

40. Aymen Abdennour

Club: Toulouse FC

Date of Birth: 6th August 1989

Position: Defender



The Tunisian international has been ever-present in the Toulouse back line over the past few seasons and shows a real maturity in his play. Abdennour's talent has attracted interest from the likes of Barcelona, who despite attempting to charm Abdennour with Champions League tickets for a match against AC Milan which the Spanish side won 4-0, failed to entice the Téfécé player to compromise his professionalism by taking up the super club's offer. Toulouse did not let the defender go to the game and it appears that an offer for the Tunisian never came in the summer. Nonetheless, Abdennour looks the real deal and other clubs do want to pounce on the player. The 24 year old's performances in 2013 have been a main reason as to why.

Despite playing as a left back going into this calendar year, Abdennour has now returned himself to the position he has always wanted play in the middle of a back four. The Tunisian is perhaps better suited to this role due to his strength and power and he is good at stopping big forwards in their tracks. Maybe this move was also to do with Abdennour's weaknesses as well as his strengths. His crossing of the ball was not always good at times and he maybe lacked some potent decision making in the final third. Nevertheless, the decision made to make Abdennour a centre back has been a good one for the most part. Some of the performances that stand out the most came in the early part of this season. Abdennour won a man of the match award in a 1-0 win against Lorient where he was able to shut down the dangerous Vincent Aboubakar for the majority of the game.

Abdennour is known for his unshakeable focus on the pitch and his general awareness of his surroundings. The defender rarely makes mistakes or lets runners ghost in past him unnoticed. The player is also very good in the pass, with a success rate of over 80% across the whole year and he loves playing long balls up to the front men. Tackling is also one of the player's strong suits and the Tunisian always appears up for a challenge, although, admittedly, it often does not get to the stage where Abdennour has to win the ball of an attacker using his feet.

The majority of the time, Abdennour is able to deal with the threat aerially, with the majority of Ligue 1 attacks not ever really pursuing the tactic of running at the heart of the oppositions defence. However, in recent months, the player's form has dropped a bit and his performances have become less consistent. This was capped off by a dreadful outing in a 5-0 home drubbing by Rennes, where Abdennour appeared incapable to control the dangerous runs of Nelson Oliveira throughout the whole game, and this resulted in the Portuguese international coming away with two goals from that very encounter. The player's form this season has not been helped by a thigh injury, which kept him out of the whole of November.

Perhaps another weakness of Abdennour's play this year has been his discipline. It is certainly a positive that Abdennour is committed in the challenge and willing to put his body on the line for the team, but the player does tend to give away more free kicks than most and this has led to his downfall on more than one occasion in 2013. The defender has also been banned twice for a collection of yellow cards, and in this way the Tunisian has not helped his teammates.

The African Cup of Nations was perhaps a disappointing one for the player, as despite good personal performances, and only one defeat, Tunisia went out in the group stage. Here, however, playing at centre-back, Abdennour showed Africa that he was able to play against the best, as despite being involved in a 3-0 defeat to the Ivory Coast, he actually performed better than most of the players on the winning team that day.

Overall, Abdennour can be viewed as one of Ligue 1's brightest talents. At the age of 24, he is a first team regular for Toulouse and has many top clubs vying for his signature. He has great vision and his reading of the game is first class. The Tunisian has put in a few poor performances this year, however, and this is something he will need to iron out of his game in years to come.

'My duel with Abdennour? He is a very good player and a very good defender.'

Falcao

11th November 2013

Quotes of the Year: Víctor Valdés: 'I am very close to Abidal. I see him as my brother. Playing with him again would be very special indeed.'

FC Barcelona goalkeeper Víctor Valdés drops a heavy hint as to where he may be next season.