

## 56. Jean-Armel Kana-Biyik

Club: Stade Rennais

Date of Birth: 3rd July 1989

Position: Defender

Cameroonian international centre back Jean-Armel Kana-Biyik has been a consistent member of both Frédéric Antonetti's and Philippe Montanier's sides at Stade Rennais over the course of 2013 and a good performer within them, particularly in the last year.

One major highlight for Kana-Biyik in 2013 will have been his contribution to Cameroon's successful attempts to qualify for the World Cup finals in Brazil. The defender played in some of Cameroon's group games and was generally unshaken throughout by the international stage, but sat on the bench as Cameroon won 4-1 away at Tunisia in the decider. Nevertheless, Kana-Biyik admitted to being delighted of his country's achievement and although nothing is ever certain in terms of selection, the player should make Volker Finke's World Cup squad for this summer, barring an injury issue. Kana-Biyik has now made three appearances for the national team of Cameroon, despite representing France at youth level.

One factor, which separates the defender from the rest, is his strength. The 24 year old is apt at holding off imposing forwards by using his often superior upper body strength to win aerial duels, ensuring that the long ball tactic is rarely an effective one for the opposition he faces. Incidentally, this strength, combined with a 'never say die' attitude was what allowed Kana-Biyik to make his only notable attacking contribution of the calendar year, his only goal. The player was on the scoresheet against Bordeaux in a 1-1 draw in November, where, after falling to the ground after his initial attempt was unsuccessful, he got up and outmuscled a defender to head the ball again, but this time with greater power and most importantly into the net.

Stade Rennais' relatively stable league position at the time of writing is in no small part down to their defensive record. Not only is the Franco-Cameroonian centre-back a dominant force when it comes to the matter of the physical battle, but he has the footballing intelligence required to play successfully in any league in Europe, being able to track strikers' runs and cut the ball out before it becomes a danger. Arguably, Kana-Biyik's form has dipped post-summer 2013. The central defender became very close to French full-back Kevin Theophile-Catherine last season on a personal level and his departure to Cardiff meant that Kana-Biyik has lost a friend in the dressing room and with that some of the presence and confidence that he displayed over the course of the 2012/2013 season.



On a footballing level, the departure of Theophile-Catherine has had little effect on Kana-Biyik, more the fact that since the summer arrival of Sylvain Armand, Rennes' new boss Philippe Montanier has switched Kana-Biyik to play the role of the right-sided centre back rather than the left-sided position that he has spent most of his career to date competing at. Subtle changes like these can often cause changes in form and, without a doubt, Kana-Biyik spent the majority of the second half of 2013 adjusting to the changes of a new manager, position, teammates and style of play.

One of the more obvious weaknesses that the player harbours is his inability to sometimes distribute the ball effectively. When in danger, the player often likes to boot the ball up the field rather than look for a simple pass. This is an area of his game which he has considerably improved on over the year, with the player starting to play his way out of trouble, but it could be developed even further, and at the age of 24, it is something that he has plenty of time to work on. For someone this age, the Cameroonian does indeed generally have very good composure and often looks more comfortable off and on the ball than some of the players that play around him in an often chaotic Rennes defensive unit.

Every player has an off day, and in 2013 Kana-Biyik was not an exception. The defender had a nightmare against Sochaux in December of 2013 during a 2-1 defeat, where he first conceded a penalty for a clumsy challenge on Roy Coucout and was then beaten all ends up Cedric Bakambu who slotted home the winner. It was a game to forget for Kana-Biyik just before the winter break. Hopefully, the Cameroonian will be able to eradicate this performance from his memory bank and begin 2014 with aplomb.

*'At times we are too cocky. But we cannot afford to be. We do not have the necessary quality.'*

Jean-Armel Kana-Biyik

16th March 2013

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