

48. Anthony Lopes

Club: Olympique Lyonnais

Date of Birth: 1st October 1990

Position: Goalkeeper



They say patience is a virtue. A man who follows this age old saying is Anthony Lopes, ranked 49th in the GFFN 100. For years, he sat on the bench or watched his side play on the television, waiting for his chance. One fine day in 2013, it finally arrived, and boy did he take it.

Rewind back to the 19th April, 2013. It was Montpellier vs Lyon, and an important game in Les Gones' season. However, Lopes was sitting on the bench for Lyon for the 30th time in the league that season, still waiting for his opportunity. The 90 minutes passed by, every minute more and more painful for the Frenchman. It must have dawned on him that he was wasting priceless time in his career he would never get back. Was Lyon the right place to be? Should he move to a smaller team, where he would get more playing time? The match finished 2-1 to Lyon, but Lopes took little joy from the win. At that time, it appeared to be the usual, uneventful day in Lopes' career. Little did he know that, the following game, he would be making his long awaited debut for Lyon.

It often happens that, as the saying goes, every cloud has a silver lining. Lyon's first choice 'keeper at the time, Remy Vercoutre, suffered a serious injury, a cruciate ligament rupture, which would keep him out for months. There was, though, one man whose career that very same injury would kick-start. Lopes was finally given his chance, and his patience with Lyon finally paid off. Against Saint-Etienne on the 29th of April this year, he made his debut, in an engaging 1-1 draw. Since then, he hasn't looked back.

In the 5 games that Lopes played to close out the 2012/13 season, he managed to only concede 3 goals, at an average of 0.6 goals per game. When Vercoutre was in goal, he conceded 33 goals in his 31 games, at a rate of over 1 goal a game, comfortably worse than Lopes' record. Because of the severity of Vercoutre's injury, Lopes was assured to have time on his side to adapt to the pressures of starting Ligue 1 games. This made it far easier for the inexperienced Frenchman to perform to the top of his ability, after all, there was almost no way he could be dropped.

Lopes' patience merited some luck, and it came in the form of Vercoutre's injury, but the chance still needed taking. If Lopes performed badly, or even at an average standard, Vercoutre would have been straight back into the team. Lopes, though, put in some assured performances, enough to secure his first team place for sure. Or so he thought.

There was to be yet more drama in 2013 for Anthony Lopes. In keeping with the theme of sayings, the latest to affect Lopes was 'what goes around comes around.' Just as Vercoutre's injury played into Lopes' hands, another injury dented Lopes' year. This time it was his own. Just as Vercoutre returned from his long absence, Lopes picked up an injury in the home match with Guingamp. It appeared that Lopes had unwittingly handed his teammate a chance to reclaim his number one spot. Vercoutre was in goal for the next 5 games, but, luckily for Lopes, he couldn't manage to keep a clean sheet, conceding 9 goals in the process.

The final defining moment in 2013 for Anthony Lopes came on the 22nd of December. For the first time in over half a year, both Lopes and Vercoutre were fit and ready to play. So who would the manager chose? Well, confirming both Lopes' rise and Vercoutre's decline, it was the former who was given the nod. It was confirmed. His patience had paid off. He was the undisputed number 1.

So, what in Lopes' game has merited the Lyon number 1 spot? Well, at just about 6ft tall, Lopes is not particularly tall for a goalkeeper, which could be seen as a disadvantage. However, his lack of height means that he is far more agile than many of his Ligue 1 counterparts. He makes a lot of reaction saves, and uses his legs to great effect, two things taller goalkeepers tend to find difficult. Finally, his sense of positioning is very good, which is perhaps surprising for a goalkeeper who has played so few games, and often he is in just the right place to save the ball, making the stops look much easier than they otherwise would have been. These attributes are backed up by his 2013 statistics. In the past calendar year, with Lopes in goal, Lyon have kept a clean sheet every 3 matches on average. Without Lopes, that figure rises to once every 4.8 games. Clearly, having Anthony Lopes in goal has been beneficial to Lyon in defensive terms.

As we have seen, 2013 has been an eventful year for the young Anthony Lopes. After years of waiting, he was given his first chance in Ligue 1 in April, a chance he was determined to take. Barring a spell on the sidelines through injury, he has grasped the opening with both hands, confirming his first team spot in one of Ligue 1's top teams and, for the first time in a while for Anthony Lopes, the future looks bright. Heads may roll when reading this work that the little-known Lopes has made it into the top half of this year's GFFN 100, but Portuguese goalkeeper's achievements fully merit the position he finds himself in.

'I'm still sad for what happened to him...'

Anthony Lopes

On his counterpart Rémy Vercoutre's injury- 28th April 2013

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