Guillaume Gillet**	RB	Belgian	30	2014/2015	RSC Anderlecht
Yannick Cahuzac	DM	French	29	2005/2006	-
Christophe Vincent	DM	French	21	2012/2013	-
Romaric	CM	Ivorian	31	2013/2014	Real Zaragoza
Ryad Boudebouz	AM	Algerian	24	2013/2014	FC Sochaux
Luka Kikabidze	LW	Georgian	19	2014/2015	Lokomotivi Tbilisi
Floyd Ayite	LW	French	25	2014/2015	Stade de Reims
Christopher Maboulou	RW	French	24	2014/2015	Chateauroux
Djibril Cisse	ST	French	32	2013/2014	Kuban Krasnodar
Junior Tallo***	ST	French	21	2014/2015	AS Roma
Famoussa Kone	ST	Guinean	20	2014/2015	-
Claude Makelele	Manager	French	41	2014/2015	-
Pierre-Marie Geronimi	President	French	-	2009/2010	-

\*Alphonse Areola is on a season long loan from PSG

\*\*Guillaume Gillet is on a season long loan from Anderlecht

\*\*\*Junior Tallo is on a season long loan from AS Roma

## SC Bastia: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	10th	49	Gianni Bruno (8)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	12th	47	Anthony Modeste (15)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	1st	71	Toifilou Maoulida (13)
2010/2011	National	1st	91	David Suarez (20)
2009/2010	Ligue 2	20th	39	Pierre Yves Andre (14)

## SC Bastia: Likely XI



## **SC Bastia: Squad Analysis:**

SC Bastia have quite encouragingly become the definition of a Ligue 1 midtable side in recent seasons since their promotion to the top flight back in 2012. Frederic Hantz was the man largely responsible for bringing the Corsican side such stability, and his departure could certainly hurt a rather depleted side as we head into the beginning of a new campaign. The man elected to replace him, Claude Makelele, was an interesting appointment to say the least, with his previous managerial experience standing at a big fat zero, leaving his coaching role at PSG to take the hot seat.

### Strengths:

SC Bastia have added flare and experience this transfer window and are expected to do considerable business before the window is out. Junior Tallo impressed for neighbouring Ajaccio last season and should be more effective at consistently producing moments of brilliance than the rather outdated Djibril Cisse. The impending arrivals of El Hadji Ba and Brandao will add steel and more importantly depth to a thin squad. The defensive partnership of Francois Modesto and Sebastien Squillaci was surprisingly impressive last term, especially considering their lack of pace. Claude Makelele is likely to be forced to play counter-attacking football again this season if he keeps that partnership in tact, but they are two of the most experienced defenders around. The signing of Alphonse Areola goes above and beyond replacing the legendary Mickael Landreau in goal.

### Weaknesses:

The departure of Wahbi Khazri to Bordeaux has yet to be accounted for and the attacking midfield line is especially weak at present. Ryad Boudebouz has yet to find consistency at his new club and will be handed a more pivotal role this season, one that he must take full advantage of. At this stage in his career, potential is no longer good enough. Julien Palmieri was very much overrated by former manager Frederic Hantz, and neither of the defensive positions down the flanks look secure enough for Bastia to be able to push on from their midtable finish.

### Key Man: [Sebastien Squillaci](#)

SC Bastia were almost taunted by their own fans when it was announced that Sebastien Squillaci would be joining the squad last summer, but the veteran defender proved last season that he can more than handle the rigours that Ligue 1 has to offer. Not only is he a beacon of calm at the heart of that back four, he provides neat attacking options from set plays. He has also really taken to the project at Bastia and is extremely vocal in egging his colleagues on during matches. He is the second captain that every manager would dream of having at their disposal and with very few years left of Squillaci's career remaining, there is no doubt that he will be up for a fight in 2014/2015.

### Verdict:

Fans may worry at the sheer amount of movement that has occurred in and around the SC Bastia squad this summer, especially with the arrival of a new manager. Their squad currently lacks depth and their attacking and central midfield options are very limited, but Makelele's appointment should turn out to be an inspired decision, so long as he is able to have the same effect in Corsica as he did at PSG during his time as a coach. No change for the remaining Corsican side in Ligue 1. **10th**

## SM Caen: Squad List:

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Remy Vercoutre	GK	French	34	2014/2015	Olympique Lyonnais
Damien Perquis	GK	French	28	2008/2009	AS Beauvais
Paul Reulet	GK	French	20	2012/2013	-
Emmanuel Imorou	LB	French	25	2014/2015	Clermont Foot
Alexandre Raineau	LB	French	28	2008/2009	FC Libourne
Felipe Saad	CB	Brazilian	30	2013/2014	AC Ajaccio
Jean-Jacques Pierre	CB	Haitian	33	2012/2013	Panionios
Damien da Silva	CB	French	26	2014/2015	Clermont Foot
Yrondou Musavu-King	CB	Gabonese	22	2014/2015	Uzes
Dennis Appiah	RB	French	22	2013/2014	AS Monaco FC
Jean Calve	RB	French	30	2012/2013	AS Nancy Lorraine
N'Golo Kante	DM	French	23	2013/2014	Boulogne
Jose Saez	DM	French	32	2013/2014	Valenciennes FC
Nicolas Seube	DM	French	34	2001/2002	Toulouse FC
Yannick M'Bone	DM	Senegalese	21	2013/2014	-
Jordan Adeoti	DM	Beninese	25	2014/2015	Stade Lavallois
Jonathan Beaulieu	CM	French	21	2013/2014	-
Julien Feret	AM	French	32	2014/2015	Stade Rennais
Thomas Lemar	AM	French	18	2013/2014	-
Lenny Nangis	LW	French	20	2011/2012	-
Herve Bazile	LW	Haitian	24	2014/2015	Poire-sur-Vie
Florian Raspentino	RW	French	25	2014/2015	Marseille
Bengali-Fode Koita	RW	French	26	2013/2014	Montpellier HSC
Sloan Privat*	ST	French	25	2014/2015	KAA Gent
Mathieu Duhamel	ST	French	30	2012/2013	FC Metz
Patrice Garande	Manager	French	53	2012/2013	AS Cherbourg
Jean-Francois Fortin	President	French	67	2002/2003	-

\*Sloan Privat is on a season long loan from KAA Gent

## SM Caen: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 2	3rd	64	Mathieu Duhamel (24)
2012/2013	Ligue 2	4th	63	Mathieu Duhamel (13)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	18th	38	Benjamin Nivet (7)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	15th	46	Romain Hamouma (9)
2009/2010	Ligue 2	1st	69	Youssef Al Arabi (11)

## SM Caen: Likely XI



## SM Caen: Squad Analysis

An industrious Mathieu Duhamel-led Caen sneaked elevation to Ligue 1 last season, finishing in the final promotion spot. The style of play that Patrice Garande has implemented in the previous two seasons relied upon his squad's superior technical ability over Ligue 2 opposition, something that will certainly not be the case in France's top flight. With the high-profile departures of both Molla Wague and Faycal Fajir this summer, Caen's squad is light in its current appearance and 2014/2015 promises to be testing for the north-based side.

### Strengths:

When one compares Caen with the other two newly promoted clubs, their midfield is vastly superior, with a blend of strength and competence in the form of N'Golo Kante and experience in the form of Jose Saez that should strengthen the defence but also provide a reliable platform for counter-attacks. Left-winger Lenny Nangis is an exciting young talent, while the additions of Florian Raspentino and Julien Feret give Caen necessary Ligue 1 experience but also individual quality to make goals out of ostensibly nothing. Then of course there is French football veteran Mathieu Duhamel who had a particularly incredible second half of the Ligue 2 season and who was largely responsible for Caen finishing top of the Ligue 2 goals scored table with 20 out of the 65 coming from the Frenchman. Despite being courted by a number of European outfits this summer, Duhamel pledged his future to the club in order to prove himself at France's highest level.

### Weaknesses:

The back four is worryingly inexperienced, and the signings of Damien da Silva and Emmanuel Imorou should hardly fill Caen fans with hope. Both players have been Ligue 2 regulars for quite some time, but are particularly inconsistent. The options for Caen should Mathieu Duhamel get injured are similarly bleak, with Sloan Privat, one of the most frustrating strikers to have ever graced the pitches of Ligue 1, joins on loan from Belgian outfit KAA Gent after underperforming in the Jupiler Pro League last term.

### Key Player: [Remy Vercoutre](#)

Lyon's former goalkeeper decided to join Caen this summer after losing his place to the emerging Anthony Lopes. The 34 year old has amassed over one hundred Ligue 1 appearances and will need to assume the role of a leader this season, with the current squad seriously lacking in relevant experience both in terms of career but also in terms of age.

### Verdict:

Somebody has to finish bottom, and SM Caen are perhaps the most likely to unfortunately achieve exactly that. On paper, they have an extremely promising squad, but the reality is that their extreme lack of collective Ligue 1 experience paralleled with the fact that they have a manager who is liable to struggle to alter his formation and tactical setup appropriately to deal with the simply more impressive Ligue 1 sides on show should spell disaster for the club. One hopes that SM Caen can prove the doubters wrong, especially if they try to heroically replicate their brand of positive football this season, but it is difficult to see that becoming a working reality. **20th**

## Stade de Reims: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Jeremy Malherbe	GK	French	23	2012/2013	Gap FC
Kossi Agassa	GK	Togolese	36	2009/2010	Hercules
Johnny Placide	GK	Haitian	26	2012/2013	Havre AC
Sacha Bastien	GK	French	20	2013/2014	CS Sedan
Franck Signorino	LB	French	32	2012/2013	Stade Lavallois
Atila Turan	LB	French	22	2013/2014	Sporting Lisbon
Mohamed Fofana	CB	Malian	29	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Mickael Tacalfred	CB	French	33	2008/2009	Dijon
Gregory Bourillon	CB	French	30	2014/2015	FC Lorient
Anthony Weber	CB	French	27	2010/2011	Paris FC
Antoine Conte	CB	French	20	2014/2015	PSG
Aissa Mandi	RB	Algerian	22	2011/2012	-
Omenuke Mfulu	RB	French	22	2014/2015	-
Christopher Glombard	RB	French	25	2011/2012	Bordeaux
Prince Oniangue	CM	Congolese	25	2013/2014	Tours FC
Alexis Peugeot	CM	French	23	2012/2013	Strasbourg
Antoine Devaux	CM	French	29	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Mads Albaek	CM	Danish	24	2013/2014	FC Midtjylland
Bocundji Ca	CM	Guinean	27	2011/2012	AS Nancy Lorraine
Diego	LW	Brazilian	26	2012/2013	Tours FC
Odair Fortes	RW	Cape Verdean	27	2008/2009	UJA Alfortville
Benjamin Moukandjo	RW	Cameroonian	25	2014/2015	AS Nancy Lorraine
Eliran Atar	ST/LW	Israeli	27	2013/2014	Maccabi Tel Aviv
Nicolas de Preville	ST	French	23	2012/2013	Istres
Gaetan Courtet	ST	French	25	2010/2011	FC Lorient
Gaetan Charbonnier	ST	French	25	2013/2014	Montpellier HSC
Grejohn Kuyei	ST	French	18	2014/2015	-
Jean-Luc Vasseur	Manager	French	45	2014/2015	US Creteil
Jean Pierre Caillot	President	French	53	2003/2004	-

## Stade de Reims: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	11th	48	Prince Oniangue (10)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	14th	43	Gaetan Courtet (9)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	2nd	65	Cedric Faure (15)
2010/2011	Ligue 2	10th	49	Julien Toudic (16)
2009/2010	National	2nd	71	Cedric Faure (25)

## Stade de Reims: Likely XI



## Stade de Reims: Squad Analysis

The departure of Hubert Fournier kicked off a summer full of disappointment for Stade de Reims, who seemed to get consistently cheated in their transfer dealings. Whether it was the minimal severance agreement that Lyon negotiated for Reims's outgoing manager or the miserly €4m that SDR managed to earn from Sevilla for Grzegorz Krychowiak, the fans go into the forthcoming season nervous and unhappy. The eventual appointment of former Creteil manager Jean-Luc Vasseur has also added fuel to the rapidly amplifying fire hanging over the club ahead of 2014/2015.

### Strengths:

There is some renewed promise for Reims this season, especially in the attacking sectors of the pitch. Youngster Nicolas de Preville was at times excellent in leading the line last season and he has made headway in taking full advantage of his superior physicality in recent months. The signing of Benjamin Moukandjo for free from AS Nancy hands Vasseur an extra weapon going forward and an aspirational youngster who will rapidly be seeking to nail down a place in the starting XI. The retention of Anthony Weber and Aissa Mandi should also stand the defence in good stead ahead of what is likely to be a challenging campaign.

### Weaknesses:

The departure of Grzegorz Krychowiak is probably single-handedly the largest solo blow to any team in Ligue 1 this summer. The defensive midfielder held the midfield together with his whimsical ability to break up play but also kick-started attacking moves thanks to the accuracy of his passing radar. He was truly irreplaceable and a large hole has been borne into Reims's midfield. The signing of Gregory Bourillon is hardly inspiring considering the ageing nature of the centre of defence and Mickael Tacalfred's late 2013/2014 season inconsistencies.

### Key Player: **Prince Oniangue**

The commanding midfielder took his first season in Ligue 1 by storm last season, finishing up as the club's top goalscorer by breaking into double figures. He is a rare breed of forward-thinking midfielder who has the capacity to sit very effectively just behind the striker, with a rifling shot on him which he often unleashes from just outside the box. On pre-season viewing, there is the distinct possibility that Oniangue will be positioned slightly deeper in that midfield trio to compensate for the departure of Krychowiak. Should this tactical tweak work, then Reims' problems in the centre of the park could be solved much more rapidly than many expect. Ultimately, it will be down to Prince Oniangue's willingness to adapt or not.

### Verdict:

Far too much depends on Jean Luc Vasseur's ability as a manager in order for Reims to have a season which does not end in disaster. Unfortunately, the current level of the squad is such that SDR should struggle in what is billed to become one of the tightest relegation battles in recent Ligue 1 history. The club's resources and their execution of what can only be described as a negative summer transfer window are two factors which leave the club extremely vulnerable to relegation. **19<sup>th</sup>**

## Stade Rennais FC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Benoit Costil	GK	French	27	2011/2012	Sedan
Olivier Sorin	GK	French	33	2014/2015	AJ Auxerre
Cheick M'Bengue	LB	Senegalese	26	2013/2014	Toulouse FC
Mexer	CB	Mozambican	25	2014/2015	CD Nacional
Jean Armel Kana-Biyik	CB	Cameroonian	25	2010/2011	Havre AC
Cedric Hountondji	CB	French	20	2013/2014	-
Gjoko Zajkov	CB	Macedonian	19	2014/2015	Rabotnicki
Sylvain Armand	CB	French	34	2013/2014	PSG
Steven Moreira	CB	French	19	2013/2015	-
Romain Danze	RB/DM	French	28	2006/2007	-
Jean Il Makoun	DM	Cameroonian	31	2012/2014	Aston Villa
Vincent Pajot	DM	French	23	2010/2011	-
Anders Konradsen	CM	Danish	24	2012/2013	Stromsgodset IF
Sanjin Prcic	CM	Bosnian	20	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Gelson Fernandes	CM	Swiss	27	2014/2015	SC Fribourg
Abdoulaye Doucoure	CM	French	21	2012/2013	-
Christian Bruls	AM	Belgian	25	2014/2015	KAAs Gent
Adrien Hunou	AM	French	21	2013/2014	-
Axel Ngando	AM	French	21	2012/2013	-
Pedro Henrique	LW	Brazilian	24	2014/2015	FC Zurich
Zana Allee	LW	French	20	2013/2014	-
Paul-Georges Ntep	LW	French	22	2013/2014	AJ Auxerre
Benjamin Andre	RW	French	24	2014/2015	AC Ajaccio
Kamil Grosicki	RW	Polish	26	2013/2014	Sivasspor
Abdoulaye Sane	RW	Senegalese	21	2012/2013	-
Philipp Hosiner	ST	Austrian	25	2014/2015	Austria Vienna
Wesley Said	ST/RW	French	19	2013/2014	-
Ola Toivonen	ST	Swedish	28	2013/2014	PSV
Philippe Montanier	Manager	French	49	2013/2014	Real Sociedad
Rene Ruello	President	French	65	2014/2015	-

## Stade Rennais FC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	12th	46	Nelson Oliveira (8)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	13th	46	Julien Feret (11)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	6th	60	Jires Kembo Ekoko (10)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	6th	56	Victor Montano (9)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	9th	53	Asamoah Gyan (13)

## Stade Rennais FC: Likely XI



## Stade Rennais FC: Squad Analysis

Last season was one of transition for the Brittany club as former Real Sociedad manager Philippe Montanier began to reshape a side that has undergone an incredible squad overhaul this summer. In truth, the 2013/2014 campaign left a sour taste in most fans' mouths after losing the Coupe de France final to rivals Guingamp and performing with a lacklustre attitude for a lot of the second half of the season, despite the January arrivals of Ola Toivonen, Paul-Georges Ntep and Kamil Grosicki which sparked the team into life somewhat.

### Strengths:

The squad oozes with a mixture of Ligue 1 experience and potentially delightful talent from goalkeeper Benoit Costil to Paul-Georges Ntep and Ola Toivonen up front. With Montanier at the helm, Rennes began to try and perform with more patient build-up play at the start of the season, but the technical capacities of the squad were not adequate for this style to be executed effectively. Instead, Montanier quickly resorted to exploiting the pace down the flanks to produce counter-attacking displays. Having flirted with relegation for much of last season, Philippe Montanier will be expected to be able to leave a more clearly defined stamp on a side that is full of players that he decided to bring to the club, whichever tactical approach he decides upon. The incredible breadth of youth talent is expected to receive ample opportunity to express themselves, with the likes of Cedric Hountondji and Adrien Hunou having shown how brightly they can perform during patches of 2013/2014.

### Weaknesses:

It will likely take several months for this new group of players to correctly gel. The squad overhaul that Montanier has undertaken is in many ways extremely brave, with so many players who are unproven at Ligue 1 level to have been brought into the setup at once. The pre-season decision to convert Benjamin Andre into a right back will also turn heads, at least in the early stages of the forthcoming campaign. The question regarding Montanier's ability to sufficiently motivate his squad remains, with far too many lacklustre individual performances dotted across the pitch at various points during last season.

### Key Player: **Mexer**

Rennes' defence has been characteristically shambolic in recent times and the smart edition of Mozambique defender Mexer, who had been the subject of a bid from AS Monaco also, shows great progression and the sheer attraction that Philippe Montanier seems to draw. The 26 year old exemplifies the modern central defender, the one-fits-all type, being just as physically imposing as agile and alert. Whether he partners the slower and diminishing Sylvain Armand or the promising but raw Cedric Hountondji remains to be seen, but he is an incredible plus point either way.

### Verdict:

Unlike the vast majority of current Ligue 1 managers expected to be in and around the bottom half of Ligue 1 this season, Philippe Montanier has a proven track record in showing that his methods have caused vast success for various different outfits over the years. In reality, Rennes must improve on last term's exploits if Montanier is to be forgiven for a somewhat unremarkable start with the Brittany club. The grace period is over, so expect the players to prove that they no longer require one. **8th**



## Toulouse FC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Marc Vidal	GK	French	23	2009/2010	-
Zacharie Boucher	GK	French	22	2013/2014	Havre AC
Ali Ahamada	GK	French	22	2010/2011	-
Issiaga Sylla	LB	Guinean	20	2012/2013	Horoya AC
William Matheus	LB	Brazilian	24	2014/2015	SE Palmerias
Francois Moubandje	LB	Swiss	24	2013/2014	Servette
Dragos Grigore	CB	Romanian	27	2014/2015	Dynamo Bucharest
Mickael Firmin	CB	French	23	2012/2013	SAS Epinal
Uros Spajic	CB	Serbian	21	2013/2014	Red Star Belgrade
Steeve Yago	CB	Burkinabe	21	2012/2013	-
Dusan Veskovac	CB	Serbian	28	2013/2014	Young Boys
Gael Vena	CB	French	21	2013/2014	-
Jean Daniel Akpa Akpro	RB	Ivorian	21	2011/2012	-
Pavle Ninkov	RB	Serbian	29	2011/2012	Red Star Belgrade
Pantxi Sirieix	DM	French	33	2004/2005	Auxerre
Dominik Furman	DM	Polish	22	2013/2014	Legia Warsaw
Abel Aguilar	CM	Colombian	29	2013/2014	Hercules
Etienne Didot	CM	French	31	2008/2009	Stade Rennais
Mihai Roman	RW	Serbian	29	2013/2014	Rapid Bucharest
Oscar Trejo	RW/AM	Spanish	26	2013/2014	Sporting Gijon
Adrien Regattin	RW	Moroccan	22	2011/2012	-
Sana Zaniou	RW	Burkinabe	19	2012/2013	-
Wissam Ben Yedder	ST	French	23	2010/2011	UJA Alfortville
Martin Braithwaite	ST	Danish	23	2013/2014	Esbjerg fB
Amadou Soukouna	ST	French	22	2012/2013	-
Aleksandar Pesic	ST	Serbian	22	2014/2015	FK Jagodina
Alain Casanova	Manager	French	52	2008/2009	-
Oliver Sedran	President	French	45	2001/2002	-

## Toulouse FC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2013/2014	Ligue 1	9th	49	Wissam Ben Yedder (16)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	10th	51	Wissam Ben Yedder (15)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	8th	56	Umut Bulut (5)*
2010/2011	Ligue 1	8th	50	Federico Santander (5)**
2009/2010	Ligue 1	14th	47	Andre Pierre Gignac (8)

\*Emmanuel Riviere also scored 5 goals in 2011/2012

\*\*Moussa Sissoko and Daniel Braaten also scored 5 goals in 2010/2011

## Toulouse FC: Likely XI



## Toulouse FC: Squad Analysis

Franck Tabanou, Moussa Sissoko, Etienne Capoue, Aymen Abdennour and now Serge Aurier. Season after season, Les Violetts seem to lose their star player but as their form guide shows above, Alain Casanova's men always achieve their standard Ligue 1 mid-table status regardless. After making the conscious decision to embark upon a recruitment campaign from primarily the Eastern European region, it remains to be seen if this innovative cohort of players will bed into Ligue 1 life successfully.

### Strengths:

Toulouse have a squad of individually talented players but often struggle to collectively and consistently gain positive results. This is perhaps due to the now two year long transition period that TFC have endured, losing their key players and adjusting to a totally different tactical system which sees Casanova deploy three central defenders. This was a formation that was totally unique to Toulouse in Ligue 1 last season and made them difficult opposition; hence the top ten finish. Martin Braithwaite and Wissam Ben Yedder are two quality forward players who will be sure to get goals as Toulouse will look to outscore the opposition again this campaign rather than playing conservative football. The defence has also been strengthened, with numerous signings this summer but also the emergence of Jean Daniel Akpa Akpro from the youth system, who has the ability to adequately replace the mighty Serge Aurier. Young goalkeeper Zacharie Boucher has impressed enormously since arriving for Le Havre halfway through last season, displacing Ali Ahamada as the club's number one after just a few weeks with his new side.

### Weaknesses:

The negative aspects of Alain Casanova's quirky formation are that defensively Toulouse are often caught short with the encouragement for both full-backs to bomb forward leaving the central defensive trio exposed on the counter-attack. Uros Spajic was a lively and unwieldy character in the heart of the defensive action last term and hindered Toulouse's cause more than he helped it for the majority of 2013/2014. The signing of Dragos Grigore should go some way to making up for Aymen Abdennour's recent departure to AS Monaco. The central midfield area remains experienced, even if Etienne Didot had the tendency to be a little overrun at times last term.

### Key Player: [Abel Aguilar](#)

Arguably the most underrated player for Colombia at this summer's World Cup, Abel Aguilar has been handed the Toulouse captaincy after a fantastic first season for Les Verts. He is a highly combative midfielder who is likely to play as the furthest forward of the midfield trio this season unless Casanova wishes to include Oscar Trejo in the starting XI this campaign. A leader by example, TFC may have finally found a captain that can satisfactorily inspire his colleagues who were sometimes accused of complacency towards the end of last season with the assumption that Toulouse had virtually nothing to play for seemingly all too prominent in a number of the players' heads.

### Verdict:

Toulouse are in for another comfortable season. The losses of Serge Aurier and Aymen Abdennour should not impact them as heavily as many might expect, simply because there are individuals already primed and ready to seize their former team mates' positions in the starting XI. While a large amount of the transfer dealings that Toulouse have involved themselves in this summer concern relative unknowns, the team has a solid enough base to consolidate their reputation as a consistent Ligue 1 side. A long cup run would certainly be an objective for 2014/2015. **11<sup>th</sup>**