

88. Cheick Diabaté

Club: Girondins de Bordeaux

Date of Birth: 25th April 1988

Position: Attacker

It is fair to say that the unorthodox 6ft5 Malian striker has had a rewarding 2013. Despite being criticised at times for missing easy chances and failing in front of goal, the 25 year old has scored some vital goals, including a few which will be remembered for a long, long time.

The high point of Diabaté's season must be winning the 2013 Coupe de France with Bordeaux. It was a competition in which he played a huge part in, scoring four goals in three starts, and his two goals in the Final showed the nation that Diabaté deals with pressure. The Malian international therefore helped Bordeaux to their first Coupe de France since 1987 and has become a firm favourite for those associated with the Stade Chaban-Delmas.

The improvement that the gangly and amiable striker has shown over the last 12 months has been astounding. Diabaté was struggling for goals even at the back end of last season, and although he did score 8 goals over the course of that campaign, he was unable to take his Coupe de la Ligue form into the league. Now, however, with only half of the season gone, Diabaté has equalled his tally from last year and is becoming a real handful for opposition teams. The goal-scavenging giant can look a little awkward when trying to balance his frame to get a shot away in dangerous positions; but he is now snatching less at his chances and has improved in terms of total focus this calendar year.

It is unsurprising perhaps, that with such height, Diabaté is a real threat in the air. He is apt at bringing the ball down after receiving a long ball forward and starting attacks for his team. Nevertheless, the majority of Diabaté's goals of late have been taken on the ground, proving doubters wrong that his height does not hinder his ability to control the ball.

This could not have been displayed better than in November against Stade Rennais, where he brought down a raking forty yard pass from Landry N'Guemo, beat two defenders and slotted the ball home.

As a character, Diabaté is a bit of a nutcase and has often been compared with El Hadji Diouf by the African media. Bordeaux boss Francis Gillot will hope the Malian limits his antics, however entertaining they are for the footballing public.



Diabaté had always shown potential. In the 2008-2009 season he averaged at just under a goal every two games at AC Ajaccio, but since then a lack of faith in the player had halted his progress.

Nevertheless, his form in the first six months of 2013, which included those goals in the Coupe de France, earned supposed interest from clubs in England such as Newcastle, who were desperately looking for a new striker. The Malian silenced the interested parties in August, however, when he signed a contract extension until 2016 and Bordeaux were delighted to have prolonged a player who at that time had 32 goals in just over 70 games. The official statement read: "It is good news for Les Girondins, who can now count on their centre-forward for several more years."

This season, Diabaté has appeared to perform best when partnered with young Uruguayan striker Diego Rolan. This was evidenced during an exhilarating performance by the pair in a 4-1 win against Sochaux, where Diabaté scored twice with Rolan providing both assists.

Diabaté had mixed emotions in his Mali shirt in 2013. His side were unable to qualify for the World Cup, but managed to reach a respectable third place in the year's African Cup of Nations. Diabaté hardly turned up for his country, only firing home once (a penalty against South Africa in the Quarter Finals). Nevertheless, he is ever-present in the Mali squad, something that is certainly set to continue.

Overall, Diabaté has had a year to remember. From two goals in the Coupe de France final to being a hit in Ligue 1, the Malian has triumphed on almost all fronts. Whether Bordeaux will be able to keep him at the club by the end of 2014 will have to be seen, as due to his current form, there are surely many suitors out there vying for Diabaté's signature.

He is a player who, under the right guidance and keeping him away from other unwarranted distractions, can maximise his potential and repay the faith that Bordeaux have had in him since he was a boy.

'Cheick Diabaté does not know pressure. You don't believe me? This is a message to the world. Cheick is here!'

Cheick Diabaté

Talking about himself- 9th August 2013

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