

25. Franck Tabanou

Club: AS Saint Étienne

Date of Birth: 16th July 1988

Position: Midfielder



Franck Tabanou is not quite the type of player that you would first imagine when you are told to think of a winger. He is not particularly quick, nor does he have magical feet, but he remains an extremely effective force in Ligue 1, something he has proven consistently over the course of the past calendar year. He has a fantastic work rate, and will do anything to help his team, including being played out of position, which he has done with success in the past.

When defenders come up against Tabanou, they know they have to be wary. He is a creative player, and will punish defenders who are not concentrating fully. Tabanou relies on knowing exactly where to be to finish a chance, and if his marker is caught ball watching or wondering off, Tabanou will occupy the empty space immediately and look to be found by his teammates. In fact, of the 4 Ligue 1 goals he scored in the calendar year of 2013, 3 of them came from deliveries to the back post, in which he made a run across his opposite full back to finish past the goalkeeper. Tabanou is one of the cleverest player's in the French league, and will make clever runs to beat defenders rather than relying on his technical skill to pass them.

Another one of Tabanou's greatest strengths is once again something that is not often associated with a winger. Defensively, Tabanou is accomplished, and is never afraid to cover his full back when the team needs him to do so. Some wide players hate defending, and will refuse to come back and help out even when their team is already in front. Tabanou is the exact opposite – he is a workaholic who is never afraid to put his body on the line for his team, and is a real box-to-box flank midfielder. His ability to defend is a massive bonus for managers, since they know that their left flank will be well covered whenever Tabanou is playing. In fact, he is so strong at the back that he has even been used as a left back in the past when teams have been affected by injuries.

In goal scoring terms, Tabanou has had a relatively average 2013, having scored just 4 goals in Ligue 1 in the calendar year. However, his game brings much more than just goals, so perhaps that is to be expected. Even so, Tabanou's best performances have come in Europe, where, unlike in the French leagues, less focus is on pace and power, and it is a little more about guile and craft, two things which Tabanou has in abundance. In the two Europa League qualifiers that St Étienne played, Tabanou scored a goal and made an outstanding 5 assists. The foreign teams struggled to contain the hard-working Tabanou, as he made incisive pass after incisive pass. Perhaps the defenders did not quite realise how different Tabanou's playing style was to some other wingers.

However, that is not to say that Tabanou has poor control or skill on the ball. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Although he does not often rely on it, he definitely has the ability to pass players down the wing, as he has demonstrated on many occasions this calendar year. The most memorable moment in which Tabanou produced a moment of skill to score a goal was against Nancy earlier in 2013. He picked up the ball on the left wing, performed a series of step overs and passed his marker, and then smashed a bullet of a shot into the near post past the goalkeeper. Far from being one-dimensional, Tabanou has a technical side to his game as well.

So, then, which areas of his game can Tabanou improve? Well, to start off with 4 goals in a calendar year is not really as many as one would like from a player of Tabanou's standard playing at a club as big as St Etienne. To score more goals, which has to be his aim for this young, driven winger, he should focus on improving his shooting ability. Often, because he is so clever with the positions he takes up, he gets a lot of chances, but he really needs to up his conversion rate. If he improves his shooting, he could make the step up to the elite level of wingers.

To conclude, Tabanou has had an impressive 2013 by all accounts. Although his goal tally perhaps leaves something to be desired, his commitment is second to none, and he is invaluable to whichever team he plays in. He has shown sparks of brilliance, especially in European games, and if he can find that level consistently, 2014 could be a great year for the 25 year old Frenchman.

'At St Étienne, the formation asks me to change a lot. I had to change everything, far from my friends.'

Franck Tabanou

On a difficult transition to St Étienne- 21st December 2013

DID YOU KNOW? Franck Tabanou has represented France at U21 and U20 levels.