

## 42. João Moutinho

Club: AS Monaco

Date of Birth: 8th September 1986

Position: Midfielder



The Portuguese midfield maestro signed on to the Monaco project for a fee of 25 million euros in June and João Moutinho has had a point to prove in France since the summer in order to set about going some way in showing fans that he is worth every penny. Moutinho is clearly an exceptional player with the sort of talent that would make it difficult for most top teams in the world to turn his services down. However, it is fair to say that in these last 6 months of 2013, he has found the going in France tougher than he was perhaps expecting.

The 27 year old has been a regular in the team, with a sense that the fee paid for the player commands an automatic starting place in the Monaco side, even when the trio of Obbadi, Toulalan and Kondogbia, although more defensive, may have at time worked more efficiently as a midfield trio. However, manager Claudio Ranieri has played Moutinho in different positions in the midfield in order to get the best out of the established Portuguese international. Moutinho has played in attacking midfield, central midfield and defensive midfield this campaign, and it could be viewed that Moutinho has not been creative enough in the final third. In fact, he has tended to play better when featuring in deeper positions this season, a contrast to the positions he used to take up successfully earlier on in the calendar year for Porto.

Despite a disappointing level of creativity perhaps, Moutinho has still been one of Monaco's star players this season. The Portuguese international has featured in almost every game for the big spenders and has formed a strong partnership with the likes of Mounir Obbadi and Jeremy Toulalan in the midfield as well as those who he used to play with at Porto. There is no doubt that making your first substantial career move going to a new country as an established player for the first time does not come with difficulties. Not least as Moutinho's French was exceedingly limited upon his arrival in the summer.

This creates all sorts of communication difficulties for Moutinho not only with his teammates but also with the staff who are trying to get their message across to him. Time will of course smooth these issues over as Moutinho begins to learn the French language and get to know the personnel at Monaco better.

Perhaps the 27 year old's best game of the season came in a 2-1 win against Lyon, where Moutinho was able to control the tempo of the game throughout and even went on to provide an assist for his team. Indeed, one of the player's main strengths is clearly his passing; with a passing accuracy rate of nearly 90%, Moutinho is close to leading the statistics charts for Ligue 1 this season and such ability to play the ball to a team-mate means that Monaco are good at keeping the ball for long periods of time when they have it in midfield and thus building attacks.

The Portuguese star also sees himself as a bit of a dead ball specialist and has in the past scored quite a few goals from direct free kicks. This skill was demonstrated this season in a 1-1 draw with Stade de Reims, where he fooled the keeper into thinking he would whip a ball into the box and ended up curling one in of the near post. Despite this goal, it could be argued that for a supposed attacking midfielder, Moutinho does not hit the net enough times. On a creative front, Moutinho is yet to hit his heights from Porto, where he created a wonderful 12 goals in the 2012/13 season.

Internationally, Moutinho has been ever-present in the Portuguese squad this year and helped to guide them to the World Cup. Navigating through a series of testing matches including a playoff against Sweden. He has formed a good partnership with Cristiano Ronaldo in particular and this could be a crucial key to more international success for Moutinho over the summer with Portugal going to the tournament as relative outsiders.

Overall, therefore, Moutinho has demonstrated class and experience that Monaco needed. There is certainly a case to argue that his overall contribution has thus far been inadequate and that he does not score enough goals and has not been good enough in the final third in the second part of this year, but nevertheless, his stellar performances with Porto in the first half of the year paralleled with his potential to become a leading figure in Monaco's history books as Rybolovlev's project really starts to take off next season scores Moutinho a high classification in this year's GFFN 100.

*'To be champions you have to win everything. It is still early days but...'*

João Moutinho

2nd September 2013

**Quotes of the Year: João Moutinho:** 'Xavi and Iniesta? I am a mix of them both.'

*João Moutinho is full of confidence in November of 2013 in his ability.*