

## 14. James Rodríguez

Club: AS Monaco

Date of Birth: 22nd July 1991

Position: Attacker

Having joined Monaco for €45,000,000 in the summer of 2013, Rodríguez was another big name who had a point to prove in Ligue 1. The Colombian international has since shown his class in France and appears to have purely continued his great form from his seasons with FC Porto in Portugal.

One of the qualities that make the 22 year old world class is his versatility. Already this season, the player has started in four different positions for Monaco; central midfield, right midfield, further up on the right hand side, and in attacking midfield. It is fair to say that the Colombian has excelled in each of them and his elegance on the ball at such a young age shows pronounced maturity, which is ultimately a gift. A footballer can train long hours but one cannot simply learn to be effortless in the manner in which Rodríguez is. The midfielder has, however, tended to play much better down the right hand side instead of behind the striker and this is where he has been able to cross to find the front men and provide assists for his team. Rodríguez has received all of his man of the match awards so far this season when playing on the right hand side. Rodríguez can also play on the left hand side, but is yet to play here, presumably due to the wholesome form he has been displaying in other areas across the pitch.

One may go as far to say that Rodríguez, or “James” as he is affectionately known at Monaco has been their standout performer to date this season. He has linked up with fellow Colombians and former teammates João Moutinho and Radamel Falcao and together, they have helped to propel the big spenders into the title race. Rodríguez himself has been described as ‘El Nuevo Pibe’, ‘the new kid’, as he is seen by many as the successor to Colombian legend Carlos Valderrama. The 22 year old is not just compared to the MLS record assist maker for his ability to put the ball in the box, but for his expert dribbling and ability to run at the defence and consequently cause them problems. Rodríguez showed these qualities in arguably his best performance yet, where he provided two assists and caused the opposition a whole host of problems in a 2-1 win against St Étienne.

The Colombian international is also a self-confessed free-kick specialist and has scored one so far this season against Rennes. The midfielder struck the ball cleanly to the left of the wall from the edge of the area, and it travelled right, into the far corner. It was a wonderful strike and showed that Rodríguez can be a goal threat as well whilst providing his teammates with opportunities. One determining factor regarding James, which separates himself from the majority of attacking players, is that he is able to make a strong defensive contribution and has indeed been important in protecting Monaco’s weak and aging defence against skilful wingers. Rodríguez is also improving at delivering the defence-splitting passes which only the best of creative football talent can produce consistently. He has split defences with some raking through balls so far this season.



Despite the array of positives, however, Rodríguez is by no means the finished package. The player’s attacking sequence is often obvious and palpable as he cuts inside more often than not instead of going down the line. Rodríguez has also been slightly wasteful from range. The 22 year old loves to take efforts from outside of the area, but has rarely hit the target, only putting his effort on course for the net on a third of shots during 2013. However, these are areas that, at the age of 22, Rodríguez will be able to refine and succeed in.

During the first six months of the year, Rodríguez was of course at Porto where he built up a great partnership with the likes of João Moutinho and helped his side to win the league. One limitation in James’s game in Portugal was the dependability of his assist making as James was unable to provide an assist at all for FC Porto in 2013. Nevertheless, his ability to run at players with pace paralleled with the natural technical ability he possesses often left defenders in Portugal incapable of prohibiting him and the rest of Europe ultimately took notice, which earned him the big money move to France.

Internationally, Rodríguez has played an important part for Colombia in their qualification for the World Cup and has helped to keep his side in the top ten in terms of FIFA’s ranking system. This upcoming summer, Rodríguez will really be able to show himself against the best in the world in Brazil.

Overall, for a 22 year old, Rodriguez shows extraordinary class and composure on the ball and has the capacity to terrorise the opposition defence and score, as well as create goals. He has a unique versatility for a midfielder, and has been one of the stars of the 2013/2014 Ligue 1 season thus far.

*‘I am crazy with joy to be with Falcao at Monaco.’*

James Rodriguez

28th May 2013

**DID YOU KNOW?** At the age of 22, James Rodriguez has already won 10 professional titles.