

## 76. Cheikh M'Bengue

Club: Stade Rennais

Date of Birth: 23rd July 1988

Position: Defender

2013 marked the end of Cheikh M'Bengue's six season-long spell at Toulouse FC. The sheer length of that stint suggests it may have been an appropriate time to move on. Toulouse was in fact all M'Bengue had known since the age of 8 and it is perhaps this bi-lateral attachment to one another that had seen bids in years gone by rejected for the player. Toulouse gave him a professional contract at the age of just 19, again showing that this continued faith in the player to succeed was no recent development. Cheick M'Bengue was always going to eventually need to breathe new life into his career and was seduced in the summer of 2013 by Philippe Montanier and his proposed project at Rennes.

His performances in 2013 were reflective of the extraordinary faith Toulouse placed on the Senegalese international in 2007. M'Bengue very much typifies the generic, athletic Ligue 1 left-back: he is quick, a solid defender and is never afraid to join in with the attack. He has an additional bonus of being around 6ft tall, so when necessary, such as during set pieces, he can help out his centre backs by dealing with any aerial threat that comes their way. What sets M'Bengue apart from most of the other left-backs currently plying their trade in France is his consistent level of high performance which is why he is so admired by many of his contemporaries in Ligue 1.

One forte to M'Bengue's game is that, although he is relatively young at 25 years of age, he has been exposed to 6 complete seasons of Ligue 1 football (already making 150 appearances). This is a rarity and undoubtedly the key to his consistency. This means that not only is M'Bengue at his physical peak, but he also knows the ins and outs of French football, which gives the Senegalese defender an advantage over many opponents he faces in Ligue 1.



At 25, M'Bengue has a lot of time left in his career to improve on his already primed game. One area he could perhaps develop is the quality of his play when he goes forward. Although M'Bengue is not afraid to bomb forward down the left wing, often his final delivery lets him down. This is summed up by the fact that in his last 3 seasons of Ligue 1 football, in which he has played well over 60 games, he has only 2 assists to his name and not a single goal. This criticism is perhaps harsh on a player whose role is to defend, but if M'Bengue wants to move his game to the next level, which no doubt he can, he should work on his attacking play and, in particular, his crossing. Aside from this, M'Bengue has every other vital ability to evolve that bit further into a top left back.

M'Bengue's new team for the 2013/2014 campaign, Rennes, lay in 15<sup>th</sup> place in Ligue 1 at the end of 2013. Certainly a disappointing reality for a side that had hoped for greater instant return on the appointment of Philippe Montanier. Being a considerable 7 points clear of the relegation zone, and just 4 points short of 10<sup>th</sup> place and mid-table, Rennes have certainly had an unremarkable second half of the calendar year.

Rennes' low position though is however not due to their defence, of which M'Bengue is an important part. In terms of goals conceded, Rennes finished the year a much higher joint 10<sup>th</sup> in the league. If M'Bengue is given a little more time to acclimatise to life in Brittany, we can certainly an even more secure SRFC back line in 2014.

2013 was a year of transition for Cheick M'Bengue, partaking in an impressive second half of the 2012/2013 campaign with Toulouse, and finishing the year with his new club Rennes, where he took no time at all to adjust to his surroundings. With a few small adjustments to his offensive game, and maintaining his impressive consistency in terms of defence, I have no doubt that M'Bengue can raise his game to the next level and have an even more impressive 2014.

*'There is little difference between Toulouse and Rennes.'*

Cheikh M'Bengue

24th October 2013

**DID YOU KNOW?** Rennes manager Philippe Montanier turned down the chance to continue managing Champions League side Real Sociedad to return to Ligue 1 instead.