

## 31. Giannelli Imbula

Club: Olympique de Marseille

Date of Birth: 12th September 1992

Position: Midfielder

21 year old defensive midfielder Giannelli Imbula burst onto the scene in 2013, and his talent and prowess has been noted by some of Europe's most high profile personalities including Chelsea manager José Mourinho. The Belgian-born young man of Congolese descent broke onto the Ligue 1 scene for the first time this summer after making the switch from newly promoted outfit EA Guingamp to join French footballing giants known as none other than Olympique de Marseille.

Marseille pursued a summer transfer window policy that was based around acquiring some of French football's roughest diamonds, French youngsters with enormous potential in order to build their squad for the long-term. The other advantage that comes with pursuing such a policy is the fact that generally-speaking, Marseille will eventually sell the likes of Florian Thauvin and Giannelli Imbula for a much larger fee than for what they had initially paid for them, which gives these investments added value because of their potential in terms of financial lucrativeness. In July of 2013, Marseille got their holding midfielder for a fee of just €7m including bonuses.

So what exactly had Imbula achieved in the build up to the summer transfer window which made this move happen in the first place? The left-footed midfielder played an instrumental role in Guingamp's eventual promotion in May of 2013 to the French top flight, 9 years after they had been relegated from Ligue 1 previously. As one can imagine, being held responsible for such success earned Imbula the instant adoration of the Guingampais faithful. Over the 2012-2013 season, Imbula protected a slow and ageing back four whilst also providing consistent attacking options through his bountiful forwards at pace. This combination of talent in both offensive and defensive areas of the game paints a suitable picture of Imbula's vast and seemingly limitless skill set.

Imbula of course possesses the necessary build, incisiveness in the tackle, change of acceleration and fitness to carry out his holding midfield duties without any great deal of trouble on most occasions. In fact, Ligue 2 became so unchallenging at times for Imbula that he was encouraged to assume more advanced central roles. So much so, that he is now equally as comfortable playing behind a striker and flanked by a pair of wingers as he is in the holding role he has typically played in since arriving at OM over the summer.



Furthermore, it appears as if the only ball that Imbula is comfortable and assured with playing is predominantly short passes to teammates immediately ahead of him. He seldom attempts to play balls over the top, in part down to Marseille's game style but also because of a self-admitted lack of confidence on his part. In terms of the short passing he engages in, when distributing to the flanks especially, the balls he provides are often too far behind his colleagues who have already set off on a surging run. Communication issues are however easily sorted and are characteristic for a youngster who only recently arrived at a new club.

Imbula's jinking and direct style of running is often topped off by the vicious shot that he possesses in his locker which he has been seen to unleash from outside the area on multiple occasions over the course of the calendar year. Although he has only scored three times in Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 collectively in 2013, his goals against Le Havre and Arles Avignon left many salivating. In both cases, Imbula dribbled some way before releasing the final product.

Another final cause for joy for Les Marseillais faithful is that Imbula tends to give his best performances in the big games- he notably impressed during his Champions League debut vs Arsenal in October and L'OM only really lost control of the game once manager Elie Baup had made the decision to bring Imbula off the field of play.

In order to continue his rapid rate of progression, Imbula must ensure that he is not sidelined by the likes of Cheyrou or Lemina for that second defensive midfield spot alongside Alaixys Romao in 2014. He won the UNFP Ligue 2 Player of the Year Award in 2013, what can he win in 2014?

*'Truthfully, I had advanced talks with Chelsea. I didn't see myself over there. To do what? It was too early.'*

*Giannelli Imbula*

28th November 2013

**DID YOU KNOW?** Giannelli Imbula has even offered up to play for the Marseille U19's side since joining OM, just so that he can play competitive matches.