

2019/2020



**LIGUE 1
SEASON GUIDE**

Even with the usual mass exodus of talent from Ligue 1 this summer, and the will he-won't he Neymar situation, there remains plenty of reason for optimism over the upcoming campaign. Paris Saint-Germain have for once bought like a club interested in building a team rather than a collection of superstars, bringing in a mix of players who may not catch the eye to the level that past signings have but who may end up being the catalyst for the side to achieve success in Europe (and yes, likely win the league at a canter).

Beyond the capital, though, there are other reasons for optimism, as Monaco have addressed their needs in an intelligent fashion in adding the likes of Benjamin Lecomte, Ruben Aguilar and making Gelson Martins present. Marseille have finally signed a striker in Argentina's Dario Benedetto; the former Boca Juniors man may not be the instant success that Mario Balotelli was, but he's a player whose cognizance of the club's history and passion fan base should make him a firm favourite at the Velodrome sooner than later.

The two southern clubs will be firmly in the mix for the Champions League alongside Lyon, who have done well to replace the departed pair of Tanguy N'Dombélé and Ferland Mendy with Youssef Koné and Thiago Mendes. The Brazilian midfielder Jean Lucas and the defender Joachim Andersen have also arrived, meaning Les Gones could be a better side than last year's edition, driven by new manager Sylvinho.

Saint-Étienne will also have a new face on the bench in Ghislain Printant, whose squad looks similar to last year; Les Verts will be in the mix for the top six as they seek to balance the rigours of the Europa League with their domestic ambitions. It remains to be seen how the unlikely European pair of Rennes and Strasbourg balance their own fixture list, but the pair have also done well in the summer, underscoring the general raised level of ambition in Ligue 1.

Bordeaux have been unambitious despite their acquisition by American investors, although the return of Laurent Koscielny is a welcome one. Nice are also set to be under new ownership, but have done even less in the market, and look to be as parsimonious as peak Mike Ashley, potentially alienating Patrick Vieira, whose work last season was nothing short of miraculous.

Reims, Montpellier, and Lille, three of last season's surprise packages, will all have likely taken a step back owing to relatively one-way traffic in the transfer market. Lille have spent to replace the players who have left but it remains to be seen how the new arrivals adjust to life in France, whereas the first two have major question marks in goal.

Further down the table, the bottom three could be any of half-dozen clubs, as the likes of Amiens and Nantes, so reliant on their managers' inimitable styles, could be in for a long season. The two promoted sides, Metz and Brest, are no strangers to the top flight, but it would be foolish to think that either can capture the imagination as Nîmes and Reims had last season.

All told, though, France's combination of young players being presented with opportunities and a diverse range of styles of play should again make Ligue 1 of Europe's most engaging divisions; all that's left for you to do is read on and enjoy the season!

--Eric Devin

Chief Features Writer, Get French Football News

*All squad information and player ages correct as of 7 August, 2019



AMIENS SC

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	15th	38
2017/2018	Ligue 1	13th	45
2016/2017	Ligue 2	2nd	66
2015/2016	National	3rd	55
2014/2015	National	11th	41

KEY MAN: MOUSSA KONATÉ

Amiens' survival last season had little to do with their attack; only Nice and the relegated sides scored fewer goals. Much of that could have been put down, to the lengthy absence of Konaté, who had scored 13 goals in 2017/18 after becoming the club's record signing. Last season he was only able to feature in a handful of matches and seemed to struggle even when fit. Having been with Senegal at the Africa Cup of Nations, he will need a few weeks to get back up to full fitness. If he can come close to matching his figures of two seasons ago, Amiens have a fighting chance of avoiding the drop. Bearing that in mind, it's unclear how Konaté and Serhou Guirassy will play together tactically.

AMIENS SC

SIGNING TO WATCH: SERHOU GUIRASSY, FC KÖLN

Guirassy is one of a number of French youth internationals of late who had sought greener pastures in Germany. However, his time there was less than successful; he returned to France with Amiens, initially on loan before a permanent move. Lanky and powerful but deceptively quick, Guirassy has never been one to fill the net, but he demonstrated flashes of poacher-esque nous. His primary strength is his aerial ability; how that dovetails with Konaté remains to be seen. The two played together last season in a diamond 4-4-2, but without a suitable number ten, that could be a dead end. If new manager Luka Elsner can get Guirassy and Konaté on the same page, Amiens could become a difficult prospect owing to their sheer physicality in attack.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

Amiens have been one of Ligue 1's least active clubs in the transfer market, opting mostly to make a raft of players who had been on loan last season permanent signings. The wisdom of that strategy shows quite a bit of hubris on the part of new manager Elsner, a 37 year-old who spent last season in Belgium having previously impressed in his native Slovenia. The club brought in the young tactician after a protracted search and he looks to be firmly invested in stability, having obviously seen from Christophe Pelissier's squad that continuity would be the best approach. Whether that wisdom pans out or not is another story; Pelissier's time with the club was nigh on miraculous in what he achieved and it's hard to see Elsner following in his footsteps, given that Dijon and promoted side Metz look to have done far better in the summer window. While Amiens could yet surprise, safety would be an achievement; relegation may have only been avoided last season owing to the ineptitude of Caen and Guingamp.

STRENGTHS:

The return of defensive midfielder Bongani Zungu will be a boost to Amiens; the South African international impressed at the Africa Cup of Nations and looks motivated to claim his place at the base of a 4-3-3. Thomas Monconduit is back, and the loans of Alexis Blin and Eddy Gnahoré have been made permanent, meaning that once more, an experienced and composed midfield will often give Amiens a puncher's chance. Régis Gurtner's form took a tumble in the early part of the season, but the veteran recovered well and should be an asset once more.

WEAKNESSES:

Injuries last campaign to Konaté, as well as Zungu and Saman Ghoddos mean that Amiens could expect a bit more from their squad as currently assembled, but the club's attack is severely lacking. Spending a lavish club record €6m for Guirassy was necessary for a side so poor in attack last season, but on its own will likely prove insufficient. Defence could also be a concern, as while Prince Gouano and one of Bakaye Dibassy and Jordan Lefort are a decent partnership, there is little depth with Khaled Adenon and Oualid El Hajjam having moved elsewhere.

VERDICT:

New manager Elsner is young and has little experience, but more critically lacks first-hand knowledge of the French league. Where Pelissier's guile might have been enough for the Picardy side last year, a defence that shipped so many goals, combined with no real reinforcements in any part of the pitch could make this season a very long one at the Stade de la Licorne.

PREDICTED FINISH: 19th



AMIENS

SC

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Régis Gurtner	GK	French	32	2015/2016	Le Havre
Matthieu Dreyer	GK	French	30	2018/2019	SM Caen
Prince Gouano	CB	French	25	2017/2018	Atalanta
Jordan Lefort	CB/LB	French	25	2013/2014	-
Haitam Aleesami	LB	Norwegian	28	2019/2020	Palermo
Mathieu Bodmer	CB/DM	French	36	2017/2018	EA Guingamp
Bakaye Dibassy	LB/CB	Malian	29	2016/2017	Sedan
Sanasi Sy	LB	French	19	2019/2020	-
Christophe Jallet	RB	French	35	2019/2020	OGC Nice
Emil Krafth	RB	Swedish	25	2018/2019	Bologna
Valentin Gendrey	RB	French	19	2019/2020	-
Bongani Zungu	CM/DM	South African	26	2017/2018	V. Guimarães
Thomas Monconduit	CM	French	27	2015/2016	AJ Auxerre
Eddy Gnahoré	CM	French	25	2018/2019	Palermo
Alexis Blin	CM	French	22	2018/2019	Toulouse
Mahdi Talal	CM/AM	French	21	2017/2018	Angers
Ulrick Eneme Ella	AM	French	18	2019/2020	Liekerfeld
Rafael Kurzawa	LW	Polish	26	2018/2019	Górnik Zabrze
Stiven Mendoza	LW	Colombian	27	2017/2018	Corinthians
Jayson Papeau	AM	French	23	2019/2020	Sainte-Génévieve
Moussa Konaté	ST	Senegalese	26	2017/2018	Sion
Juan Ferney Otero	ST/LW	Colombian	23	2018/2019	Estudiantes
Quentin Cornette	RW	French	25	2016/2017	Montpellier
Chadrac Akolo	AM/ST	DR Congolese	24	2019/2020	VFB Stuttgart
Saman Ghoddos	RW/AM	Iranian	25	2018/2019	Östersunds
Serhou Guirassy	ST	French	23	2018/2018	FC Köln
Cheick Timité	ST	Ivorian	21	2018/2019	-
Yannick Mamilonne	ST	Guadeloupean	27	2016/2017	AS Poissy
Luka Elsner	Manager	Slovenian	37	2019/2020	Saint-Gilloise
Bernard Joannin	President	French	66	2011/2012	-



ANGERS SCO

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	13th	46
2017/2018	Ligue 1	14th	41
2016/2017	Ligue 1	12th	46
2015/2016	Ligue 1	9th	50
2014/2015	Ligue 2	3rd	64

KEY MAN: JEFF REINE-ADÉLAÏDE

After flattering to deceive for the early part of the season, Reine-Adélaïde was a force to be reckoned with when played in a centrally in the latter weeks of the campaign. He subsequently turned that form into a recall for France's U-21s and was one of Les Espoirs' bright spots in Italy. With Flavien Tait sold to Rennes, the expectation will squarely be on Reine-Adélaïde to continue to perform at a high level, with the additions of Sada Thioub and Rachid Alioui being seen as complementary pieces to his role in attacking mid-field. If Reine-Adélaïde can continue his stylish play through this campaign, survival will be in reach, but the team might suffer if he shows the same lack of end product that he had in 2018.

ANGERS SCO

SIGNING TO WATCH: SADA THIOUB, NÎMES

Nîmes, one of Ligue 1's most effervescent sides last year, have been torn apart by the departures of Téji Savanier and Denis Bouanga, but might Les Crocos come to miss Thioub more? His place in the side came under fire for a large stretch of last season, but his form was enough to see him earn a place in the Senegal side in the Africa Cup of Nations. A pacy and direct winger who is somewhat lacking in end product, as well as defensive effort, Thioub may seem a strange acquisition for Angers given their parsimonious play, but with the departure of Tait, Angers are sorely lacking in width and pace, two things which Thioub has in spades, a tactical reality which could help open up space in attacking areas for Reine-Adélaïde.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

The impact of the departure of Tait, an unheralded attacking presence who has been quietly one of France's best for several seasons, cannot be understated. However, there is a quiet hope that in the arrivals of Thioub and Portuguese youth international Mathias Pereira Lage that manager Stéphane Moulin can once again turn on his water-into-wine attacking magic as he previously had with Karl Toko Ekambi and more recently Stéphane Bahoken. Midfield seems to lack a bit of depth, as do the full-back positions, but the progression of both Rayan Aït Nouri and Lassana Coulibaly, back from a loan spell with Rangers, could be equally be key, as will an increased role for Angelo Fulgini. The aerial ability and leadership of Cheikh N'Doye will also be hard to replace, but once would be unwise to bet against Moulin and what is largely a veteran squad on the back of an impressively attritional campaign (no side recorded more draws than Angers' 16 last season). Survival should be comfortably achieved, albeit with no great style.

STRENGTHS:

As it was in years previous, Ligue 1's longest-tenured manager, Moulin, will be a steady hand, playing his brand of needs-must football. The team's front six will be effective, and Reine-Adélaïde could be the league's breakout star. Baptiste Santamaria, Fulgini and the veteran Thomas Mangani will offer balance in a midfield that will offer more creativity to replace that lost by the departure of Tait. Ludovic Butelle returns in goal, but will face competition from Montenegro international Danijel Petkovic, an improvement on that position's depth.

WEAKNESSES:

Bahoken delivered 11 goals last season, but that number, despite being a decent return, belies his effectiveness in other phases of play. He will face competition from Rachid Alioui, who failed to pull up any trees with Nîmes last season; it is not difficult to imagine Angers struggling badly for goals without Tait's attacking flair. In defence, Moulin will again rely on the ageing pair of Romain Thomas and Ismaël Traoré. No longer the imperious partnership of a few seasons ago, they could yet be a liability in a league in which pace has come to the fore.

VERDICT:

While the attack may flatter to deceive, Moulin's gifts for both organisation and the potential on show in the form of Reine-Adélaïde ought to be enough to see Le SCO avoid the drop. Much of that is more an indictment of the sides below them than any comment on their quality but it ought, nevertheless, to see them in good stead.

PREDICTED FINISH: 14th



ANGERS

SCO

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Danijel Petkovic	GK	Montenegrin	26	2019/2020	Lorient
Ludovic Butelle	GK	French	36	2017/2018	Club Brugge
Anthony Mandrea	GK	French	22	2017/2018	-
Romain Thomas	CB	French	31	2013/2014	Carquefou
Ismaël Traoré	CB	Ivorian	32	2015/2016	Stade Brestois
Mateo Pavlovic	CB	Croatian	29	2016/2017	Werder Bremen
Ibrahim Cissé	CB	French	23	2018/2019	Tours
Théo Pellenard	LB	French	25	2018/2019	Bordeaux
Saliou Ciss	LB	Senegalese	29	2017/2018	Valenciennes
Rayan Aït Nouri	LB	French	18	2018/2019	-
Vincent Manceau	RB	French	30	2008/2009	-
Abdoulaye Bamba	RB	Ivorian	29	2016/2017	Dijon FCO
Baptiste Santamaria	CM/DM	French	24	2016/2017	Tours
Anthony Mancini	DM	French	18	2019/2020	-
Vincent Pajot	CM/DM	French	28	2018/2019	Saint-Étienne
Thomas Mangani	CM	French	32	2015/2016	Chievo Verona
Lassana Coulibaly	CM	Malian	23	2017/2018	SC Bastia
Angelo Fulgini	CM/RM	French	22	2017/2018	Valenciennes
Jeff Reine-Adélaïde	RW/AM	French	21	2018/2019	Arsenal
Pierrick Capelle	LW/RW/LB	French	32	2015/2016	Clermont
Sada Thioub	RW	Senegalese	24	2019/2020	Nîmes
Mathias Pereira Lage	AM	Portuguese	22	2019/2020	Clermont
Farid El Melali	RW	Algerian	22	2018/2019	Paradou
Rachid Alioui	ST	Moroccan	27	2019/2020	Nîmes
Cristian López	CF	Spanish	30	2018/2019	RC Lens
Stéphane Bahoken	CF	Cameroonian	27	2018/2019	RC Strasbourg
Wilfried Kanga	CF	French	21	2017/2018	Paris SG
Stéphane Moulin	Manager	French	51	2011/2012	SO Chatellerault
Saïd Chabane	President	Algerian	54	2011/2012	-



GIRONDINS DE BORDEAUX

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	14th	41
2017/2018	Ligue 1	6th	55
2016/2017	Ligue 1	6th	59
2015/2016	Ligue 1	11th	50
2014/2015	Ligue 1	6th	63

KEY MAN: NICOLAS DE PREVILLE

De Prévile, an incandescent presence at Reims, often found it hard to get a game last season. A victim of both the form of François Kamano and the tactical vagaries of Ricardo and Paulo Sousa, to say that he underachieved would be fair, given the talent he has. The pre-season has looked bright for De Prévile, however, and he seems to be brimming with confidence. Exactly how he fits into Sousa's system will depend on how the Portuguese sets out his stall, but in a team that looks likely to be once more starved of goals, a player whose mercurial talent could make the difference in a tight match will make himself indispensable no matter his position on the pitch.

GIRONDINS DE BORDEAUX

SIGNING TO WATCH: LOAN RETURNEES

Bordeaux have been quiet in the summer market. Whilst the likes of Enock Kwateng and Mexer look like canny signings, there is also a raft of loan returnees who look eager to make a mark under Paulo Sousa. Valentín Vada, so impressive in 2016/17, is back from Saint-Étienne, while fellow midfielder Daniel Mancini featured for Auxerre in Ligue 2 last season. Bordeaux were starved of much creative intent in 2018/19, with Younousse Sankharé often played the furthest forward in midfield. The results showed in the table; Bordeaux had one of the league's poorest attacks, despite a trio of accomplished attackers. Should either of Vada or Mancini be able to exert their creative influence, Bordeaux can hope for a move up the table.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

The losses of Jules Koundé and Zaydou Youssouf will sting, running as they seemingly do counter to a policy of fostering the team's academy products. In their place, the club have brought in a number of prospects, most notably Yacine Adli and Josh Maja. These, combined with the still young Enock Kwateng and the aforementioned loan returnees, mean that this is a side in flux. There is clearly a great deal of potential here; Adli and academy product Yassine Benrahou have both looked sharp in pre-season friendlies and Bordeaux should play more directly as a result. However, questions remain over Sousa's tactical philosophy and whether this side has enough goals in it, with Jimmy Briand no younger. Nicolas De Préville has looked motivated in pre-season and could yet make a difference, but there are simply too many unknowns to be confident about Les Girondins' prospects, even with the arrival of Laurent Koscielny.

STRENGTHS:

Benoît Costil remains a stalwart in goal, and Pablo has emerged as one of France's better centre backs; he, Koscielny and Mexer could be key in instilling confidence in the club's attacking players. The full-backs, Youssouf Sabaly, Maxime Poudjé and Kwateng, are all capable going forward but can be derelict defensively. In midfield, Ótávio and Toma Basic both seemed to grow in confidence as the season wore on and should yet be more influential, but realistically, there is not much about which one can be avowedly positive surrounding this side.

WEAKNESSES:

A lack of a proven striker remains worrisome; Briand will be 35 before season's end and De Préville is not really a pure centre forward. Maja could be an answer here but has looked very raw. There is also a lack of depth at goalkeeper and in central defence, with Jérôme Prior having departed; Laurent Koscielny's arrival bring experience and a fantastic professional, but his age and injury woes do not go a long way towards assuaging these concerns; the sale of Koundé without much in the way of incoming transfers speaks to a worrying paucity of ambition.

VERDICT:

Bordeaux have looked sharper than many might have thought in pre-season, but they still seem far away from challenging for Europe. A deep run in one of the cups is realistically the best this side can hope for as they begin the process of renewing a side that had grown too tepid and cautious in recent seasons.

PREDICTED FINISH: 11th



GIRONDINS DE BORDEAUX

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Benoît Costil	GK	French	31	2017/2018	Rennes
Gaëtan Poussin	GK	French	19	2017/2018	-
Laurent Koscielny	CB	French	33	2019/2020	Arsenal
Mexer	CB	Mozambiquan	30	2019/2020	Rennes
Vukasin Jovanovic	CB	Serbian	23	2017/2018	Zenit S. Petersburg
Pablo	CB	Brazilian	28	2015/2016	Ponte Preta
Paul Bayse	CB	French	31	2017/2018	Malaga
Enock Kwateng	CB/RB	French	22	2019/2020	FC Nantes
Maxime Poudjé	LB	French	26	2011/2012	-
Loris Benito	LB	Swiss	27	2019/2020	Young Boys
Youssef Sabaly	RB/LB	Senegalese	26	2017/2018	Paris S-G
Raul Bellanova	RB	Italian	19	2018/2019	AC Milan
Otávio	DM	Brazilian	25	2017/2018	Atlético Paranaense
Albert Lottin	DM	French	17	2018/2019	-
Younousse Sankharé	CM	Senegalese	29	2016/2017	Lille OSC
Valentin Vada	CM/AM	Argentine	23	2014/2015	-
Toma Basic	CM	Croatian	22	2018/2019	Hadjuk Split
Aurélien Tchouameni	CM	French	19	2018/2019	-
Daniel Mancini	RM/AM	Argentine	22	2016/2017	Newell's Old Boys
François Kamano	LW	Guinean	23	2016/2017	SC Bastia
Samuel Kalu	RW	Nigerian	21	2018/2019	KAA Gent
Jonathan Cafú	RW	Brazilian	28	2017/2018	Ludogorets
Yacine Adli	AM	French	19	2018/2019	Paris S-G
Nicolas de Préville	CF/LW	French	28	2017/2018	Lille OSC
Yassine Benrahou	AM	French	20	2014/2015	-
Alexandre Mendy	CF	French	24	2017/2018	EA Guingamp
Josh Maja	CF	English	20	2018/2019	Sunderland
Ui-Jo Hwang	CF	Korean	26	2019/2020	Gamba Osaka
Paulo Sousa	Manager	Portuguese	48	2018/2019	TJ Quanjian
Frédéric Longuepee	President	French	53	2018/2019	Paris 2024



STADE BREST 29

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 2	2nd	74
2017/2018	Ligue 2	5th	65
2016/2017	Ligue 2	5th	65
2015/2016	Ligue 2	10th	47
2014/2015	Ligue 2	6th	57

KEY MAN: GAETAN CHARBONNIER

Aside from a certain Kylian Mbappé, no one in French professional football scored more goals than Charbonnier's 27 last season, the former Angers man leading Brest to promotion as part of the league's best attack. Now, of course, comes the hard part — this will be Charbonnier's fifth season in the top flight after spells with Montpellier and Reims, and he has never scored more than six goals in a Ligue 1 season. Likely to again be a lone centre forward no matter new manager Olivier Dall'Oglio's tactics, it could be a long season for both the player and the club if he proves unable to come close to replicating that sort of scoring form. More than just a target man, seeking to involve his teammates as well.

STADE BREST 29

SIGNING TO WATCH: ROMAIN PERRAUD, OGC NICE

Perraud won't make the difference between safety and relegation for Brest, but he might be one of the year's breakout stars after signing from Nice, having impressed with Paris FC. A part of the same 2016 U-19 European Championship-winning side that boasted Kylian Mbappé, Perraud's development with Nice's reserves has been a slow burn, but he already looks a complete full-back. Rapid and good with the ball at his feet, he also demonstrates physicality and sound defensive awareness, traits that will be key if Brest are to improve upon last year's defensive record. While this campaign might only be a stop on the way to bigger and better things for the youngster, he may end up being one of a very few reasons to watch the Breton side.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

Players like Mathias Autret and Yoann Court were able to help Charbonnier shoulder the scoring load last year, but they have also played in Ligue 1 before to no great effect, meaning that despite replacing Jean-Marc Furlan with the similarly attack-minded Dall'Oglio, the results may be somewhat harder to stomach. Brest should be commended, at least, for bringing in younger players, with Perraud, Samuel Grandsir's loan from Monaco and making permanent their borrowing of Ibrahima Diallo bold moves. Especially for a club for whom survival, if it is achieved at all, will only likely be done by the thinnest of margins. However, to place so much faith in youth seems foolhardy and so, perhaps cynically, the club are hoping to profit financially from a rare season in the top flight. The defence, far from being one of Ligue 2's best last season, will remain largely unchanged, with former Le Havre centre back Denys Bain having replaced Anthony Weber. It's difficult to see Bain making much of a difference.

STRENGTHS:

Young goalkeeper Gautier Larssonneur was inarguably one of Ligue 2's best last season and while he will no doubt be tested on another scale this campaign, his skills look as likely as anything to keep Brest in matches. The midfield three of Autret, Court, and N'Goma will play some eye-catching football; the question is whether that alone will be sufficient to battle effectively against relegation. Despite some canny movement in the transfer market, it is hard to point to much in this side that inspires confidence.

WEAKNESSES:

Brest seem to have been in two minds with their transfer strategy; Perraud and Diallo have ideal profiles vis-à-vis their sell-on value, but it's difficult to reconcile their supposed ambition with the signing of a player like Ludovic Baal. Given Dall'Oglio's well-known penchant for attacking football, it doesn't seem that the club's hierarchy are shopping with their manager in mind. If results are poor from the off, it could be a long and painful campaign. Their lack of strategic coherence and top flight experience are clear red flags in terms of achieving safety.

VERDICT:

Dall'Oglio will no doubt put forward an entertaining team, but the defence remains worrisome. They have impressed in their friendlies to date, but it's hard to imagine Brest achieving anything higher than maybe 17th, with automatic relegation a far more likely outcome.

PREDICTED FINISH: 20th



STADE BREST 29

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Gautier Larssonneur	GK	French	22	2017/2018	-
Julien Fabri	GK	French	25	2017/2018	Marseille
Donovan Léon	GK	Guyanese	26	2015/2016	-
Denys Bain	CB	French	26	2019/2020	Le Havre
Jean-Charles Castelletto	CB	Cameroonian	24	2017/2018	FC Brugge
Brendan Chardonnet	CB	French	24	2014/2015	-
Romain Perraud	LB	French	21	2019/2020	OGC Nice
David Kiki	LB	Beninese	25	2017/2018	Niort
Ludovic Baal	LB	Guyanese	33	2019/2020	Rennes
Gaëtan Belaud	RB	French	32	2014/2015	Stade Laval
Hiang'a Mbock	CM	French	19	2019/2020	-
Ibrahima Diallo	CM/DM	French	20	2019/2020	AS Monaco
Cristian Battocchio	CM	Italian	27	2018/2019	M. Tel Aviv
Haris Belkebla	CM	Algerian	25	2018/2019	Tours
Ferris N'Goma	CM	French	26	2018/2019	Orléans
Hugo Magnetti	CM	French	21	2018/2019	-
Samuel Grandsir	RW	French	22	2019/2020	AS Monaco
Julien Faussurier	RM	French	32	2016/2017	Sochaux
Yoann Court	LW	French	29	2018/2019	Bourg-en-Bresse
Mathias Autret	AM/CM	French	28	2017/2018	RC Lens
Gaëtan Charbonnier	CF	Haitian	30	2017/2018	Stade de Reims
Kévin Mayi	CF	French	26	2017/2018	Nijmegen
Derick Osei Yae	CF	French	20	2018/2019	Toulouse FC
Olivier Dall'Oglio	Manager	French	55	2019/2020	Dijon FCO
Denis Le Saint	President	French	55	2016/2017	-



DIJON FCO

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	18th	34
2017/2018	Ligue 1	11th	38
2016/2017	Ligue 1	16th	37
2015/2016	Ligue 2	2nd	70
2014/2015	Ligue 2	4th	61

KEY MAN: NAÏM SLITI

Sliti has spent enough time impressing for his country and under Olivier Dall'Oglio that he should not only be an automatic first choice, but the player around whom this side is built. While he was frequently left on the bench under Antoine Kombouaré, once his delayed pre-season begins, he will become the attack's focal point under new manager Stéphane Jobard. How Jobard lines up tactically with Sliti remains to be seen given his involvement in the Africa Cup of Nations; he could feature on the left of a three, as a ten in a 4-2-3-1, or behind two strikers in a 5-2-1-2 with equal success. No matter how Jobard lines up his team, giving free reign to Sliti must be his top priority.

DIJON FCO

SIGNING TO WATCH: MAMA BALDÉ, SPORTING CLUB DE PORTUGAL

A versatile player who split time between right-back and more advanced roles on loan with Aves last season, the Guinea-Bissau international managed to finish with eight goals for a struggling side, no mean feat for a winger. A dogged presence in defence, Baldé is adept at harrying opponents and wreaking havoc with his pressing. He can be a bit selfish on the ball at times, but his end product more than justifies the means. Even though his time with his country at the Africa Cup of Nations wasn't exactly spectacular, his dynamism and pace will make the departures of Wesley Saïd and Kwon Chang-Hoon much easier to stomach as Baldé's polyvalence means he can effectively play in any number of positions on the right flank.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

Dijon look a right mess at present, their transfer business seemingly half-finished operating at a €23m profit for this window alone. They sincerely lack a reserve goalkeeper, depth at striker and full-back. Of the players that they do have, their midfield is rapidly greying, and while their defence is relatively young, Nayef Aguerd in particular seemed a bright spot, only Guingamp shipped more goals last season and Bruno Ecuele Manga on his own will hardly right that listing ship. Baldé looks set to be an upgrade on Kwon, at least in terms of end product. Mehdi Abeid was a reliable performer in central midfield, but the club hope that Didier Ndong can be motivated to become once more the player that Sunderland spent an eye-watering €15m on. The sales of Wesley Saïd and Sory Kaba seem good business given their inconsistencies, but there is more to squad building than getting good value for players, and Dijon seem primed to learn that lesson the hard way.

STRENGTHS:

Naïm Sliti and Julio Tavares did not pull up any trees last season, but at their best in the past, they are a capable pair of attacking presences and Baldé can only add to that. More than their attacking trio, though, Jobard may be an asset given that there is no "book" on his managerial style and tactical philosophy. A lack of experience in the top flight has hardly stopped the likes of David Guion and Stéphane Moulin from succeeding with meagre resources in the recent past, after all.

WEAKNESSES:

Dijon have only two recognised full-backs in their squad, Mickäel Alphonse and Fouad Chafik, and while both are competent players, they are rather limited. The sale of Wesley Saïd to Toulouse also leaves the club thin in attack; unless Jules Keita can show more consistency, this could be a far cry indeed from the free-flowing football Dijon practiced under Olivier Dall'Oglio. The team have also let the experienced deputy goalkeeper Bobby Allain walk, leaving the mistake-prone Rúnar Alex Rúnarsson with little competition.

VERDICT:

Dijon may just stay up, but the feeling of this poorly constructed side ahead of the season is painfully reminiscent of Caen last time out, being a side constructed without much planning and a young and inexperienced manager at the helm. That they've not been picked for the drop here is testament only to the lack of talent elsewhere.

PREDICTED FINISH: 18th



DIJON

FCO

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Runar Alex Rúnarsson	GK	Icelandic	24	2018/2019	Nordsjaelland
Lévi Ntumba	GK	French	18	2018/2019	-
Bruno Ecuele Manga	CB	Gabonese	31	2019/2020	Cardiff City
Théo Barbet	CB	French	18	2019/2020	-
Wesley Lautoa	CB	French	31	2017/2018	Lorient
Nayef Aguerd	CB	Moroccan	23	2018/2019	FUS Rabat
Senou Couilbaly	CB	French	24	2018/2019	FC Mantes
Fouad Chafik	RB/LB	Moroccan	32	2016/2017	Stade Lavallois
Mickaël Alphonse	RB	French	30	2018/2019	Sochaux
Didier Ndong	CM/DM	Gabonese	25	2019/2020	EA Guingamp
Jordan Marie	DM	French	27	2013/2014	-
Enzo Loiodice	CM	French	18	2018/2019	-
Romain Amalfitano	CM	French	29	2014/2015	Newcastle
Florent Balmont	CM	French	39	2016/2017	LOSC Lille
Mama Baldé	RW/RB	Guinea-Bissauan	23	2019/2020	Sporting Club
Frédéric Sammaritano	LW	French	33	2015/2016	AJ Auxerre
Naïm Sliti	LW/AM	Tunisian	26	2018/2019	LOSC Lille
Bryan Soumaré	AM	French	20	2019/2020	Saint-Quentin
Jules Keita	LW	Malian	21	2018/2019	-
Julio Tavares	ST	Cape Verdean	30	2012/2013	Bourg-Peronnas
Benjamin Jeannot	ST	French	27	2017/2018	Lorient
Laurent Jobard	Manager	French	48	2019/2020	Olympique Ales
Olivier Delcourt	President	French	50	2012/2013	-



LILLE OSC

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	2nd	75
2017/2018	Ligue 1	17th	38
2016/2017	Ligue 1	11th	46
2015/2016	Ligue 1	5th	60
2014/2015	Ligue 1	8th	56

KEY MAN: LOÏC RÉMY

A forgotten man at the turn of the year with the success of the now-departed teenaged striker Rafael Leão, Rémy looked past it, to be polite, but finished the season in fine form. He displaced the Portuguese youngster at centre forward and scored four goals in his last five matches. Rémy doesn't need to offer anything beyond what he's capable of doing; a dozen or goals, hold-up play and leadership will be a welcome return as the side rejuvenates its attack. He will also need to work on his link-up play, something that will be key no matter how Lille set out their stall tactically. If Rémy stays injury-free and accomplish this, Lille may surprise those nay-sayers who lament the number and quality of their departures.

LILLE OSC

SIGNING TO WATCH: TIMOTHY WEAH, PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

The young American admittedly did not pull up many trees on loan with Celtic last season, but he looks a real prospect with his pace and eye for goal. Whether playing alongside Loïc Rémy in a two or in a slightly more withdrawn, central role, Weah's fits in well with those of Jonathan Bamba and Jonathan Ikoné, all pace and tricks but not without a decent degree of end product. He will not be enough to make anyone forget Nicolas Pépé, but has all the hallmarks of the type of young player who can come on in leaps and bounds under Galtier. It would be good to remember that Pépé's initial months at Lille were far from impressive; with patience and Galtier's patented magic, Weah could be one of the season's breakout players.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

Where to start; Lille have lost four of last season's key players in Pépé, Thiago Mendes, underrated full-back Youssouf Koné and Rafael Leão. They have gone the Monaco route in bringing in numerous younger players from abroad, and while the southern club has had its shortcomings in its international scouting, Lille have definitively not, with the likes of Mendes, Zeki Celik and Thiago Maia looking well worth their transfer fees two years on. On the domestic front, the signings of Benjamin André and Timothy Weah could be massive coups; neither cost more than €12m. Depth and how it is managed in the context of the Champions' League (and how that competition is prioritised) are a source of concern, to be sure, but on the whole, Lille look to have rebuilt this side in a rather canny fashion, relying on Galtier to work his magic with a largely callow set of arrivals. If he can keep this team in the hunt for Europe while navigating the Champions' League, it will have been a successful season.

STRENGTHS:

Mike Maignan may have been the best goalkeeper in France last season, and ahead of him, José Fonte and Adama Soumaoro look an imposing centre back duo. While Pépé may have departed, the other two members of "BIP-BIP," Bamba and Ikoné, look primed to take on greater importance in the attack, with Luiz Araujo and Victor Osimhen adding depth. In central midfield, Thiago Mendes is a massive loss, but Benjamin André has quietly been one of Ligue 1's best central midfielders for some time and seems likely to continue doing so.

WEAKNESSES:

The starting eleven should be able to compete for European football, but with the Champions' League sure to be a point of emphasis for the ownership, depth will no doubt rear its head at some point in the season. With the likes of Rémy and José Fonte no spring chickens, how Galtier rotates his side will be crucial to their success. For many of these players, too, this will be a first foray in Europe; how they make the step up to a higher level of competition will doubtless have no small degree of bearing on their confidence.

VERDICT:

The starting eleven should be able to compete for European football, but with the Champions' League, depth will no doubt rear its head at some point in the season. Rémy and Fonte are no spring chickens; how Galtier rotates his side will be crucial to their success.

PREDICTED FINISH: 8th



LILLE

OSC

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Mike Maignan	GK	French	24	2015/2016	PSG
Adam Jakubec	GK	Slovakian	22	2017/2018	Spartak Trnava
Léo Jardim	GK	Brazilian	24	2019/2020	Rio Ave
Domagoj Bradaric	LB	Croatian	19	2019/2020	Hadjuk Split
Hamza Mendyl	LB	Moroccan	20	2016/2017	-
Reinildo Mandava	LB	Guineau-Bissauan	25	2019/2020	Belenenses
Saad Agouzoul	CB	Moroccan	21	2019/2020	Kawkab Marrakech
Tiago Djaló	CB	Portuguese	19	2019/2020	AC Milan
José Fonte	CB	Portuguese	35	2018/2019	Dailian Yifang
Gabriel	CB	Brazilian	21	2016/2017	Avai
Adama Soumaoro	CB	French	27	2011/2012	-
Jérémy Pied	RB/LB	French	20	2018/2019	Southampton
Zeki Celik	RB	Turkish	22	2018/2019	Istanbulspor
Show	DM	Angolan	20	2019/2020	1 De Agosto
Arton Zekaj	DM	Serbian	19	2018/2019	FK Sopot
Thiago Maia	CM	Brazilian	22	2017/2018	Santos
Boubakary Soumaré	DM	French	20	2017/2018	Paris S-G
Xeka	CM/DM	Portuguese	24	2016/2017	Braga
Benjamin André	CM/DM	French	29	2019/2020	Stade Rennais
Timothy Weah	RW/ST	American	19	2019/2020	Paris S-G
Yusuf Yazici	AM	Turkish	22	2019/2020	Trabzonspor
Luiz Araujo	LW/RW	Brazilian	23	2017/2018	Sao Paulo
Yassine Benzia	ST/AM	French	24	2015/2016	Lyon
Jonathan Ikone	AM/LW	French	21	2018/2019	Paris S-G
Jonathan Bamba	RW/ST	French	23	2018/2019	Saint-Étienne
Victor Osimhen	ST	Nigerian	20	2019/2020	Charleroi
Virgilu Postolachi	ST	French	19	2019/2020	Paris S-G
Loïc Rémy	ST	French	32	2018/2019	Las Palmas
Christophe Galtier	Manager	French	52	2017/2018	Saint-Étienne
Gérard Lopez	President	Spanish	47	2016/2017	Fola Esch



OLYMPIQUE LYONNAIS

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	3rd	72
2017/2018	Ligue 1	3rd	78
2016/2017	Ligue 1	4th	67
2015/2016	Ligue 1	2nd	65
2014/2015	Ligue 1	2nd	75

KEY MAN:

MOUSSA DEMBÉLÉ

Only Kylian Mbappé has scored more league goals than Dembélé in 2019, and if Lyon are to return to the Champions' League, their young striker will have to play once more to that sort of standard, having shaken off a sluggish start. A player who combines the aerial abilities and physical qualities of a traditional number nine with good ability on the ball and instinctive movement, Dembélé is an ideal lone striker, but one has to wonder if playing between Memphis Depay and Bertrand Traoré gets the best out of the him. Might his scoring record have improved with orthodox wingers as opposed to the more selfish "wide" men currently at the club? If Sylvinho can get the three on the same page, Dembélé could well become Lyon's next great striker.

OLYMPIQUE LYONNAIS

SIGNING TO WATCH: JOACHIM ANDERSEN, SAMPDORIA

With Marcelo seemingly better suited to whinging than settling down, Lyon have finally spent on a centre back to hasten the Brazilian's move away from being first choice. Sure, Andersen doesn't have the international reputation of the sorts of players with Lyon were linked with last summer. However, he does offer quite a bit more physicality and strength, something that Les Gones have too often been lacking in their back line in recent years, with the likes of Samuel Umtiti and Jason Denayer being more cultured on the ball. In the pre-season, Andersen looks a bit Bambi on ice, but Sylvinho seems to have faith in the young Dane. If he and Denayer can form a convincing partnership, Lyon are comfortable favourites for second.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

Another summer, another big name departure for Lyon; three in this case, though, as Nabil Fékir and Ferland Mendy have joined Tanguy N'Dombélé in seeking pastures greener. Lyon have brought in like-for-like replacements (at least positionally) for N'Dombélé in Thiago Mendes and Mendy in Youssouf Koné, but both were supreme talents, arguably the best at their positions in the league. The two arrivals from Lille are already proven performers in Ligue 1 and should slot in well. Elsewhere, however, Lyon will be rolling the dice on Andersen; the club's record on bringing younger players in from abroad is, to be kind, mixed, with Sergi Darder and Pape Cheikh not exactly coming off as successes, even if Mariano Diaz and Denayer have done fairly well. Overall, though, Lyon have plenty of quality, being comfortably the league's second most-talented squad; all that remains to be seen is if Sylvinho can achieve some modicum of consistency, something that Bruno Génésio failed to do.

STRENGTHS:

While N'Dombélé and Mendes are different sorts of players, the Brazilian's more prosaic qualities will do plenty to allow Aouar and Jean Lucas more freedom, while Lucas Tousart and Pape Cheikh add depth. In attack, even if Dembélé is the side's only orthodox striker, there are plenty of options, with Martin Terrier, Maxwel Cornet and youngsters Lenny Pintor and Amine Gouiri. In goal, while Anthony Lopes has made noises over wanting to leave over wage disagreements, he and Ciprian Tatarusanu give Lyon arguably the league's best one-two.

WEAKNESSES:

Lyon's leaky defence was an issue last season, as Marcelo regressed after an impressive first campaign; even as Denayer looks a bargain, improving the back four was imperative. Lyon have spent, but it remains to be seen whether Andersen will be an upgrade. Too, if Sylvinho is wedded to playing with a lone front man, questions linger over depth at centre forward, as neither Martin Terrier nor Memphis Depay are well-suited to that role. Right wing could have used an upgrade as well, with Maxwel Cornet and Bertrand Traoré both being somewhat flawed.

VERDICT:

Lyon have spent well this summer, and continued improvement from the likes of Aouar and Dembélé should see them finish comfortably second barring serious injury or a lengthy domestic cup run. Any sort of unrest in a finely balanced squad could yet derail these hopes, but the feeling here is that even with a change in management, Lyon are simply too well-run to fall away.

PREDICTED FINISH: 2nd



OLYMPIQUE LYONNAIS

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Anthony Lopes	GK	Portuguese	28	2011/2012	-
Ciprian Tatarusanu	GK	French	33	2019/2020	FC Nantes
Anthony Racioppi	GK	Swiss	20	2018/2019	-
Fernando Marcal	LB	Brazilian	30	2017/2018	Benfica
Youssef Koné	LB	Malian	24	2019/2020	Lille OSC
Joachim Andersen	CB	Danish	23	2019/2020	Sampdoria
Mapou Yanga Mbiwa	CB	French	30	2015/2016	AS Roma
Jason Denayer	CB	Belgian	24	2018/2019	Manchester City
Oumar Solet	CB	French	19	2018/2019	Stade Lavallois
Marcelo	CB	Brazilian	32	2017/2018	Besiktas
Léo Dubois	RB	French	24	2018/2019	Nantes
Rafael	RB	Brazilian	29	2015/2016	Manchester United
Kenny Tete	RB	Dutch	23	2017/2018	Ajax
Lucas Tousart	DM	French	22	2015/2016	Valenciennes FC
Thiago Mendes	DM	Brazilian	27	2019/2020	Lille OSC
Jean Lucas	CM	Brazilian	21	2019/2020	Flamengo
Maxence Caqueret	CM	French	19	2018/2019	-
Pape Cheikh Diop	CM/DM	Spanish	22	2017/2018	Celta Vigo
Titouan Thomas	AM	French	17	2019/2020	-
Houssem Aouar	CM/AM	French	21	2016/2017	-
Boubacar Fofana	LW	French	20	2019/2020	Gazelec Ajaccio
Bertrand Traoré	AM/ST	Burkinabe	23	2017/2018	Chelsea
Martin Terrier	AM/ST	French	22	2017/2018	Lille OSC
Memphis Depay	LW/AM/ST	Dutch	25	2016/2017	Manchester United
Moussa Dembélé	ST	French	23	2018/2019	Celtic
Maxwel Cornet	ST/RW	French	22	2014/2015	FC Metz
Amine Gouiri	LW/ST	French	19	2017/2018	-
Lenny Pintor	ST	French	19	2018/2019	Stade Brestois
Sylvinho	Manager	Brazilian	45	2019/2020	-
Jean Michel Aulas	President	French	70	1987/1988	-



DROIT AU BUT

OLYMPIQUE MARSEILLE

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	5th	61
2017/2018	Ligue 1	4th	77
2016/2017	Ligue 1	5th	62
2015/2016	Ligue 1	13th	48
2014/2015	Ligue 1	4th	69

KEY MAN: FLORIAN THAUVIN

Much of this preview will be lather, rinse, repeat for Marseille, and that Thauvin will be key to OM's hopes of a Champions' League return is no surprise. His scoring and assists totals were down last year from his stunning 2017/18 campaign, but with Dimitri Payet another year older and the frankly unknown quantity that is Dario Benedetto in to replace of Mario Bala-telli at centre forward, Thauvin will need to come up with the goods if OM are to contend for the top three. A lack of European football will be key in that regard, but without a consistent source of goals, this side could fail to meet expectations, and perhaps even signal the beginning of the end for Frank McCourt's involvement with the team.

OLYMPIQUE MARSEILLE

SIGNING TO WATCH: ANDRE VILLAS-BOAS

Given that Marseille have been quite in the market this summer, signing only Dario Benedetto, it makes sense to focus on the club's manager in this space. Villas-Boas has lost much of the lustre he had when he rocked up at Chelsea a few years ago, but if pre-season is any indication, he seems to be in a good place with Marseille, building a side that picks itself while still having his own stamp tactically. This strong set of performances in recent weeks has served to raise expectations, but Villas-Boas must demonstrate that he can improve a club rather than merely playing with house money. Returning Marseille to the Champions' League would not represent total vindication, but it would go a long way towards restoring his reputation.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

Marseille are virtually the same side they were last year, save Lucas Ocampos and Balotelli, who will both be missed, especially as the fiery Argentine looked to be capitalising in a meaningful way on his potential. Clinton N'Jie has also moved on, as has Rolando, but the hope for the club's hierarchy is that a season free from major injuries ought to be enough to get the team back to the Champions' League. OM continue to lack much in the way of cover in attacking areas, as a long-term injury to either Dimitri Payet or Thauvin could tear the team's plans up; Bouna Sarr and Nemanja Radonjic project as their understudies, and neither has yet shown the means to play as an effective attacker. Villas-Boas must also figure out how to keep his four established midfielders happy, no easy challenge without Europe.

STRENGTHS:

The budding partnership in defence between Boubacar Kamara and Duje Caleta-Car should continue to improve, and midfield will also be one of Ligue 1's strongest, with the quartet of Morgan Sanson, Maxime Lopez, Kevin Strootman and Luiz Gustavo all proven performers. Payet and Thauvin on their day are tremendous talents -- the former looks motivated given his performances in pre-season, something which has been no small matter in his itinerant career. The full-backs, too, are exciting, with Hiroki Sakai and Jordan Amavi capable of bombing forward.

WEAKNESSES:

That we are on the eve of the season and Marseille hope to earn a place in the Champions' League with Valère Germain and a fiery forward in Benedetto with no experience in Europe as their main strikers says it all; the Italian may have been frustrating but he clearly seemed motivated with Marseille, and his end product made a difference. Elsewhere, given the occasional question over the form and age of Steve Mandanda, this side is relatively well-constructed, it's just a bit older than most in Ligue 1.

VERDICT:

Marseille stood still this summer, but without European football, it may just be enough to earn the club a much-coveted return to the Champions' League. It has been a long time coming, and is truthfully down more to questions surrounding the weaknesses of their surrounding competitors, but it may at last come to pass that McCourt's "Champions Project" bears fruit.

PREDICTED FINISH: 3rd



OLYMPIQUE MARSEILLE

SQUAD LIST

DROIT AU BUT

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Yohann Pelé	GK	French	36	2015/2016	FC Sochaux
Steve Mandanda	GK	French	34	2017/2018	Crystal Palace
Ahmadou Dia	GK	French	19	2019/2020	-
Alvaro González	CB	Spanish	29	2019/2020	Villarreal
Jordan Amavi	LB	French	25	2018/2019	Aston Villa
Christopher Rocchia	LB	French	21	2017/2018	-
Tomas Hubocan	CB/RB	Slovakian	32	2016/2017	Dynamo Moscow
Duje Caleta-Car	CB	Croatian	22	2018/2019	RB Salzburg
Adil Rami	CB	French	33	2017/2018	Sevilla
Aymen Abdennour	CB	Tunisian	29	2017/2018	Valencia
Lucas Perrin	CB	French	20	2018/2019	-
Hiroki Sakai	RB	Japanese	29	2016/2017	Hannover 96
Abdallah Ali Mohammed	RB	Comorian	20	2019/2020	-
Boubakar Kamara	DM/CB	French	19	2017/2018	-
Luiz Gustavo	DM/CB	Brazilian	32	2017/2018	Wolfsburg
Grégory Sertic	DM/CB	French	30	2016/2017	Bordeaux
Morgan Sanson	CM/DM	French	23	2016/2017	Montpellier
Alexandre Philpneau	DM	French	19	2019/2020	-
Kevin Strootman	CM	Dutch	29	2018/2019	AS Roma
Florian Thauvin	AM/RW	French	25	2016/2017	Newcastle United
Maxime Lopez	AM	French	21	2014/2015	-
Florian Chabrolle	AM	French	21	2018/2019	-
Dimitri Payet	LW	French	32	2016/2017	West Ham United
Bouna Sarr	RW/RB	Guinean	27	2015/2016	FC Metz
Nemanja Radonjic	LW/RW	Serbian	23	2018/2019	Red Star Belgrade
Saïf-Eddine Khaoui	AM	Tunisian	24	2016/2017	Tours
Valère Germain	ST	French	29	2017/2018	AS Monaco
Darío Benedetto	ST	Argentine	29	2019/2020	Boca Juniors
Andre Villas-Boas	Manager	Portuguese	41	2019/2020	Shanghai SIPG
Jacques-Henri Eyraud	President	French	51	2016/2017	-



FC METZ

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 2	1st	81
2017/2018	Ligue 1	20th	26
2016/2017	Ligue 1	14th	43
2015/2016	Ligue 2	3rd	65
2014/2015	Ligue 1	19th	30

KEY MAN: HABIB DIALLO

Diallo was a model of efficiency last season in Metz's promotion campaign, finding the back of the net 26 times, a figure only eclipsed by Brest's Gaëtan Charbonnier. Averaging just over 100 minutes per goal, he also contributed six assists as Metz comfortably won the division with the second-best attack. As Diallo has been on Metz's books for several years, with a decent but not impressive scoring record, it is difficult to comprehend how this marked uptick in form came about. Not the most imposing presence physically, Diallo instead affects matches by stretching play and beating players off the dribble, working with Ibrahima Niane to stretch the pitch as both are comfortable playing centrally and on the right flank.

FC METZ

SIGNING TO WATCH: THIERRY AMBROSE, MANCHESTER CITY

Ambrose, signed on loan from the English champions after playing with Lens last year, does not have a clear role in this side. Metz seem set to play a 4-3-3, and the attacking trio of Boulaya, Diallo, and Niane were incandescent at times last year. Capable of playing as striker, in a withdrawn role or on either flank, though, he should displace Opa Nguette as Vincent Hognon's first option off the bench if Metz are in need of goals. Ambrose will need to find consistency; his time with Lens started out well, but 2019 saw him being used far more sparingly as Le Sang Et Or's tilt at promotion faltered. An impact in City's first team still seems a pipe dream, but Ambrose has the potential to deliver strong performances in a top five league.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

It's tempting to want to place Metz slightly higher this season, given how diffident many other clubs around them were in their transfer dealings this summer, but the club (aside from captain Renaud Cohade) lack much experience in the top flight and will also be under the charge of Vincent Hognon, a manager whose own lack of experience could be found out as well. That said, the club have moved to bring in an impressive set of recruits this summer; Fabien Centonze has long been one of Ligue 2's most intrepid fullbacks, and Manuel Cabit may not pull up any trees but the former Ajaccio man should offer good competition to Thomas Delaine. Midfield will have been strengthened by the loans of Habib Maïga and Victorien Angban being made permanent while Kévin N'Doram can do a job in front of the defence or as part of it, offering a good combination of versatility for a side lacking a recognised third-choice centre back. On the whole, Metz's ambition should be justified by, at the least, avoiding a relegation scrap.

STRENGTHS:

Metz had Ligue 2's second-best attack last year, and Ambrose should only bolster that, but Les Grenats look strongest in midfield, where the ageless Cohade continues to run the show ahead of the impressive Chelsea academy product Victorien Angban. Central defence will also be a position of strength; John Boye and Stoppila Sunzu are experienced enough without the potential for age being a negative, and are Metz's best centre back pairing in some time, while the front three of Boulaya, Diallo, and Niane looks ready to take a step up as well.

WEAKNESSES:

Sunzu and Boye did their part last season, but questions remain over Alexandre Oukidja; his last spell in Ligue 1, with Strasbourg, was nothing short of disastrous. His confidence may be buoyed by playing behind a strong defence, but even taking that into account, Ligue 2 is a notoriously goal-shy division; playing in the more open top flight could easily expose his shortcomings anew. Full-back is an area with plenty of potential but little experience; the group could easily find themselves ill-at-ease coping with Ligue 1's more talented wide players.

VERDICT:

The jump up to Ligue 1 is a difficult one, but in Cohade, Sunzu, Nguette, and others, Metz have a raft of top-flight experience. That the team's hierarchy have been willing to spend this summer, with a net loss approaching €10m, says much about their intent to end what must seem a perpetual state of "yo-yoing" between France's two professional divisions.

PREDICTED FINISH: 15th



FC METZ SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Alexandre Oukidja	GK	Algerian	31	2018/2019	Strasbourg
Paul Delecroix	GK	French	30	2018/2019	Lorient
Guillaume Dietsch	GK	French	18	2018/2019	-
Stoppila Sunzu	CB	Zimbabwean	30	2018/2019	Lille
John Boye	CB	Ghanian	32	2018/2019	Sivasspor
Thomas Delaine	LB	French	27	2018/2019	Paris FC
Manuel Cabit	CB	Martiniquais	26	2019/2020	Ajaccio
Matthieu Udol	LB	French	23	2015/2016	-
Fabien Centonze	RB	French	23	2019/2020	RC Lens
Kévin N'Doram	CB/DM	French	23	2019/2020	AS Monaco
Mamadou Fofana	DM	Malian	23	2018/2019	Alanyaspor
Victorien Angban	DM	Ivorian	22	2019/2020	Chelsea
Habib Maïga	DM	Ivorian	23	2019/2020	Saint-Étienne
Sami Lahssaini	DM	Belgian	20	2018/2019	RFC Seraing
Raouf Mroivili	DM	French	20	2018/2019	-
Marvin Gakpa	CM	French	25	2018/2019	Quevilly
Renaud Cohade	CM	French	34	2016/2017	Saint-Étienne
Papa Ndiaga Yade	AM	Senegalese	19	2019/2020	Génération Foot
Opa Nguette	LW	Senegalese	25	2016/2017	Valenciennes
Adama Traoré	LW	French	22	2015/2016	-
Farid Boulaya	CF	French	33	2015/2016	Hannover 96
Habib Diallo	CF	Senegalese	24	2015/2016	-
Ibrahima Niane	RW/CF	Senegalese	20	2017/2018	Génération Foot
Albie Jallow	CF	French	30	2018/2019	Metz
Thierry Ambrose	RW/CF	French	21	2017/2018	Sochaux
Amadou Ndiaye	CF	French	22	2017/2018	Le Havre
Vincent Hognon	Manager	French	48	2018/2019	Nancy
Bernard Serin	President	French	68	2009/2010	-



AS MONACO

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	17th	36
2017/2018	Ligue 1	2nd	80
2016/2017	Ligue 1	1st	95
2015/2016	Ligue 1	3rd	65
2014/2015	Ligue 1	3rd	71

KEY MAN: ALEKSANDR GOLOVIN

While it's tempting to put Gelson Martins or Radamel Falcao here, a strong season from Golovin has the potential to make Monaco once again a part of the conversation surrounding the top three. Injuries and a late return from the World Cup last summer meant that his introduction into Leonardo Jardim's side was far from an easy one, and he was occasionally dropped under Thierry Henry. His performances and confidence grew over the season's latter months, however, and with Monaco settling on a 4-2-3-1, his ability to be the attacking fulcrum flanked by Martins and Rony Lopes is more than enough to whet the appetite, provided he and Cesc Fabregas can co-exist on the ball.

AS MONACO

SIGNING TO WATCH: BENJAMIN LECOMTE, MONTPELLIER

Lecomte has been one of Ligue 1's more impressive goalkeepers for some time now, both at Montpellier and Lorient. He was duly rewarded with a first France call-up last season, and looks set to battle with Alphonse Areola to replace Hugo Lloris when Les Bleus' captain does hang up his gloves. A commanding presence in the air while also being an impressive shot-stopper, Lecomte is fully deserving of his place with the national team, and belongs alongside Mike Maignan and Walter Benitez in any conversation about Ligue 1's very best goalkeepers. Given the worrisome combination of age and form of both Danijel Subasic and Diego Benaglio last season, 28 year-old Lecomte has the potential to at last give Monaco a reliable presence in goal.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

For once, Monaco haven't been subjected to a massive exodus of players; Youri Tielemans' move to Leicester was the only major departure, and even that was on the heels of the Belgian having spent the second half of the season on loan in England. A number of fringe players (Jean-Eudes Aholou, Kévin N'Doram) have been sent out on loan, but without European football depth is no issue. Radamel Falcao looks motivated in pre-season, even though he is publicly playing for a departure and the permanent signing of Gelson Martins looks a wise addition. The club's lack of additions is likely a combination of having been a bit snake-bitten by many of their recent acquisitions, and wanting to see what a healthy side looks like; Stevan Jovetic, Gabriel Boschilia, and Willem Guebbers all could yet play important roles in adding attacking depth this season off the back of injuries or (in the case of Boschilia) being away on loan. With stability and continuity, Jardim should have this side pushing for European football at a minimum.

STRENGTHS:

The team's diversity of attacking options, provided they are all fit, will no doubt be a feather in Monaco's cap as rivals like Marseille and Saint-Étienne struggle to replace key attackers like Mario Balotelli and Rémy Cabella. Radamel Falcao may creak and be injury-prone, but it is hard to doubt his efficacy, and in Martins and Lopes, Monaco have wide players who can contribute in meaningful ways as well. If those three can get on the same page as Golovin, this edition of Monaco has a real chance to be one of the league's top sides going forward.

WEAKNESSES:

Defensive midfield springs immediately to mind; it is clear that in shipping Aholou on loan to Saint-Étienne, Monaco are doubling down on the reinvention of Jemerson as a defensive midfielder, but the pairing of he and Fabregas don't exactly inspire the same confidence that Fabinho and Tiemoué Bakayoko did three seasons ago. Defence, as well, may be a source of worry, even as Kamil Glik and Benoît Badiashile did evince some promising moments last season; there is little depth beyond those two as well, apart from the exciting Jonathan Panzo.

VERDICT:

Given Monaco's uneven form and dalliance with Thierry Henry last season, to posit the club as a Champions' League contender may seem a stretch, but one shouldn't underestimate how much of a role injuries played in their struggles. With no European football to stretch this side and major doubts in Lille, Marseille, and Lyon, Monaco could yet be this season's opportunists.

PREDICTED FINISH: 4th



AS MONACO

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Seydou Sy	GK	Sengalese	23	2014/2015	-
Diego Benaglio	GK	Swiss	35	2017/2018	Wolfsburg
Benjamin Lecomte	GK	French	28	2019/2020	Montpellier
Danijel Subasic	GK	Croatian	34	2011/2012	Hajduk Split
Benoît Badiashile	CB	French	17	2018/2019	-
Kamil Glik	CB	Polish	31	2016/2017	Torino
Jonathan Panzo	CB	English	18	2018/2019	Chelsea
Naldo	CB	Brazilian	36	2018/2019	Schalke 04
Jemerson	CB	Brazilian	26	2015/2016	Atletico Mineiro
Benjamin Henrichs	RB/LB	German	22	2018/2019	Bayer Leverkusen
Ruben Aguilar	RB	French	26	2019/2020	Montpellier
Cesc Fabregas	CM/AM	Spanish	32	2018/2019	Chelsea
Romain Faivre	CM	French	21	2019/2020	-
Enzo Millot	CM	French	17	2019/2020	-
Youssef Aït Bennasser	CM/DM	Moroccan	23	2016/2017	Nancy
Adama Traore	AM/LW	Malian	24	2015/2016	Lille OSC
Aleksandr Golovin	AM/CM	Russian	23	2018/2019	CSKA Moscow
Gabriel Boschilia	AM/LW	Brazilian	23	2015/2016	Sao Paulo
Nacer Chadli	LW/CM	Belgian	20	2018/2019	West Brom
Sofiane Diop	AM	French	19	2018/2019	Rennes
Gil Dias	LW	Portuguese	22	2015/2016	Braga
Willem Geubbels	LW/ST	French	17	2018/2019	Lyon
Rony Lopes	RW/AM	Portuguese	23	2015/2016	Manchester City
Samuel Grandsir	RW	Portuguese	24	2018/2019	Atletico Madrid
Keita Baldé	ST/RW	Senegalese	24	2017/2018	Lazio
Irvin Cardona	ST	French	22	2017/2018	-
Lyle Foster	ST	South African	18	2018/2019	Orlando Pirates



AS MONACO

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Moussa Sylla	LW/ST	French	19	2018/2019	-
Stevan Jovetic	ST	Montenegrin	29	2017/2018	Inter Milan
Pietro Pellegri	ST	Italian	18	2017/2018	Genoa
Falcao	ST	Colombian	32	2013/2014	Atletico Madrid
Leonardo Jardim	Manager	Portuguese	44	2012/2013	Sporting Lisbon
Dimitri Rybolovlev	President	Russian	51	2011/2012	-



MONTPELLIER HSC

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	6th	59
2017/2018	Ligue 1	10th	51
2016/2017	Ligue 1	15th	39
2015/2016	Ligue 1	12th	49
2014/2015	Ligue 1	15th	42

KEY MAN:

ANDY DELORT

Delort, a newly minted champion of Africa with Algeria, may take some time to get going given his late start to the season, but his partnership with Gaëtan Laborde last campaign was a thing of beauty, reflecting a renaissance for a player who had endured an unhappy spell in Mexico before underwhelming in Toulouse. The two combined for 25 goals, and with both of their moves now permanent, Montpellier have one of the league's best strike partnerships, with Delort's aerial ability and tireless work ethic making him the ideal foil for Laborde's vision. With Téji Savanier now in the fold, Michel Der Zakarian's reputation as a tactically limited, prosaic manager may just need to be reconsidered.

MONTPELLIER HSC

SIGNING TO WATCH: FLORENT MOLLET, FC METZ

Savanier and his meteoric rise from the second division to a player who was arguably the best midfielder in Ligue 1 last season was a story that truly captured the imagination, and his move to Montpellier seemed like an appropriate step up. His passing acumen and determination could well be the extra bit of guile that Der Zakarian's side needed to finally qualify for Europe. While the sales of Lecomte and Skhiri mean a dimmer view should be taken on that count, Savanier will no doubt continue to thrill. Especially, as he should be given even more creative licence playing alongside one of Jordan Ferri or Damien Le Tallec, both of whom are far more sorted to screening a defence than the former Nîmes man.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

The acquisition of Savanier is a coup indeed, but the club look a little threadbare at present. Jordan Ferri is a decent squad player, but a midfield of he and Savanier will hardly be as robust as Ellyes Skhiri and Le Tallec, even if the veteran Frenchman does remain. More pressing, however, is a seeming lack of response to Benjamin Lecomte's move to Monaco. Impressive in goal for La Paillade last season, he rightly earned a call-up to the national team, offering an assured presence in the air as well as fine shot-stopping; the drop-off between Lecomte and his deputy, Dimitry Bertaud, looks a particularly sharp one at the time of writing. Even as goalkeeper is likely to be Montpellier's Achilles heel, there should be cautious optimism surrounding the rest of the squad, who only missed out on European qualification last season owing to the league placement of the two cup winners, Rennes and Strasbourg.

STRENGTHS:

The aforementioned strike-force of Delort and Laborde looks set to thrill again, and in Mollet and Savanier, Montpellier have two of the league's better creative players. Central midfield beside Savanier will need some sorting but Der Zakarian has an impressive array of options, while the defence, despite the advancing ages of Hilton and Daniel Congré, looks again certain to be solid, with youngster Nicolas Cozza adding depth. The full-back positions also have good depth, as MHSC moved quickly to replace Rubén Aguilar with Ligue 1 seasoned Arnaud Souquet.

WEAKNESSES:

If Montpellier have shown one thing in their friendlies, it is just how assured a presence Lecomte was last season. Dimitry Bertaud is still young, and has been capped for France but his small stature and suspect handling have already been called into question; a veteran goalkeeper is a must, even if only for competition. Depth at striker is also a concern; it is hard to see Montpellier being as impressive an attacking force were Delort or Laborde to suffer a long-term injury.

VERDICT:

Montpellier will be more pleasing on the eye this season, which is never a bad thing given how Ligue 1 tends to be tagged with a reputation for negativity, but at what cost? The departures of Lecomte and Skhiri are not the type to be easily absorbed and another tilt at Europe looks a bridge too far.

PREDICTED FINISH: 6th



MONTPELLIER

HSC

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Dimitry Bertaud	GK	French	21	2017/2018	-
Mathis Carvalho	GK	Portuguese	20	2019/2020	Toulouse
Clément Vidal	CB	French	19	2019/2020	-
Damien Le Tallec	CB/DM	French	29	2018/2019	Red Star Belgrade
Mihailo Ristic	LB	Serbian	23	2018/2019	FK Krasnodar
Daniel Congre	LB/CB	French	34	2012/2013	Olimpo
Hilton	CB	Brazilian	41	2011/2012	Marseille
Nicolas Cozza	CB/LB	French	19	2017/2018	-
Arnaud Souquet	RB	French	27	2019/2020	KAA Gent
Pedro Mendes	CB/RB	Portuguese	28	2017/2018	Rennes
Ambroise Oyongo	LB	Cameroonian	27	2017/2018	Montréal
Mathias Suarez	RB	Uruguayan	23	2018/2019	Defensor
Facundo Piriz	DM	Uruguyan	29	2018/2019	Akhmat Grozny
Téji Savanier	CM	French	27	2019/2020	Nîmes
Paul Lasne	CM	French	30	2014/2015	AC Ajaccio
Junior Sambia	CM/AM	French	22	2017/2018	Niort
Jordan Ferri	CM	French	27	2019/2020	Lyon
Kylian Kaïboué	DM	French	20	2018/2019	-
Amir Adouyev	CM	Russian	20	2019/2020	-
Florent Mollet	AM	French	27	2018/2019	Metz
Keagan Dolly	LW	South African	26	2016/2017	Mamelodi Sundowns
Petar Skuletic	ST	Serbian	29	2018/2019	Genclerbirligi
Gaëtan Laborde	ST	French	25	2018/2019	Bordeaux
Souleymane Camara	RW/ST	Senegalese	36	2008/2009	OGC Nice
Bilal Boutobba	RW	French	20	2018/2019	-
Andy Delort	ST	French	27	2018/2019	Toulouse
Michel Der Zakarian	Manager	Armenian	56	2017/2018	Stade de Reims
Laurent Nicollin	President	French	46	2017/2018	-



FC NANTES

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	12th	48
2017/2018	Ligue 1	9th	52
2016/2017	Ligue 1	7th	51
2015/2016	Ligue 1	14th	48
2014/2015	Ligue 1	14th	45

KEY MAN:

KALIFA COULIBALY

The hulking Malian did not set the world alight under Miguel Cardoso, but under Vahid Halilhodzic, he grew into his own, and looks ready to justify what had been a near club-record fee on his arrival from Gent. Injuries had marred his first season, and Emiliano Sala finding consistency also presented an obstacle, but now it is clear that Koulibaly will be the focal point of the attack. Santy Ngom and youngster Bridge Ndilu are the only other recognised strikers in the squad. It should be mentioned here as well that despite Koulibaly's physical prowess and finishing, his hold-up play is sometimes lacking, as is his discipline, but he looks poised to push on from last season.

FC NANTES

SIGNING TO WATCH: ALBAN LAFONT, FIORENTINA

Lafont's arrival from La Viola on a two-year loan deal looks a masterstroke on the part of Nantes, even if the move was hastened by the surprising departure of Ciprian Tatarusanu to Lyon. Still only 20, Lafont was solid enough for Fiorentina, but he will be eager to come back to France and bump his stock after a middling U-20 World Cup this summer. With likes of Paul Bernardoni and Gautier Larssonneur also looking to make a name for themselves in France's youth sides, Lafont should be well-motivated; if he can approach the level of form and maturity which he displayed for Toulouse, Nantes will have done well. Strong in the air but also an excellent shot-stopper, Lafont provides Nantes' restructured defence with an ideal option.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

Where to begin with Nantes? Christian Gourcuff has replaced the departed Vahid Halilhodzic and will be a capable pair of hands. However, the momentum that Nantes had generated at the end of last season, and with a decent set of pre-season results to boot, has just been stopped dead in its tracks. This was never going to be an easy season for a team that turned over half its defence with the departures of Diego Carlos and Enock Kwateng, but the club's dynamic midfield, led by Valentin Rongier and Abdoulaye Touré, remains intact, and another year of development from the likes of Samuel Moutoussamy and Imran Louza should give the team depth. The club seem to have bought well, the erratic Marcus Coco notwithstanding; aside from Lafont, the arrivals of Mehdi Abeid, Dennis Appiah and Molla Wagué represent a trio of experienced heads. However, the departure of Halilhodzic has torn this asunder, and rather than pushing up the table, Nantes could well be battling relegation.

STRENGTHS:

Nantes' bustling midfield remains intact at the time of writing, even if one suspects there are more departures to come, perhaps in the form of Rongier. An ideal blend of dynamism and physicality, the midfield trio (Mehdi Abeid should be first choice in a defensive role this season) was the best part of Nantes last season. Moutoussamy is notably all set to explode in this campaign. The defence also stoic, even if Wagué is a downgrade on Carlos; Appiah is a proven performer at this level and there is good depth at full-back as well with Fabio and Charles Traoré.

WEAKNESSES:

Koulibaly is the only holdover from last year's attacking unit, and bearing in mind that Nantes only scored 48 goals last season, that may not be a bad thing, but the quality of their replacements is dubious indeed, with Guingamp disappointment Marcus Coco and the unproven Ndi-lu not looking yet ready to pass muster. It is a shame, really, as the rest of the team stands well-constructed, but a bluntness in attack is likely to see Nantes struggle as they have not since before the appointment of Michel Der Zakarian.

VERDICT:

Nantes are a team in crisis, and the departure of Halilhodzic, especially on the back of some encouraging friendly results has plunged this team from looking a comfortable mid-table side to one for whom relegation looms. Gourcuff's appointment could yet make a difference, but it would be foolish to hold one's breath on that count.

PREDICTED FINISH: 15th



FC NANTES

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Alban Lafont	GK	French	20	2019/2020	Fiorentina
Alexandre Olliero	GK	French	23	2016/2017	-
Molla Wagué	CB	Malian	28	2019/2020	Udinese
Lucas Lima	LB	Brazilian	26	2016/2017	Arouca
Fabio	LB/RB	Brazilian	29	2018/2019	Middlesbrough
Thomas Basila	CB	French	20	2018/2019	-
Nicolas Pallois	CB	French	31	2017/2018	Bordeaux
Josué Homawoo	CB	Togolese	21	2019/2020	-
Batista Mendy	CB	French	19	2019/2020	-
Anthony Walongwa	CB	DR Congolese	25	2014/2015	-
Dennis Appiah	RB	French	27	2015/2016	Anderlecht
Andrei Girotto	DM	Brazilian	27	2017/2018	Tombense
Abou Ba	DM/CM	French	21	2019/2020	Nancy
Mehdi Abeid	DM	Algerian	27	2019/2020	Dijon
Rene Krhin	DM	Slovakian	29	2018/2019	Granada
Abdoulaye Touré	DM	Malian	25	2012/2013	-
Valentin Rongier	CM	French	24	2015/2016	-
Lucas Evangelista	CM	Brazilian	24	2018/2019	Udinese
Samuel Moutoussamy	CM	French	22	2017/2018	-
Alexis Alegué	LW	French	22	2015/2016	-
Imran Louza	AM	French	20	2019/2020	-
Santy Ngom	LW/ST	Senegalese	26	2017/2018	Suze-sur-Sarthe
Joris Kayembé	RW	Belgian	25	2017/2018	FC Porto
Marcus Coco	RW	French	23	2019/2020	EA Guingamp
Yassine El Ghanassy	LW	Belgian	29	2017/2018	Oostende
Bridge Ndilu	ST	French	19	2019/2020	Laval
Kalifa Coulibaly	ST	Malian	27	2017/2018	Gent
Christian Gourcuff	Manager	French	64	2019/2020	Al Gharafa
Waldemar Kita	President	Polish	66	2007/2008	FC Lausanne



OGC NICE

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	7th	56
2017/2018	Ligue 1	8th	54
2016/2017	Ligue 1	3rd	78
2015/2016	Ligue 1	4th	63
2014/2015	Ligue 1	11th	48

KEY MAN: YUCEF ATTAL

An impressive first season at right back was capped by a similarly bravura Africa Cup of Nations for the youngster, earning a deserved gold medal with Algeria. With Patrick Burner's development continuing apace, Attal may be asked to play a more attacking role this season, as Patrick Vieira has lined up Les Aiglons most often in a 4-3-3 in pre-season. Of course, Attal has not yet been a part of those lineups. However, he ought to be afforded more space in which to operate in forward areas, his hat-trick against Guingamp last season showed. Whether he plays at right-back, or on the left as an inverted winger, in a side starved of invention, Attal's pace and ability on the ball will need to end product as well.

OGC NICE

SIGNING TO WATCH: KHÉPHREN THURAM, AS MONACO

Yes, Thuram is here by default — only Vincent Marcel's return from a loan spell with Troyes has bolstered Les Aiglons' ranks beyond the lanky defensive midfielder's arrival, but that does not discount his potential. A regular place in the starting eleven may be hard to come by initially, but Thuram, who only turned 18 in March, has been a regular part of France's various youth setups and his arrival is not without merit. Likely to shadow Tameze, or to be played alongside him if Nice play three at the back, Thuram's long strides allow him to get about the pitch with ease, and he also has a decent shot. His tackling and passing, as befits a player of his age and experience, still requires improvement, but he has no immediate pressure to succeed.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

Nice have been relatively quiet this summer; a mooted takeover by English businessman Jim Ratcliffe rumbles on without being completed, but there ought to be money to spend after the club somehow persuaded Newcastle to spend €21m on Allan Saint-Maximin. Attacking players ought to be the priority, with the perpetually injured Mickäel Le Bihan the team's only recognised striker save the bustling youngster Ignatius Ganago. Other than the former Bastia man's departure (which may itself be addition by subtraction), Nice have largely opted for continuity, holding on to Wylan Cyprien, Attal, and Walter Benítez, all of whom have surely caught the eye of bigger clubs. The sale of Romain Perraud, so impressive on loan with Paris FC last season, shows a good deal of faith in Malang Sarr. Elsewhere, Adrien Tameze has spurned the advances of the likes of Cardiff and should once more play a key role in shielding the defence, his bustling style allowing the slower Dante a bit more positional leeway.

STRENGTHS:

Walter Benítez was probably Ligue 1's best goalkeeper last season; the Argentine will feel aggrieved not to have joined up with his country in Brazil, but should use that slight as motivation to keep up his strong form. Ahead of Benítez, even if Dante is another year older, he, Sarr and Christophe Hérelle form an impressive set of centre backs. Wylan Cyprien and Pierre Lees-Melou can be influential going forward from midfield, even if the latter is infuriatingly incapable of contributing any number of goals.

WEAKNESSES:

Nice's anaemic attack has only gotten weaker this summer; Saint-Maximin, despite his failings, was nevertheless able to stretch play and draw multiple defenders. Former Lyon youngster Myziane Maolida has recovered from a long-term injury absence, but prior to that, he was hardly setting the league apart. There may be a bit more positivity about Bassem Srarfi, but this is a threadbare unit indeed. Depth in defence is also a concern; Hilton has kept the wolves of time at bay for Montpellier but if Dante fails to do the same, Nice could struggle.

VERDICT:

Pre-season results should be taken with a grain of salt, but Nice conceding a combined fourteen goals in its final two friendlies is more than a little troubling. That said, Vieira looked at sea tactically and personnel-wise early last season before carefully moulding a prosaic side that showed a remarkable ability to close out matches and things should improve.

PREDICTED FINISH: 7th



OGC NICE

SQUAD LIST

Yoan Cardinale	GK	French	25	2014/2015	-
Yannis Clementia	GK	French	22	2018/2019	-
Walter Benitez	GK	Argentinian	26	2016/2017	Quilmes
Racine Coly	LB	Senegalese	22	2017/2018	Brescia
Malang Sarr	CB/LB	French	20	2016/2017	-
Christophe Hérelle	CB	French	26	2018/2019	Troyes
Dante	CB	Brazilian	35	2016/2017	Wolfsburg
Gautier Lloris	CB	French	24	2014/2015	-
Youcef Atal	RB/RW/LW	Algerian	23	2018/2019	Kortrijk
Patrick Burner	RB	French	23	2016/2017	-
Rémi Walter	DM	French	24	2015/2016	Nancy
Danilo	DM	Brazilian	23	2018/2019	SC Braga
Adrien Tameze	CM/DM	French	25	2017/2018	Valenciennes
Khéphren Thuram	DM	French	18	2019/2020	AS Monaco
Wylan Cyprien	CM	French	24	2016/2017	RC Lens
Pierre Lees-Melou	RW/AM	French	26	2017/2018	Dijon
Bassem Srarfi	RW/AM	Tunisian	22	2016/2017	Club Africain
Arnaud Lusamba	CM/AM	French	22	2016/2017	Nancy
Ihsan Sacko	RW/AM	French	22	2017/2018	Strasbourg
Myziane Maolida	LW/ST	French	20	2018/2019	Lyon
Vincent Marcel	RW	French	22	2016/2017	-
Hicham Mahou	RW	French	20	2018/2019	-
Mickael Le Bihan	ST	French	29	2015/2016	Le Havre
Ignatius Ganago	ST	Cameroonian	20	2018/2019	-
Patrick Vieira	Manager	French	43	2018/2019	New York City FC
Gauthier Ganaye	President	French	32	2018/2019	Barnsley



NÎMES OLYMPIQUE

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	9th	53
2017/2018	Ligue 2	2nd	73
2016/2017	Ligue 2	6th	64
2015/2016	Ligue 2	14th	43
2014/2015	Ligue 2	13th	46

KEY MAN:

RENAUD RIPART

With Rachid Alioui and Umut Bozok having stolen the show during Nîmes' 2017-18 promotion campaign, few would have guessed that Ripart, more frequently used on the wing, or even as a full-back, would have topped the scoring charts for Les Crocos last season. Yet with eight goals, he proved a vital catalyst. The academy product's strong play and matador celebration have made him a fan favourite at the Stade Costieres, but it is another thing entirely to start the campaign with he and Clément Depres as the club's only recognised strikers. Energetic and physical to the point of bordering on recklessness, a perfect embodiment of the team's philosophy under Bernard Blaquart, Ripart appears ready to do the job.

NÎMES OLYMPIQUE

SIGNING TO WATCH: ZINEDINE FERHAT, LE HAVRE

While Sada Thioub's form dipped slightly in the season's second half, there's no doubt that the all-action winger will be missed on France's south coast. In his place, however, comes a much-needed creative presence in the form of Ferhat, who has amassed nearly thirty assists over the last two seasons in Ligue 2. That he had not made the jump to the top flight sooner was somewhat of a surprise, but last season saw Le Havre falter slightly, and there was some thinking that Ferhat, at 26, might have been a one-hit wonder. However, with pace and dribbling being his main assets, he will do well to stretch the pitch and his potential links with Sofiane Alakouch could make the right flank Nîmes' focal point in attack.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

As many as half of last year's regular starters have left the club, and even if few of them save Téji Savanier, Thioub and Denis Bouanga were to remain integral parts to the team, they still represented an understanding of Blaquart's style. Where last year Nîmes switched readily between a 4-4-2 and a 4-3-3, it seems clear this season that a three-man midfield will be preferred, with Antonin Bobichon and Théo Valls set to be joined by Sidy Sarr in midfield. Bobichon is good for a goal or two, having scored some crackers last season, but none are close to offering anything like the completeness of Savanier's game. The defence should be improved given the injuries with which it struggled last season, and Pablo Martinez could be a clever signing on a free from Strasbourg. Regardless, this team will, as it had last year, seek to out-score opponents rather than limit them.

STRENGTHS:

Despite faltering at key moments and at times paying the price for playing such an aggressive style, Bernard Blaquart's ethos was on clear display throughout the season, and how the club have ruthlessly tossed players aside underlines to what extent the manager has the club's backing. In terms of the playing staff, Paul Bernardoni has been signed for another year on loan and his improvement should continue apace, while the defence, which suffered from several long-term injuries last season should also ameliorate.

WEAKNESSES:

One of Savanier's greatest assets was his creativity, and it is not exactly clear whether Nîmes have replaced that, with Jordan Ferri also having moved to Montpellier following his loan from Lyon. It is true that Ferhat's assist figures from Ligue 2 are impressive, but a shopworn Romain Philippoteaux hardly inspires confidence on the opposite flank, and there is also a real dearth of goalscoring ability beyond Ripart and Dépres. Nîmes have brought in several intriguing players from abroad, but the fear here is that they may struggle with the step up to Ligue 1.

VERDICT:

Nîmes will feel the sting of the loss of Savanier but the club have otherwise moved well to replace their other departures. Improving on last season's ninth seems unlikely, but with Blaquart still at the helm, Les Crocos will once again be an entertaining watch, no doubt again becoming a neutrals' favourite.

PREDICTED FINISH: 12th



NÎMES

OLYMPIQUE

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Paul Bernardoni	GK	French	22	2018/2019	Bordeaux
Lucas Dias	GK	French	20	2019/2020	-
Pablo Martinez	CB	French	30	2019/2020	Strasbourg
Anthony Briançon	CB	French	24	2014/2015	-
Kelyan Guessoum	CB	French	20	2019/2020	-
Loïck Landré	CB	French	27	2018/2019	Genoa
Théo Sainte-Luce	LB	French	20	2019/2020	-
Floran Miguel	LB	French	22	2018/2019	Tours
Sofiane Alakouch	RB	Moroccan	21	2017/2018	-
Gaëtan Paquiez	RB/LB	French	24	2016/2017	-
Sidy Sarr	DM	Senegalese	23	2019/2020	Chateauroux
Théo Valls	CM	French	23	2015/2016	-
Pierrick Valdivia	CM	French	31	2015/2016	Sint-Truidense
Zinedine Ferhat	RM	Algerian	26	2019/2020	Le Havre
Antonin Bobichon	RM	French	22	2015/2016	-
Renaud Ripart	ST/LW	French	26	2012/2013	-
Romain Philippoteaux	LW	French	31	2019/2020	Auxerre
Haris Duljevic	LW	Bosnian	25	2019/2020	Dynamo Dresden
Kévin Denkey	CF	Togolese	18	2018/2019	-
Vlatko Stojanovski	CF	Macedonian	22	2018/2019	Renova
Clément Depres	CF	French	24	2015/2016	-
Sami Ben Amar	CF	Moroccan	20	2018/2019	-
Bernard Blaquart	Manager	French	61	2015/2016	Tours
Rani Assaf	President	Lebanese	45	2015/2016	-



PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	1st	91
2017/2018	Ligue 1	1st	93
2016/2017	Ligue 1	2nd	87
2015/2016	Ligue 1	1st	96
2014/2015	Ligue 1	1st	83

KEY MAN:

KYLIAN MBAPPÉ

One has to start to wonder whether a ceiling for Mbappé exists at all. Despite having impressed in the season before last, he again raised his level of play, scoring 33 times in 29 league appearances. Without being rested during a smattering of Champions' League matches and an ugly incident with Téli Savanier that saw him banned for three matches, 40 goals might have been a real possibility. Only 21 in December, he will only build on that for the upcoming campaign, especially if Neymar continues to throw his toys out of the pram. The only question mark over Mbappé is whether he can become more of a creative influence, if the Brazilian does depart, as Thomas Tuchel may seek to pair him with Edinson Cavani in a 3-4-1-2.

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

SIGNING TO WATCH: IDRISSE GUEYE, EVERTON

The former Lille man did nothing in England to dissuade observers of the qualities that he showed during his previous spell in Ligue 1, and after a January dalliance with the French club, he has finally made the move to Paris. His numbers for tackles and interceptions were among the best in the Premier League, and at his most imperious he allowed Everton's more attack-minded players to go about their business without much concern for tracking back. He will be tasked with a similar role with PSG, likely playing as a lone holding midfielder to allow some combination of Marco Verratti, Leandro Paredes, Pablo Sarabia, Julian Draxler, and Ángel Di María to focus more on their attacking duties.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

There was surely no shortage of hand-wringing this season when PSG's first signing of the summer was Pablo Sarabia, but in the time since, the capital side have made a number of canny and reasonably-priced acquisitions, with Abdou Diallo and Ander Herrera joining Gueye and Sarabia. The departures of Adrien Rabiot and Dani Alves will provoke some adjustment in the dressing room dynamics, as will PSG turning loose a trio of younger players in Christopher Nkunku, Moussa Diaby and Timothy Weah. However, it would be foolish indeed to try to put forward the idea that this squad has not improved. It has more experience without being perilously old, and it will be able to afford more opportunities to the young players who have stayed, such as Loïc Mbe Soh and Stanley N'Soki (if the latter remains). With greater depth and less reliance on one or two star performers, the team will be less stretched at the business end of the Champions' League, and may at last be able to make a mark on that competition.

STRENGTHS:

PSG scored 105 goals last season, and that was with Cavani and Neymar absent for large chunks. The addition of Sarabia adds more creative nous to an already-potent attack, while the club are also flush with central defenders, Diallo having joined from Borussia Dortmund. This should allow Thomas Tuchel more tactical flexibility, to adhere to a back three more frequently and enable him to move Marquinhos into midfield more convincingly. Central midfield, too, presents the manager with many capable options, making this a well-rounded squad.

WEAKNESSES:

With the departure of Gianluigi Buffon, PSG have a glaring lack of a firm second choice goalkeeper. Eric-Maxim Choupo-Moting showed his foibles as a deputy to Cavani and Mbappé last season with a particularly ignominious miss against Strasbourg. If Tuchel does persist with two up front, another option will be necessary. The departure of Dani Alves also leaves Thomas Meunier's only cover as Colin Dagba, but on the whole this squad is arguably the most complete of the QSI era.

VERDICT:

With or without Neymar PSG have by far the best squad in France and for the first time in half-a-decade appear to have done right in the market with a series of understated, canny buys. If the title race were to be even mildly close it would be a massive surprise; all that remains is to see how Tuchel makes this squad stand up in Europe.

PREDICTED FINISH: 1st



PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Marcin Bulka	GK	Polish	19	2019/2020	Chelsea
Alphonse Areola	GK	French	25	2013/2014	-
Juan Bernat	LB	Spanish	26	2018/2019	Bayern Munich
Mitchel Bakker	LB	Dutch	19	2019/2020	Ajax
Layvin Kurzawa	LB	French	26	2015/2016	AS Monaco
Stanley N'Soki	LB	French	20	2018/2019	-
Thiago Silva	CB	Brazilian	33	2012/2013	AC Milan
Marquinhos	CB/DM	Brazilian	25	2013/2014	AS Roma
Thilo Kehrer	CB	German	22	2018/2019	Schalke 04
Presnel Kimpembe	CB	French	22	2014/2015	-
Abdou Diallo	CB/LB	French	23	2018/2019	Borussia Dortmund
Loïc Mbe Soh	CB	French	18	2018/2019	-
Thomas Meunier	RB	Belgian	26	2016/2017	Club Brugge
Colin Dagba	RB	French	20	2018/2019	-
Leandro Paredes	DM	Argentine	25	2018/2019	Zenit St. Petersburg
Idrissa Gueye	CM/DM	Senegalese	29	2019/2020	Everton
Ander Herrera	CM	Spanish	29	2019/2020	Manchester United
Pablo Sarabia	CM/AM	Spanish	27	2019/2020	Sevilla
Marco Verratti	CM	Italian	26	2012/2013	Pescara
Julian Draxler	LW/CM	German	25	2017/2018	Wolfsburg
Jese	LW	Spanish	26	2016/2017	Real Madrid CF
Kylian Mbappé	RW/ST	French	20	2018/2019	AS Monaco
Angel di Maria	LW/RW	Argentinian	31	2015/2016	Manchester United
Neymar	LW	Brazilian	27	2017/2018	Barcelona
Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting	ST	Cameroonian	30	2018/2019	Stoke City
Edinson Cavani	ST	Uruguayan	32	2013/2014	Napoli
Thomas Tuchel	Manager	German	45	2018/2019	Borussia Dortmund
Nasser Al Khelaifi	President	Qatari	45	2010/2011	-



STADE de REIMS

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	8th	55
2017/2018	Ligue 2	1st	88
2016/2017	Ligue 2	7th	55
2015/2016	Ligue 1	18th	39
2014/2015	Ligue 1	15th	44

KEY MAN: RÉMI OUDIN

Having hinted at his potential for some time, Oudin's campaign last season was definitively a breakout one, notching ten goals from the right wing as he combined to form an underrated attacking trio with winter signing Arber Zeneli and the versatile Mathieu Cafaro. Each element of the troika combines ability on the ball and an eye for goal, but Oudin was easily the pick of the bunch, even if Zeneli had become the club's record signing. Given that Reims' strikers, including the now-departed Pablo Chavarria, were, to be charitable, anaemic last season, even with Grejohn Kyei having returned from loan, it is clear that goals for the Champagne side will have to come from sources other than their strikers.

STADE de REIMS

SIGNING TO WATCH: PREDRAG RAJKOVIC, MACCABI TEL AVIV

Édouard Mendy's move to Rennes now official, it seems Reims were always aware of losing the Senegal international, having moved preemptively to sign Rajkovic earlier in the summer for a club-record €5m. A product of Red Star Belgrade's academy, the Serbian international kept clean sheets in 14 of his 26 league appearances last campaign, conceding only twelve goals as his team finished the season unbeaten. Israel has not exactly been a happy hunting ground for prospects, but a certain Vincent Enyeama had made his name there before joining Lille. A lanky keeper who has made his name with his shot-stopping ability, Rajkovic has a similar profile to Mendy, and should ensure that the latter's departure is not powerfully felt.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

Reims built last season's success on a physically imposing defence and a cunning blend of mid-field steel and ability on the ball. If they had harboured a half-decent striker, a European finish may have come to pass. To date, they have done nothing to remedy that in the summer, even letting the veteran Argentine Chavarria depart on a free, but there is no less reason to be optimistic. The emergence of Oudin and Cafaro as viable attackers in the top flight was impressive indeed, and Tristan Dingomé showed enough in flashes to be a valuable and versatile role player. Not bringing in a veteran replacement for Björn Engels may be a decision the club to regret, but clearly David Guion has full faith in Axel Disasi. Ghislain Konan should ready to return from injury; he and Thomas Foket will be competent if not flashy options at full-back. Defensive midfield is a bit of a doubt with Alaixys Romao another year older, but Dingomé and new man Marshall Munetsi should offer enough cover there.

STRENGTHS:

David Guion's contract extension ensures that continuity will be an important part of the club's start to the season. That the team have retained a projected nine of last season's starting eleven will feed into that as well. The manager has done very well with players who understand his ethos and are willing to work hard, even from the front and that should continue to be the case this season. The aforementioned attacking midfielders will allow Reims to offer a fair few wrinkles to their 4-2-3-1, something that cannot be undersold, either.

WEAKNESSES:

Yunis Abdelhamid was a rock at centre back last season, but it remains to be seen how impressive Reims' defence will be this season with Björn Engels having departed for Aston Villa. Thomas Fontaine has also left, leaving only Abdelhamid and youngster Disasi as central defenders. Striker is also a source of concern as well, with Hyuk-Sun Jun and Boulaye Dia having scored a mere six goals in forty appearances between them. This may not be a huge source of concern if the attacking midfielders can produce. A big if though.

VERDICT:

Reims were one of the season's surprises last year as they made an (ultimately ill-fated) fist at Europe, but with Rajkovic looking a more than capable replacement for Mendy, and Guion offering a great degree of continuity, there is little reason to be any less optimistic than fans might have been ten weeks ago at season's end.

PREDICTED FINISH: 10th



STADE de REIMS

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Predrag Rajkovic	GK	Serbian	23	2019/2020	Maccabi Tel Aviv
Yehvann Diouf	GK	French	20	2019/2020	Troyes
Dialy Kobaly Ndiaye	GB	Senegalese	20	2019/2020	Cayor Foot
Nicolas Lemaître	GK	French	22	2017/2018	-
Yunis Abdelhamid	CB	Moroccan	31	2017/2018	Dijon
Axel Disasi	CB	French	21	2017/2018	-
Ghislain Konan	LB	Ivorian	23	2018/2019	V. de Guimarães
Lenny Vallier	LB	French	20	2017/2018	-
Patrick Bahanack	LB	Cameroonian	22	2018/2019	-
Thomas Foket	RB	Belgian	24	2018/2019	Gent
Sambou Sissoko	RB	French	20	2018/2019	Tours
Alaixys Romao	DM	Togolese	35	2018/2019	Olympiakos
Nolan Mbemba	DM	French	24	2017/2018	V. de Guimarães
Xavier Chavalerin	CM	French	28	2017/2018	Red Star Paris
Tristan Dingomé	CM	French	28	2018/2019	Troyes
Marshall Munetsi	CM	Zimbabwean	23	2019/2020	Orlando Pirates
Hassane Kamara	LW/LB	Gambian	25	2015/2016	Chateauroux
Grégory Berthier	LW	French	23	2016/2017	Auxerre
Mathieu Cafaro	AM	French	22	2017/2018	Toulouse
Moreto Cassama	AM	Guinea-Bissauan	21	2018/2019	Porto
Moussa Doumbia	LW	Malian	24	2018/2019	Rostov
Arbër Zeneli	LW/AM	Kosovan	24	2018/2019	Heerenveen
Rémi Oudin	RW/CF	French	22	2016/2017	-
Grejohn Kyei	CF	French	23	2014/2015	-
Hyun-Jun Suk	CF	Korean	28	2018/2019	Troyes
Boulaye Dia	CF	French	22	2018/2019	Jura Sud
David Guion	Manager	French	50	2017/2018	Cannes
Jean-Pierre Caillot	President	French	57	2004/2005	-



STADE RENNAIS

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	10th	52
2017/2018	Ligue 1	5th	58
2016/2017	Ligue 1	9th	50
2015/2016	Ligue 1	8th	52
2014/2015	Ligue 1	9th	50

KEY MAN: M'BAYE NIANG

Niang, whose somewhat star-crossed career has seen him move from Caen to Milan to Montpellier and finally back to France permanently, represents a considerable investment on the part of Rennes at €15m. Yet after the Senegal international scored ten goals in 2019 in the league, his signing was an easy choice. Still only 24, Niang still has issues with discipline and being a bit too bravura with the ball at his feet, but he has also consistently showed a willingness to involve team-mates in attacks last campaign. With Flavien Tait now also in the fold, if Niang can continue to show anything close to the form of last season, Rennes could make themselves a genuine contender for the top three.

STADE RENNAIS

SIGNING TO WATCH: FLAVIEN TAIT, ANGERS SCO

While the loss of Hatem Ben Arfa may on the surface seem a big blow given how influential he was last season in guiding Rennes to a Coupe de France triumph and a momentous European campaign, in bringing in Tait as his effective replacement, Rennes may have actually improved. Tait's raw numbers from last season (five goals, seven assists), don't exactly catch the eye, but watching the left winger play can be a thing of pure joy. Skilled on the ball but with an eye for goal from range as well, he may not have quite the level of glamour as Ben Arfa. However, in a side where there will be other attacking options to shoulder the load, a luxury which he wasn't afforded at Angers, he could yet take another step up as one of the league's best wide players.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

With several players having been involved in the Africa Cup of Nations, and Jordan Siebatcheu not yet fully fit, it has been difficult to view Rennes' pre-season as any sort of referendum on how the club might perform this season. The loss of Ben Arfa stings, of course, but the departure of Benjamin André may have more impact on how the squad fare this season, as the totemic midfielder was incredibly influential in allowing his side's attack to play with such impunity. Without him, one of Jakob Johansson or Benjamin Bourigeaud will likely be pressed into service alongside Clément Grenier in midfield. Although, youngster Eduardo Camavinga could yet stake a claim for a place in front of the defence in what looks likely to be a 4-3-3 given the absence of a natural playmaker. Defence and goalkeeper are solid enough but a lack of depth, particularly at the full-back positions, could be a concern, with Jérémy Morel the only arrival on the back of the departures of Mexer and Mehdi Zeffane.

STRENGTHS:

As previously stated, Rennes may have the league's second-best front three, with each of Bourigeaud, Niang, and Tait an impressive player. Romain Del Castillo, Adrien Hunou, and Siebatcheu add depth and Grenier is capable of contributing goals and assists from midfield as well. Édouard Mendy should again be one of the division's better keepers. With Faitout Maouassa back from loan at Nîmes and Hamari Traoré an electric presence on the right when he wants to be, Rennes' full-backs ought to be positive as well, at least from an attacking point of view.

WEAKNESSES:

The loss of André will be deeply felt, as between Camvinga and Johansson, manager Julien Stéphan will have to rely on a particular blend of inexperience and immobility, something that could leave the team's defence exposed. That back is also an area of concern; Rennes have lost Mexer to Bordeaux, a move which seemingly doubles down on the less-than-convincing play of Jérémy Gélín and Damien Da Silva last season, even if Ramy Bensebaini may be able to play centrally as well.

VERDICT:

Even with André and Ben Arfa having moved on, Rennes have sought continuity this summer, and largely achieved it, hoping to rely on a raft of younger players' continued improvement to push them up the table. The rigours of European football may limit their domestic ambitions, but there could yet be a surprise on the part of the Breton side.

PREDICTED FINISH: 9th



STADE RENNAIS

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Édouard Mendy	GK	Senegalese	27	2019/2020	Reims
Romain Salin	GK	French	35	2019/2020	SC Portugal
Souleyman Doumbia	LB	Ivorian	22	2018/2019	Grasshopper
Jérémy Morel	CB/LB	Malagasy	35	2019/2020	Lyon
Gerzino Nyamsi	CB	French	21	2018/2019	-
Ramy Bensebaini	CB/LB	Algerian	24	2016/2017	Paradou AC
Jérémy Gelin	CB	French	22	2017/2018	-
Damien Da Silva	CB	French	31	2018/2019	SM Caen
Sacha Boey	RB	French	18	2019/2020	-
Hamari Traoré	RB	Malian	27	2017/2018	Stade de Reims
James Léa Siliki	CM	French	23	2017/2018	-
Jakob Johansson	CM/DM	Swedish	29	2018/2019	AIK
Denis Will Poha	CM/AM	French	22	2016/2017	-
Eduardo Camavinga	DM	French	16	2018/2019	Bordeaux
Clément Grenier	CM/AM	French	28	2018/2019	EA Guingamp
Benjamin Bourigeaud	CM	French	25	2017/2018	RC Lens
Flavien Tait	LW	French	26	2019/2020	Angers
Romain Del Castillo	RW/AM	French	23	2018/2019	Lyon
Adrien Hunou	ST/AM	French	25	2013/2014	-
Rafik Guitane	AM	French	20	2017/2018	Le Havre
Faitout Maouassa	LW/RW/LB	French	19	2017/2018	Nancy
Yann Gboho	AM	French	18	2019/2020	-
M'Baye Niang	ST/RW	French	24	2019/2020	Torino
Diafra Sakho	ST	Senegalese	29	2017/2018	West Ham United
Jordan Siebatcheu	ST	French	23	2018/2019	Stade de Reims
Julien Stéphan	Manager	French	38	2018/2019	-
Olivier Létang	President	French	48	2017/2018	-



SAINT ETIENNE

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	4th	66
2017/2018	Ligue 1	7th	55
2016/2017	Ligue 1	8th	50
2015/2016	Ligue 1	6th	58
2014/2015	Ligue 1	5th	69

KEY MAN: WAHBI KHAZRI

Khazri blossomed as a striker last season, revelling in a free role that he will likely continue to play in ahead of a revamped front three. It is difficult to say how the Tunisian international will dovetail with Denis Bouanga and Arnaud Nordin, the likely starters on the flanks, as Nordin was a bit-part player last season, while Bouanga is freshly arrived from Nîmes. This is also true of Ryad Boudebouz, in attacking mid-field, but if Ghislain Printant can have the same faith in Khazri's considerable gifts as his predecessor, Jean-Louis Gasset, there is every possibility that he could improve upon his impressive return of thirteen league goals this season.

SAINT ETIENNE

SIGNING TO WATCH: RYAD BOUDEBOUZ, REAL BETIS

Boudebouz was an exciting attacking lynchpin for Montpellier, but given La Paillade's intractable status as a selling club, his sparkling 2016/17 campaign made his departure all but inevitable. His move to an ambitious Real Betis side made sense, but after an unhappy spell in Spain, including a loan from January to Celta Vigo, the Algerian international, perhaps cowed by not being included in his country's Africa Cup of Nations squad, has made a return to France. Boudebouz is not quite as quick as the player he replaces, Cabella, but his gifts from set pieces and in holding the ball up will nevertheless give Les Verts another intriguing dimension provided he and Khazri can coexist.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

There is really very little to find fault with in terms of Sainté's summer save the departure of Rémy Cabella. While not quite the force he had been with Montpellier, the matches in which the little midfielder featured in pre-season were a potent reminder of his ability to be both a goalscorer and a creative fulcrum. His versatility will be missed, as will his experience, but the arrival of Boudebouz has good potential for success, and the squad has been unequivocally strengthened elsewhere. The sale of William Saliba looks good business especially considering his being retained on loan for the current season, while youngsters like Zaydou Youssouf, Harold Moukoudi, and Sergi Palencia will be able to add depth without any huge fear of expectation. On another day, this side might be ranked higher, but there are still slight questions as to depth; what sort of shape would a long-term injury to Khazri or Yann M'Vila leave the team in, and how does Printant, who has never coached in Europe, manage his squad rotation?

STRENGTHS:

Sainté will once again draw on a core of experienced players through their spine in M'Vila, Loïc Perrin, and Stéphane Ruffier, and they also have good depth, if not the best in consistency in attacking areas. Printant will have this side well-organised and looks thus far unafraid to give younger players a chance, with 18-year-old central defender Wesley Fofana among those to have impressed in pre-season. Those qualities will serve the team well, as will the general level of experience on show at the club.

WEAKNESSES:

Only depth at full-back remains a real concern; Sainté were often forced to use Kévin Monnet-Paquet as a wing-back when a combination of injuries and suspensions robbed the club of Mathieu Debuchy and Timothée Kolodziejczak with Gabriel Silva a long-term absentee. Sergi Palencia and Alpha Sissoko have been added to bolster that position, but neither have much experience.

VERDICT:

The loss of Cabella, whose dynamism made him one of Ligue 1's best last year, will be hard to replace, but the team's spirit and performances in their early friendlies are commendable. If Printant can rotate well, a return to Europe should be the minimum expectation, with a potential tilt at the Champions' League not entirely out of the question.

PREDICTED FINISH: 5th



SAINT ETIENNE

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Stéphane Ruffier	GK	French	32	2011/2012	AS Monaco
Jessy Moulin	GK	French	33	2011/2012	-
Théo Vermot	GK	French	22	2019/2020	-
Miguel Trauco	LB	Peruvian	26	2019/2020	Flamengo
Gabriel Silva	LB	Brazilian	28	2017/2018	Udinese
Sergi Palencia	RB	Spanish	23	2019/2020	Barçelona
William Saliba	CB	French	18	2018/2019	-
Harold Moukoudi	CB	French	21	2019/2020	Le Havre
Leo Lacroix	CB	Swiss	27	2016/2017	FC Sion
Loïc Perrin	CB	French	33	2003/2004	-
Mathieu Debuchy	RB	French	34	2017/2018	Arsenal
Alpha Sissoko	RB	French	22	2019/2020	Clermont
Yann M'Vila	CM/DM	French	29	2018/2019	Rubin Kazan
Assane Dioussé	CM/DM	Senegalese	21	2017/2018	Empoli
Jean-Eudes Aholou	CM	Ivorian	25	2019/2020	AS Monaco
Zaydou Youssouf	CM	French	20	2019/2020	Bordeaux
Mahdi Camara	CM	French	21	2018/2019	-
Wahbi Khazri	AM/ST/LW	Tunisian	28	2018/2019	Sunderland
Arnaud Nordin	LW	French	21	2016/2017	-
Denis Bouanga	LW/ST	Gabonese	24	2019/2020	Nîmes
Romain Hamouma	RW	French	32	2012/2013	SM Caen
Franck Honorat	RW	French	22	2018/2019	Clermont
Ryad Boudebouz	AM	Algerian	29	2019/2020	Real Betis
Kevin Monnet-Paquet	RW/LW	French	30	2014/2015	FC Lorient
Lois Diony	ST	French	26	2016/2017	Dijon FCO
Robert Beric	ST	Slovenian	28	2015/2016	Rapid Vienna
Ghislain Printant	Manager	French	58	2019/2020	-
Bernard Caiazzo	President	French	65	2009/2010	-
Roland Romeyer	President	French	73	2010/2011	-



RC STRASBOURG

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	11th	49
2017/2018	Ligue 1	15th	38
2016/2017	Ligue 2	1st	67
2015/2016	National	1st	58
2014/2015	National	4th	65

KEY MAN:

LUDOVIC AJORQUE

Ajourque's bulky frame often looked out of place in the early going last season, with the more mobile Nuno Da Costa and Lebo Mothiba often preferred to the former Clermont man. Yet as the campaign progressed, his rapport with his fellow attackers (and full-backs) improved and he finished the season with an impressive return of nine goals from only 18 starts. More than just a big unit, Ajourque, like all of Strasbourg's attackers, is also diligent off the ball, doing his best to play a pressing game and involve his team-mates as well. He has already recorded a pair of goals in European qualifying, and looks comfortable playing either as part of an orthodox two or in tandem with Adrien Thomasson.

RC STRASBOURG

SIGNING TO WATCH: ALEXANDER DJIKU, SM CAEN

First at Bastia and then at Caen, Djiku has suffered through two relegations at this point in his still-young career, but that he has stayed in Ligue 1 while his clubs have not is a clear marker of his quality. Not the biggest for a centre back (he had come through at Bastia playing more frequently on the right), what he lacks in size he more than makes up for in his all-action style of play, using his pace and wiry strength to get about the pitch. Strong in the tackle and able to use his pace to his advantage, his mobility will be an ideal complement to Stefan Mitrovic and Lamine Koné, his likely partners in a three-man back line.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

Strasbourg have quietly set about retooling their defence, making the loan of Lamine Koné permanent and adding the underrated Djiku from Caen. Add in another year of maturity from the versatile Anthony Caci and Strasbourg should be much tighter at the back than in previous years. Elsewhere in the side, continuity has largely been the byword, with Anthony Gonçalves the only major departure. Jonas Martin had been an influential figure in midfield before a lengthy injury absence, but he looks set to once again play a key role alongside Ibrahima Sissoko and youngster Youssouf Fofana. Aside from Djiku, the addition of the promising Jean-Ricner Bellegarde in midfield should be a positive as well. Matz Sels looks set to build on a solid first year in goal, while the attack, which has already struck four goals in the Europa League, will continue to be feared, with Lebo Mothiba and Nuno Da Costa eager complements to Ajorque and Adrien Thomasson adding a bit of flash in attacking midfield.

STRENGTHS:

The depth and quality in central midfield is of a top six level; Martin is in the prime of his career and Sissoko is one of the league's brightest prospects. The ageless Dimitri Liénard adds attacking momentum, providing a versatile and hard-working set of attackers an ideal platform to play on the counter. Sels rightfully won the fans' player of the season award last year, and he will again be looked to to save the blushes of a defence which could be ropy at times (Mitrovic) but looks to be improved by the arrival of Djiku.

WEAKNESSES:

Lionel Carole had some tricky outings last year at left wing-back as he readjusted to the French football world, and will need to improve if Strasbourg are going to continue to play with such fluency; Abdallah Ndour is capable cover but nowhere near the same going forward. On the opposite flank, Kenny Lala has been impressive indeed, but Strasbourg lack cover for him. It also remains to be seen how this team handle the Europa League's relentless rhythm; there is very little experience in that regard and stability in the league may yet prove a challenge as a result.

VERDICT:

Strasbourg should be pleasing to the eye again, but issues of depth in defence could become problematic if the team progress to the group stages of the Europa League. It's not impossible, either, to rule out a late sale (Kenny Lala?) similarly scuppering Strasbourg's hopes. Survival shouldn't be a concern, but it's hard to see this side battling for the top six.

PREDICTED FINISH: 13th



RC STRASBOURG

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Matz Sels	GK	Belgian	27	2018/2019	Newcastle
Eiji Kawashima	GK	Japanese	36	2018/2019	FC Metz
Bingourou Kamara	GK	French	22	2017/2018	Tours
Lamine Koné	CB	Ivorian	30	2018/2019	Sunderland
Kenny Lala	RB	French	27	2017/2018	RC Lens
Stefan Mitrovic	CB	Serbian	29	2018/2019	Gent
Alexander Djiku	CB	French	25	2019/2020	SM CAen
Ismaël Aaneba	CB/RB	Moroccan	20	2016/2017	-
Pablo Martinez	LB/CB	French	29	2017/2018	Angers SCO
Lionel Carole	LB	French	28	2018/2019	Galatasaray
Abdallah Ndour	LB	Senegalese	25	2015/2016	FC Metz
Ibrahima Sissoko	DM	French	21	2018/2019	Brest
Jérémy Grimm	DM	French	32	2013/2014	Colmar
Jonas Martin	CM/DM	French	29	2017/2018	Real Betis
Youssef Fofana	CM	French	20	2018/2019	-
Dimitri Liénard	CM/LW	French	30	2013/2014	FC Mulhouse
Jean-Ricner Bellegarde	CM	Haitian	21	2019/2020	RC Lens
Benjamin Corgnet	AM	French	32	2017/2018	AS Saint-Étienne
Adrien Thomasson	AM/LW	French	25	2018/2019	Nantes
Lebo Mothiba	ST	South African	23	2018/2019	Lille OSC
Nuno Da Costa	ST	Cape Verdean	27	2017/2018	Valenciennes
Ludovic Ajorque	ST	French	24	2018/2019	Clermont
Kévin Zohi	ST	Ivorian	22	2017/2018	-
Thierry Laurey	Manager	French	55	2016/2017	Gazelec Ajaccio
Marc Keller	President	French	51	2012/2013	-



TOULOUSE FC

LIKELY XI



FORM GUIDE

Season	Division	Position	Points
2018/2019	Ligue 1	16th	38
2017/2018	Ligue 1	18th	37
2016/2017	Ligue 1	13th	44
2015/2016	Ligue 1	17th	40
2014/2015	Ligue 1	17th	42

KEY MAN: MAX GRADEL

Gradel is, still, for the moment, a Toulouse player, and as it was last season, his motivation and energy will dictate how well or poorly Les Violets' season goes. The Ivorian winger scored 11 goals and contributed a further five assists last season; no other player in the squad was involved in as many as seven goals. While his performances may have waned in the season's second half, it is clear that Gradel is the team's talisman, even if the club have added Wesley Saïd on a club-record fee. His heart-on-sleeve style, pace and eye for goal have endeared him to fans, and he was all that stood between the club and almost certain relegation last year. That said, Gradel is 31, and could well be tempted to cash in on his play.

TOULOUSE FC

SIGNING TO WATCH: EFTHYMIOS KOULOURIS, PAOK

The leading scorer in Greece last season, Koulouris arrives with a not-inconsiderable reputation, having been called the “Greek Benzema,” and reportedly tracked by Premier League clubs. A powerfully built striker, he scored 25 goals in 35 matches across all competitions last season, and has made inroads to establish himself in the Greek national team. An aggressive presence who is eager to press from the front and involve himself in all phases of the game, he is a superb finisher who is intelligent and instinctual with both feet. He is decent in the air, too; his success comes more from his fearlessness than his technique, though. However, it is not unfair to expect that bravery to translate well in France, his doggedness serving him well.

SQUAD ANALYSIS:

After winning three of their first four matches last season, Toulouse proceeded to win just five more times in the following 34. While survival was achieved, it was down more to how poor Caen and Guingamp were than their own heroics. How Alain Casanova has retained his job is perhaps the product of his past success and a butchered transfer market last summer. Aside from making Gradel a permanent signing, no new face save Baptiste Reynet made themselves indispensable, although Mathieu Dossevi’s season was complicated by injury. The departures of Andy Delort and Jean-Clair Todibo at below-market prices will have stung in particular, and Firmin Mubele was an unqualified flop at €5m, scoring just once in fifteen appearances. It is not all negative for Toulouse, though, as a young core of Ibrahim Sangaré, Kalidou Sidibé, and Bafodé Diakité emerged. This, combined with further development from Kelvin Amian, has allowed Toulouse to keep faith in Casanova.

STRENGTHS:

The team’s spine is youthful, this much is true, but it is also impressive, as the departure of Yannick Cahuzac and John Bostock’s move to the periphery will allow Sangaré and Sidibé’s development to continue apace. Dossevi and Gradel are both superb wingers on their day, even if they may be reluctant to endure another relegation battle on the wrong side of thirty. The full-backs, too, are perpetually underrated, especially the versatile Issiaga Sylla; the Mali international really should be playing a step up from a lower mid-table side.

WEAKNESSES:

The club lack creativity aside from Gradel and Dossevi; last season Jimmy Durmaz and Manu Garcia may have been erratic in their contributions but they still had the class to turn a match in a moment of brilliance, something this season’s edition may come to miss. Central defence, however, is arguably the biggest worry, with Christopher Jullien having departed for Celtic and Gen Shoji failing to impress since his January arrival. The young Uruguayan defender Agustín Rogel has arrived from Russia, but his two red cards in fourteen matches are worrisome.

VERDICT:

Toulouse, provided they hang on to Gradel, will be in much the same situation as last year. Unless Koulouris is a revelation, the team will struggle to score and could be even more inept at defending. Three of their first four fixtures come against sides that look to be relegation rivals in Amiens, Dijon, and Brest; a strong start is imperative for this side to gain some confidence.

PREDICTED FINISH: 17th



TOULOUSE

FC

SQUAD LIST

NAME	POSITION	NATIONALITY	AGE	AT CLUB SINCE	FORMER CLUB
Baptiste Reynet	GK	French	28	2018/2019	Dijon FCO
Mauro Goicoechea	GK	Uruguayan	31	2015/2016	FC Arouca
Issiaga Sylla	LB/LW	Malian	25	2012/2013	Horoya AC
Mathieu Gonçalves	LB	French	18	2018/2019	-
Gen Shoji	CB	Japanese	26	2018/2019	Kawashima Antlers
Steeve Yago	CB/RB	Burkinabe	26	2012/2013	-
Bafodé Diakité	CB	French	18	2016/2017	-
Steven Moreira	RB	French	24	2018/2019	Lorient
Kelvin Amian	RB	French	20	2016/2017	-
Agustin Rogel	CB	Uruguayan	21	2019/2020	KS Samara
Kalidou Sidibé	DM	French	20	2018/2019	-
William Vainqueur	DM	French	30	2019/2020	Nice
Jean-Victor Makengo	CM	French	21	2019/2020	Ferencváros
Ibrahim Sangaré	CM	Ivorian	21	2016/2017	AS Denguélé
Max-Alain Gradel	LW/ST	Ivorian	31	2018/2019	Bournemouth
Quentin Boisgard	AM	French	22	2017/2018	-
Mathieu Dossevi	RW	Togolese	31	2018/2019	Metz
Yaya Sanogo	ST	French	26	2017/2018	Arsenal
Efthymios Koulouris	ST	Greek	23	2019/2020	PAOK
Aaron Leya Iseka	ST	French	21	2018/2019	Anderlecht
Wesley Saïd	ST/RW	French	24	2016/2017	Dijon
Alain Casanova	Manager	French	57	2018/2019	RC Lens
Oliver Sadran	President	French	51	2001/2002	-