

## 50. André Pierre Gignac

Club: Olympique de Marseille

Date of Birth: 5th December 1985

Position: Attacker



André Pierre Gignac was wondering where it had all had gone wrong. It was the end of the 2011/12 season, without doubt the most disappointing season in Gignac's career, and doubts were beginning to creep into his mind. In a season blighted by injury, Gignac had managed just 1 goal in 21 league games, a far cry from his prolific days in Toulouse colours. Was Marseille really the right choice? Had he made a mistake in leaving Toulouse, the club where he had had so much success?

Well, 2013 confirmed that it was, in fact, no mistake. After the huge disappointment of his first season at the club, Gignac has begun to dip back into the form that earned him a move to the club in the first place. Last season, he managed to make the starting place as the spearhead of Marseille's attack very much his own, and he repaid the manager's faith with 13 league goals in 31 league appearances, a much improved rate to that of the previous season.

At the midpoint of the 2013/2014 campaign, 'Big Mac' as he is affectionately or not so affectionately known, has already managed 8 goals from 17 games, starting 12 games and coming on as a substitute in 5. His minute per goal rate currently stands at 138 minutes per goal for this season. Gignac has only ever managed to better that figure over the course of a season once in his whole career, in 2008-2009, when he scored 24 goals in the league for Toulouse, undoubtedly his most accomplished season as a professional footballer. This was incidentally the first time that Olympique de Marseille showed serious interest in him. His record for that season was 136 minutes per goal, just 2 minutes less than his record for the current season at the time of writing. Clearly, after a rocky start at Marseille, Gignac is once again producing some of his best football.

So, what sets Gignac's game apart from other strikers? First of all, he stands at around 6ft 1 inch tall, so he is a strong physical presence and will certainly score his fair share of headers. Despite this, Gignac does have a tendency to avoid using his head whenever he can, a rather peculiar habit for a centre forward indeed but at times it is almost as if he is frightened to put his body in potentially dangerous and physical situations. This could be a psychological block that remains ever-present in the forward's mind because of his injury-susceptible nature.

However, Gignac's real strength lies with his feet, and in particular his finishing. Because of Gignac's physical stature, he does not possess lightning pace, so will find it hard to make runs in behind the opposition's defence. As a result, many of his goals come from shots from a slightly further distance, and this is made possible by his powerful finishing, in particular from his favoured right foot. Especially for Marseille, many of Gignac's goals have come when there are still defenders between him and the goal, in other words not in 1 on 1 situations. He can score these goals because he has a very accurate, powerful shot that goalkeepers find hard to deal with. In fact, many pundits in France would go as far to say that his ability to strike the ball is unparalleled in Ligue 1, perhaps in some cases even than by the sharpshooting finisher that is Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

It is also true that Gignac has a knack of scoring important goals, something which has been especially evident during his time at Marseille. Halfway through the current season, it is still the case that Marseille have only ever lost 1 game when Gignac has scored. In addition, in all but 1 of the games in which Gignac scored in the league last season, the match was decided by just 1 goal. As a result, Gignac's goals over the past calendar year have not just been useful for goal difference; they have repeatedly earned his side valuable points.

Although there remain some weaknesses in Gignac's game, (he is yet to make an assist for Marseille in the league after 2 and a half seasons), he has shown some clear signs that he is returning to that blistering form he displayed in the 2008/9 season for Toulouse, at least in goal-scoring terms. The calendar year of 2013 has been comfortably Gignac's best in Marseille colours, and he is a worthy member of the GFFN 100. Gignac is on the road to recovery and may well have finally shaken off the weight of the enormous €18m transfer fee that he commanded when he first arrived at the Stade Velodrome. Perhaps this loss of weight will ensure that the player's critics cease from insisting on goading him with the infamous 'Big Mac' label.

*'I am still paying the price for the salary I receive and the transfer fee that I cost Marseille.'*

André-Pierre Gignac

20th December 2013

**DID YOU KNOW?** André-Pierre Gignac often celebrates his goals by sucking his thumb in honour of his first son, 'André-Pierre Junior'.