

11. Darío Cvitanich

Club: OGC Nice

Date of Birth: 16th May 1984

Position: Attacker



A football match can often be a tale of two halves. Darío Cvitanich had a year of two halves: from being arguably Ligue 1's most reliable striker to falling into mediocre form from the commencement of the 2013/2014 season right up until the end of the calendar year.

While seven league goals is not a tally that should be sniffed at as we conclude the year, the contrast with last season's tally of twenty is particularly difficult for OGC Nice fans to take. In the early months of 2013, as Ligue 1's most surprising package, Les Aiglons were on a most unassuming road to securing a form of continental qualification for the first time since the 2001/2002 season and it all centred on the man that is affectionately known as 'Super Dario'. He was an unshakeable, infallible and wholly committed sharp-shooter and finisher who's invention in front of goal would have at times made the assumed "King" of present French football goal-scorers, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, proud.

The fire he, and indeed many of his teammates, possessed in their bellies to achieve their aim qualifying to represent their club in a continental fashion in 2013/2014, an aim they went on to achieve but then execute poorly in early August when they were kicked out of the Europa League at the hands of Chornomorets Odessa in the qualification rounds, inspired Les Aiglons to some of the most tantalising counter-attacking football that the Stade du Ray has certainly ever seen from the home team.

Fundamentally, in order for a counter-attacking system to work, the manager needs to know that when his side is presented with a sort of goal scoring opportunity, there is somebody who can adequately add the vital finishing touch to the swift move. In the second match of the 2013/2014 campaign, Nice beat Rennes 2-1, with Cvitanich bagging the decisive strike to bring Les Aiglons their first league win of the season. At that point, Darío Cvitanich had a better shots to goals ratio than anybody playing in Ligue 1, solely looking at performances over the course of the calendar year: 2.7.

Not only was he efficient, but, when motivated, makes zigzag runs across the opposition back four which are often far too well thought out and intelligent for Ligue 1's burly defenders to understand or for that matter impede. At 5 ft 7, runs behind defences make up a crucial part of Cvitanich's game, as he has little chance of being able to win aerial duels or hold the ball up effectively.

Once one understands the integrality of Darío Cvitanich in the system that manager Claude Puel deployed in the 2012/2013 season and continued with this term, and the success the Argentinian had within it previously, one has to wonder what changed to cause the former Ajax man's downturn from August onwards.

Once one understands the integrality of Dario Cvitanich in the system that manager Claude Puel deployed in the 2012/2013 season and continued with this term, and the success the Argentinian had within it previously, one has to wonder what changed to cause the former Ajax man's downturn in form August onwards.

With the transfer market being as it currently is, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the middle-sized European clubs to find themselves affordable strikers. OGC Nice paid just 350 thousand Euros for the player in the summer of 2012. Naturally, when a player scores twenty goals plus in one season for a team residing in a league that is generally accepted to be within the top five in Europe, heads are going to turn. Interest in the Argentinian front man skyrocketed this summer, with AS Roma making some serious headway in the negotiation stage before being promptly turned away by OGC Nice's rather resolute President Jean-Pierre Rivère.

Darío Cvitanich is quite an interesting 'tweeter' on the social media platform Twitter. He often subtly laments about returning to Boca Juniors, the club that he freely calls him home, where he spent a season-long loan spell during the 2011-2012 season, and has hinted that the club would like to bring him back.

His temperament is however one of his least desirable characteristics and that has come across especially during the latter end of 2013. Week in, week out he cuts a disinterested and frustrated figure at the front of OGC Nice attack and this will certainly contribute to his overall ability to score goals as he causes himself psychological stress.

Either way, that passion and fire that Cvitanich harboured in the 2012/2013 season was something extraordinarily special and perhaps Les Aiglons should have let the player leave this summer, undoubtedly recouping a sizeable transfer fee in the process. Since then, that fire has extinguished somewhat and consequently so have Nice's performances. In 2012/2013, Nice were continental football qualifiers but in the first half of 2013/2014 they are firmly submerged below that mid-table divide.

Barring the summer departure of former captain Renato Civelli, the OGC Nice team has remained broadly the same, and the impact on their performances that Cvitanich's changed form has had evidences just how formidable a player he was in the first six months of this year.

The GFFN 100 celebrates some of Cvitanich's best months as a professional footballer. One cannot help but wonder where he may have finished in terms of rankings had he only started in August where he left off in May.

'I feel at ease, I feel at home here at Nice.'

Darío Cvitanich

23rd September 2013

DID YOU KNOW? Darío Cvitanich became a father in April 2013 with a girl called Lupe. A factor in his downturn in form? Most likely not. Either way, Lupe has her own official Twitter account at the age of 1. Impressive.