

## 7. Marco Verratti

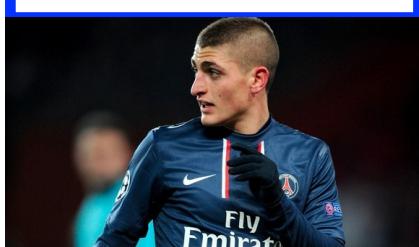
The first of a host of PSG players to make the GFFN 100 top ten category, Italian defensive midfield maestro Marco Verratti has flourished in 2013. Throughout the calendar year, he has been an unswerving fixture in the Paris Saint Germain side that are currently boisterously dominating the French football scene. If one adds the fact that Verratti is still just 21 years of age, you begin to picture the true level of both his current brilliance and potential. With the realisation that Verratti's part in this title-winning squad is in fact key, with him playing the vital role of the second hand to Thiago Motta that helps the PSG midfield clock tick, you have the crucial third element, which further shines a favourable light on the former Pescara man.

Following his move from Italian side Pescara in the summer before the 2012/13 season began, Verratti, barely 19 at the time, was not expected to claim a first team spot in a PSG team that was filled with an abundance of talent. However, the dogged Italian took no prisoners, showing an unwavering commitment to the cause, and nailed down a spot in the first XI within his first few games at the club, ahead of his older, more experienced teammates. Over the course of 2013, Verratti's game has developed immeasurably, thanks in no small part to the playing time given to him by both Ancelotti and Blanc and the advice and coaching that have provided him. An in-depth glance at Verratti's style of play certainly makes a strong case for the pint-sized defensive midfielder as being the most prominent, young player in the aforementioned position that Ligue 1 can be proud to say that it has in its ranks. Verratti is perhaps just what one would expect when one considers the attributes that a young, feisty Italian defensive midfielder may possess. Although he is small, especially for a player whose role involves a large amount of physicality, he is never afraid to put himself about, and often dominates opponents of considerably bigger and bulkier build. Verratti is never one to shy away from a physical battle, in fact it often appears as if this is what he takes the most pleasure out of. Put it this way, Ligue 1 opponents have learnt to give the petite man a wider berth in 2013. Verratti is an enormously convincing tackler, with his leading role in the PSG set-up being that of a ball-winning midfielder, a man who will roam the middle third of the pitch to close down opposition attacks before they become advanced. Verratti's positioning in front of members of the opposition who have the ball, is rather unique, and certainly worth mentioning. Verratti will often lead with his arm, and then wrap his feet around the ball and, if this does not yield a successful interception, he will consequently wrap himself around the opposition player, so that his opposite man is unable to progress. A master of tactical fouling, he will not hesitate in taking a yellow card in order to stop an opposition attack.

The aspect of Marco Verratti's game that has arguably seen the most amount of amelioration over the last twelve months is his ability on the ball. Previously, Verratti was able to win the ball back, and would then look to offload to his more creative teammates to instigate an attack. Nowadays, though, he has the necessary self-assurance on the ball, and is no longer afraid to drive and dribble towards the opposition goal himself. The increased completeness of Verratti's game amplify his importance to the PSG setup, as he is no longer restricted to a set central midfield role, should manager Laurent Blanc decide to alter Les Parisiens' formation or tactics during a match. To highlight the improvement in his attacking play, Verratti already has 5 assists at the halfway stage of the 2013/14 season, more than he made in the whole of the previous campaign. Verratti has been fortunate in the sense that he has been exposed to top-flight football at an early age, but one cannot fail to be captivated by how swiftly he is picking things up and refining his game. Ultimately, the loyalty and trust that Ancelotti, and subsequently Blanc, have placed in the Italian seems to be paying in dividends. However, as you would expect for a player as juvenile and raw as Verratti, they are certainly edges to his game that need smoothening. The most profound area of weakness emanates from Verratti's style of play – his lack of discipline. In the 2012/13 season, Verratti picked up 12 yellow cards in 27 games, two of which came in the same match and led to a red card. His tally of yellow cards was comfortably the highest in the PSG team, with Ibrahimovic (believe it or not!) the player with the next highest number of yellows. This season, he has already picked up 5 in his 16 games, and looks on course to enter into double digits again come May.

One would be right to encourage Verratti to rectify this indiscipline by proceeding with greater caution, after all picking up yellow cards not only means that he runs the risk of picking up a red, but also means that he is often banned for receiving too many cards, which can break up a sparkling run of form at just the wrong moment. However, Verratti must, if possible, find a solution whilst staying true to his style of play. PSG require Verratti to continue to disrupt the opposition's play, but perhaps he just needs to use his brain a little more, and judge which fouls are really that necessary to give away. Judgement in football is a difficult skill to inherit and an even more difficult one to master, but one that Verratti will be able to grapple with as he gains maturity.

Club: Paris Saint Germain  
Date of Birth: 5th November 1992  
Position: Midfielder



Over the course of 2013, another part of Verratti's game that needs cultivating has been highlighted. He often overplays the ball, especially against the better teams, whose midfielders are aware of Verratti's perceived overconfidence. When he does lose the ball, it can often be fatal for his team, as the PSG back four are criminally exposed without Verratti to protect them, and PSG have conceded multiple goals like this in the last 12 months. Verratti needs to judge when to hold on to the ball and when to release it. The quality of his distribution will of course grow with experience.

At 21 years of age, he is just beginning to embark on his journey in the footballing world. The fact that he already has major honours to his name suggests that we could be witnessing something truly special and, if he fashions the correct amendments to his game, in all honesty, Verratti's potential knows no bounds. Expect huge things from this fiery Italian midfielder. That abhorrent tag of 'the next Pirlo' could indeed be fulfilled.