94. Fethi Harek

<u>Club</u>: SC Bastia
<u>Date of Birth</u>: 21st October 1981
<u>Position</u>: Defender

As the 2011/12 season drew to a close, Fethi Harek looked back with pride. His Bastia side had managed to gain a historic promotion to Ligue 1, and Harek had played 36 of their 38 league games. However, the nippy Algerian was more interested in looking ahead, rather than dwelling on the past. Harek had yet to play at Ligue 1 level, and he knew he had to prepare himself for the challenge ahead. Many thought he simply wasn't good enough to succeed at Ligue 1 level, but Harek, as ever, managed to prove his critics wrong.

At 32 years of age and standing at around 5 ft 7, Harek has had to be disciplined in his physical conditioning without having a towering frame; a trait that is becoming more and more necessary for a Ligue 1 defender, be it as a full back or otherwise, to possess. There are however certain benefits that come with the extended football experience that Harek has gathered as well as remaining at the same club for 6 straight seasons.

Harek has a wealth of football know-how at his disposal, which is set to play a key part in his game as he ages and nears the latter stages of his career. Harek is best compared with one of those yapping dogs that refuses to cease until the 90 minutes are up. The player's relentlessness and alertness match after match provide Bastia with an attacking spark as well as a committed full back.

His reflexes encourage Harek to attempt ambitious interceptions which, when they come off, look indeed impressive but at other times, he can look exposed. Despite his vast experience the player is not appear terribly authoritative or interested in instructing his teammates on the pitch. On a personal level however, Harek's proficiency enables him to remain solid down that left hand side throughout the 90 minutes. In fact, last season 9 out of 13 of Bastia's wins last season were by a solitary goal, and it is in these situations where Harek has excelled.

Another strength of Harek's game is that he is a very versatile player. In 2013, he was used as a left back as well as a centre back, and he is relatively comfortable in both positions. This makes him a very useful member of any squad for a manager, because he can cover for injuries by simply shifting Harek into the required position, and is one of the reasons why he continues to be a success at Ligue 1 level well into his 30s. It is quite clear, though, that Harek is more comfortable at left back than centre back. As a left back, being 5ft 7 tall is not so much of a problem. However, as a centre back, a position in which dealing with crosses is one of your main priorities, it can be a serious disadvantage to be so small, and occasionally Harek can struggle in this position.

Although his experience and positioning does save him to some extent, the combination of his age and lack of height makes it difficult for Harek to truly succeed in the position. In fact, in the 6 games that Harek has stated at centre back this season, Bastia have won only 1 game, keeping just 1 clean sheet.

Stability is achieved in the top leagues with players who have been there and done it all before, and one major reason why Bastia are starting to stabilise is because they have a handful of these players Landreau, Squillaci and Harek himself to name but a few. With this strong base of experienced defensive players, Bastia are looking to become a mainstay Ligue 1 side for years to come.

In 2013, Fethi Harek has showed us that, although time is passing by and he is growing older, he still has a part to play in his football career at the highest level, and there is no reason to suggest that 2014 cannot be just as successful a year for the Algerian.

> *'I am not surprised, but I am delighted and proud to be wearing the national shirt again.'*
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> Fethi Harek
> On being selected for Algeria again-
> 9th September 2013

DID YOU KNOW? Fethi Harek was a keen basketball player but switched to football because the local pitch was closer to his house than the basketball court! Talk about being lazy…