

39. Alaixys Romao

Club: Olympique de Marseille

Date of Birth: 18th January 1984

Position: Midfielder



It had been an explosive start to 2013 for Alaixys Romao, though not an undeserving one following the former Lorient midfielder's strong 2012 campaign.

The Togo international swapped Les Merlus for Olympique de Marseille in January, a move which recognised his value as one of the league's top midfielders though despite the transfer, it wasn't until February that the 29 year old stepped out at the Stade Velodrome, having initially, required to travel to South Africa to feature in the Africa Cup of Nations.

Following Togo's exit at the quarter-final stage, Romao returned to France – though questions would remain – as always – as to how players returning from the AFCON would find their rhythm from the off, especially at a Marseille side gunning for the title with limited means.

Nevertheless, there was no such problem with Romao – who was inserted seamlessly to add steel to a Marseille side that looked a bit light in midfield. Indeed, he would unseat Joey Barton, on loan from QPR, as the primary partner to Benoit Cheyrou in the heart of the Marseillais midfield.

Bringing his seemingly limitless energy to a flagging side, Romao not only brought replenishment to the club, but also added a new dimension to Elie Baup's often stoic brand of football. The 29-year-old is usually a combative, industrious midfielder, who is comfortable across the midfield. Sitting in front of the defence, he would act as the instigator of Marseille's offensive ventures with a preference to ping the ball over the top for the likes of Andre Ayew or Mathieu Valbuena to chase.

His statistics also resemble his efficiency in the squad, with an 87% pass completion rate. Romao subsequently featured in the next 15 games for OM, as they eventually ended the season in second place, 12 points behind eventual winners Paris Saint-Germain, but mathematically in the title race until the week before the penultimate round of matches.

As the 2012-13 season was brought to a close, the Togolese international was lauded as a fantastic signing by the hierarchy, and that couldn't have been disputed. Plucked from Lorient, themselves in mid-table obscurity, he launched himself into a bigger club and fared well.

The 2013-14 season would be a whole different experience.

Romao was met with uncertainty in the summer of 2013, with Joey Barton coming to the end of his loan deal and Benoit Cheyrou, who would begin to take on a more peripheral figure, Romao was really, the only primary first-team central midfielder left in the side.

Eventually, Marseille settled on two fantastic young talents to supplement their midfield – though neither brought with them the experience and mentality required to succeed at that level. One of which however – Mario Lemina – was signed from Romao's ex-club – a triumph for the player.

Romao started the season in as strong form as he ended the 2012-13 campaign as Marseille rocketed to the top of the table with three wins from three. Though, really, that remained the highlight of his season to date.

Marseille's jittery form began in September with a 2-1 capitulation to Monaco, after a number of defensive errors. Two draws to Toulouse and Bastia followed, and the doubt began to settle. For Romao, he wasn't able to produce his best form – especially at a time when his midfield partner (OM normally played in a 4-2-3-1 formation) would fluctuate game to game from Giannelli Imbula, Cheyrou, and latterly, Mario Lemina. There was no regularity with the starting eleven, and there was no regularity with Romao himself.

The highlight of the midfielder's year remains his first encounter with the UEFA Champions League – his premier continental competition at club level, at age 29. It proved to be a chastening experience however as OM were out of their depth, suffering six losses – five of which featured him.

Though Romao was unrelenting, maintain his presence in the heart of midfield – and highlighting his superb traits in every single encounter. If those around him weren't playing well, the same couldn't be said of the former Lorient man. A testament to his ability.

If the year has been tough on Marseille, not so for Romao. In little under 12 months, he has gone from being a staple of the Lorient midfield, to the primary midfield man at the biggest club in France, and has tasted both European and international action. Not bad at all.

'I was the wrecker service. I got penalised and then my team got penalised as I picked up cards stupidly.'

Alaixys Romao

On his role at former club FC Lorient- 10th February 2013

DID YOU KNOW? Alaixys Romao temporarily suspended his international career with Togo after the horrific bus shooting occurred in 2010 when two teammates and several staff were seriously wounded by supposed Angolan rebels.