

## 59. Éric Bauthéac

Club: OGC Nice

Date of Birth: 24th August 1987

Position: Attacker



In an age where player power often dictates the outcome of transfer wrangles and club loyalty takes a back seat to the search for a more lucrative pay packet, it is refreshing to come across instances where this loyalty still counts. One such example is Nice's French winger Eric Bauthéac - a breath of fresh air both on and off the pitch.

In flying form on the left wing for much of the year, Bauthéac has proven to be an excellent set piece taker as well as always offering a threat with his devilish crossing. Meanwhile, while he draws plenty of fouls with his excellent dribbling skills, a tendency to commit just as many with his poor tackling makes him something of a liability when going in for a challenge – committing 59 fouls and earning 6 bookings in 35 games last season.

Aside from the minor disciplinary problems however, left-footed Bauthéac enjoyed an excellent 2012/13 campaign. Over the course of the season he grabbed 9 goals and 7 assists and his value soared. After helping his side to finish in fourth place and having enjoyed a great season on a personal level, it was obvious that there would be suitors looking at Bauthéac when the 2013 summer transfer window opened.

According to reports, interest was shown by some of Europe's big names but Bauthéac was determined to remain loyal to his current employers and repay the faith shown in him. In stark contrast to several of the other Ligue 1 transfer sagas that dominated the summer - with Florian Thauvin missing training to force through a move to Marseille and Romain Alessandrini of Rennes publicly criticising his club for blocking his departure - Bauthéac was not swayed.

Speaking to L'Equipe in April, he said: "Of course it's flattering when a club like Newcastle, OM or Lazio are following me, but I signed a three-year contract with Nice. I really want to experience the new stadium so I will do all I can to still be here next season. But we will have to see what the directors want." And this sense of pride in representing his side demonstrates a precocious maturity in a 26 year old who still has his best years ahead of him.

The current campaign has been a different story for both Bauthéac and his club, however. After a promising opening month or two, a series of knee injuries have limited him to just 11 Ligue 1 appearances so far and his club's form has suffered as a result. With the former Saint Etienne youth player's fitness representing such a crucial part of their hopes, the lack of an adequate replacement was painfully exposed during his absence.

His knee problems effectively meant a two-month absence from the end of September to the start of December. The player did play in the loss to Bordeaux in early November but felt a twinge in his knee the following week in training and subsequently missed the next month and a half. Evidently brought back into action too soon, this unfortunate incident only serves to further highlight his importance.

In the few appearances he has made, however, he still managed to notch 4 goals, making him Nice's second highest scorer this season after Dario Cvitanich – the only man to outscore Bauthéac last season for L'OGCN, with 19 strikes.

Indeed, Bauthéac has demonstrated that he can be the man to turn games around almost single-handedly on occasion. After losing seven consecutive games for the first time since 1965, it took the winger's return to help Nice recapture their winning ways.

On 14 December he inspired his side to victory over Sochaux, scoring the only goal of the game with a close range finish after an exquisite piece of chest control freed him from his marker. Then, on 21 December, Bauthéac was unstoppable in Nice's 3-1 victory over Evian, finishing the match with two goals and a booking: a neat representation of the player's all-round game and a performance that capped off what has been an excellent year.

Now Les Aiglons will be hoping that he can maintain this level of form and fitness as they look to climb up the league and replicate their excellent results of last season. A huge second half from Bauthéac will be pivotal to his side's chances of European football next season and, after proving to be the match-winner in the final two games of 2013, Bauthéac himself will certainly be hoping to take this form into the New Year.

After leaving relegated Dijon when his contract expired and moving to Nice on a free transfer, Bauthéac has certainly warranted the faith shown in him with the influential year that he had in 2013. It seems that more is on the way, however, as his sense of loyalty and determination will see him keep pushing for the best results possible. If he maintains top form and stays injury-free over the coming months, perhaps he will even be able to catch the eye of Didier Deschamps in time for a summer trip to Brazil.

*'When we speak about the manager we have to make sure he's not next to us!'*

*Éric Bauthéac*

On the fact that Nice right back Gregoire Puel is manager Claude Puel's son- 18th February 2013

**DID YOU KNOW?** On the 22nd September 2013, Éric Bauthéac became the first Frenchman to score a goal in OGC Nice's new Allianz Riviera stadium.