

## 92. Papy Dijlobodji

Club: FC Nantes

Date of Birth: 12th January 1988

Position: Defender

One of the secrets to FC Nantes' formidable start to the season is the fact that the majority of the team have been with the club for a number of years. There was no splurging on lots of new players or vast overhaul of the squad, just a couple of carefully targeted recruits brought into reinforce the squad to contend with the rigours of Ligue 1. This could be because the club was trying to be financially prudent and not wanting to repeat the folly of the 2008/2009 season.

One such player who has spent much of the four previous seasons schlepping around France's less salubrious outposts wearing the yellow and green is Senegalese defender Papy Dijlobodji. Dijlobodji is an all-action central defender who has been attracting a serious amount of interest from other clubs who are looking to poach him away from Les Canaris. He recently turned 25 and, as such, would be expected to shortly enter the traditional prime of his career. He has also been recently capped for the first time by the Senegal national team, a personal achievement the player admitted to be immensely proud of.

It is safe to say that Dijlobodji has formed an integral part of the way that FC Nantes play. The spine of the team of Rémy Riou, Dijlobodji, Lucas Deaux and Filip Djordjevic is rarely tampered with by coach Der Zakarian and this is testament to the Senegalese international's wonderful consistency.

This season he has more often than not been partnered in central defence with a new recruit, the Venezuelan Oswaldo Vizcarondo. This partnership has rapidly blossomed, FC Nantes currently have the fourth best defensive record in Ligue 1 (2013/2014). They have notched up eight clean sheets and seem to complement each other well. With the ease at which the partnership was formed, Vizcarondo an improvement on his Venezuelan compatriot Gabriel Cichero, who Dijlobodji played alongside in Ligue 2 last season, has given Nantes an assured basis on which to rely on. A solid defence being imperative as Ligue 1 new-boys.

Dijlobodji is no stranger to the tackle and has made on average two per match this season. However, these tackles have led to the award of one foul per game against the Senegalese defender.



Naturally, with statistics like that, discipline may be considered an issue in Dijlobodji's game. He has picked up 4 yellow cards and 1 red card so far this season. Last season in Ligue 2 he picked up two yellows and one red, but this is probably more indicative of Nantes' differing game-plan in the respective leagues. In Ligue 2, opposition teams tended not to attack Nantes as much, thus Dijlobodji was not called upon to make as many tackles. Whereas, in Ligue 1 FC Nantes have tended to cede possession to their opposition and rely on their efficiency in front of goal. Thus there has been an increased onus on Dijlobodji and the Nantes defence to keep attackers at bay. There is, of course, the occasionally eyebrow-raising nature of Ligue 1 refereeing to consider as well.

Dijlobodji is particularly strong in the air: he has won 82% of his aerial duels this season; hardly surprising given his physical stature: Dijlobodji stands at 193cm (6 ft 3) tall. He is certainly physically imposing and one of the improvements that he has made in the last eighteen months is using this physicality more wisely.

He is certainly no longer quite as octopus-like, before he tended to be all arms and legs. One incident in particular stands out, when, in a game with Boulogne-sur-Mer in early 2012 when he committed something akin to a rugby tackle gifting a penalty and an opportunity to get back into the game. These rather unsavoury characteristics have been eradicated from the player's game. The Dijlobodji of 2013 is a much-changed defender.

Another pleasant surprise this season has been the three goals that Dijlobodji has to his name in nineteen league games. He possesses a fearsome shot, evidenced by his pile-driver that gave FC Nantes a glimmer of hope of 3 points in a recent home game against Toulouse. He was also the player that caused Alex to put the ball past his own keeper in the Nantes/PSG game in August.

Dijlobodji has perhaps come of age in 2013 as he looks increasingly at home in France's top flight, his performances throughout 2013 will have unsurprisingly attracted suitors within France and abroad. It's fair to say that Papy may well have decisions to make come the summer; if not sooner.

*'I have seldom seen a defender with this good a left and right foot.'*

Yaya Touré

On Papy Dijlobodji - 27th December 2013

**Quotes of the Year: Salomon Kalou:** "Nowadays, all I need is one chance and I will score."  
*The Lille forward was not short of confidence upon his return from the 2013 African Cup of Nations.*