

22. Geoffrey Kondogbia

Club: AS Monaco

Date of Birth: 15th February 1993

Position: Midfielder



Geoffrey Kondogbia has made a quiet, conscientious start to Ligue 1 life in AS Monaco colours. Before the 2012/13 season, he had made just a handful of appearances for French club RC Lens, and was very much an unfamiliar talent. However, an opportunity arose for the youngster when Spanish club Sevilla took a gamble in acquiring him from the team nicknamed "Sang-et-Or", and what followed surprised virtually ever follower of French football.

From January of 2013 onwards, Kondogbia exploded on the La Liga scene, impressing with his level of maturity and sheer power in the deep-lying midfield role. He played in 17 out of 18 of Sevilla's La Liga games at the backend of the 2012/2013 campaign, and helped them to a respectable 9th place, bringing the club European football in the form of the Europa League. In addition, the 20 year old was critical in Sevilla's Copa del Rey run, in which they narrowly lost out to Atletico Madrid in the semi-finals.

After such a stellar season in Spain, the summer that followed was full of rumours about Kondogbia's next destination, where he would next look to prove himself. Clubs from all over Europe were after his signature, including teams like Arsenal, Juventus and Real Madrid, but he ultimately decided that to take a step forward in his career, he would have take a step back by returning to the country where it had all started: France. AS Monaco met Sevilla's release clause of around €20 million, and Kondogbia thus agreed to join Claudio Ranieri's ambitious side in their objective of qualifying for the Champions League.

However, things have not quite gone to plan for the tall Frenchman so far this season. Up until the winter break, he had only played a full 90 Ligue 1 minutes for Monaco on one occasion. Such is the talent of the squad, especially in midfield, that Kondogbia is finding it difficult to earn consistent game time. However, at just 20 years of age, with so many prosperous seasons ahead of him, he should not be overly concerned that it is taking him some months to settle in another league, with another team. Despite his lack of consistent game time, Kondogbia has provided Monaco with another midfield dimension, when he is substituted on, helping ASM to a current league position of 2nd place behind PSG.

So, what was it about Kondogbia that brought him to the attention of so many top European sides in summer? Standing at 6 ft 2 inches and already of a monstrous build, Kondogbia has a very dominating physical presence in defensive midfield. His height helps him win the aerial battles, which are becoming increasingly vital in a league that relies on brute force in defence, and also enables him to be a threat in the opposition box during set pieces.

Kondogbia's best asset is by far his ability to break up play. Using his strength, he is often able to muscle lighter attacking midfielders off the ball. If he needs to, he will make a sliding challenge, but this is somewhat of a rare occurrence, such is Kondogbia's strength on his feet. He is one of those players that opposing midfielders must hate coming up against, as they know they will not get away without taking a physical hit of some sort from the towering defensive midfielder.

While Kondogbia has the defensive framework that gives him the necessary grounding as a defensive midfielder, those characteristics alone were not enough to make him the distinguished player that he was in Spain. The way in which Kondogbia is able to distribute the ball gave Sevilla and gives Monaco a root where their attacks can begin. When he picks up the ball with space to run into in midfield, he will stride into it right away. His powerful runs, akin to those made by Yaya Touré in the Premier League, are often explosive. His game is, in essence, is so well rounded that he is becoming the midfield powerhouse that was so sought after in the summer.

Geoffrey Kondogbia's decision-making in the final third does however often let him down. When he played for Sevilla during the 2012/13 season, his runs often put him in a position in which he was leading his team's attack, with options either side of him. However, in these types of situations, he often choses the wrong option, whether that is to continue himself or just picking out the wrong pass. Having said that, decision-making often comes with experience, and for a player who is just 20 years old, and with only one full season in a top European League under his belt, he has ample time to rectify that. If he pays attention to the attack-minded players in Monaco in training, he will certainly pick up some useful tips.

Overall, Geoffrey Kondogbia is one of the most promising youngsters in Ligue 1 at the moment. He already has strengths in his game that certain older players in his position will never possess, and if he continues to develop at the rate that he did in 2013, we could have a very special talent on our hands.

'I don't think I realised how difficult the transition would be at the age of 20.'

Geoffrey Kondogbia

30th November 2013

#GFFN recommends: @mattspiro: France based football writer who is responsible for worldwide Ligue 1 coverage and has played an essential role in widening the Ligue 1 audience.