

63. Jonathan Pitroipa

Club: Stade Rennais

Date of Birth: 12th April 1986

Position: Attacker



Despite impressing on a regular basis since moving to Rennes from Hamburg in the summer of 2011, 2013 has been something of a breakthrough year for Jonathan Pitroipa. While Rennes faded away after a promising start to their 2012/13 Ligue 1 campaign, Pitroipa's stock has continued to rise significantly over the last 12 months.

Deployed predominantly down the right wing, occasionally switching over to the left and even playing through the centre, Pitroipa has further honed the impressive pace and dribbling skills that initially drew Rennes to signing him. With these attributes 'Pit', as he is often known, provides a constant threat on the counter attack and draws fouls on a regular basis. Furthermore, when coupled with his keen eye for a pass and some deft finishing, the Burkina Faso international can take some stopping.

Meanwhile, less desirable attributes that continue to blight his otherwise impressive game include an unfortunate tendency to hold onto the ball for too long and his occasionally suspect crossing and shooting – demonstrated by the fact that he has managed just two shots on target from 16 attempts in the league so far this season.

However, it is on the international stage that Pitroipa really excelled this year, cementing his place as a footballing legend in his homeland in the process. With 44 caps and 9 goals for his country to date at the time of writing, his performances at the 2013 Africa Cup of Nations saw him emerge as not only a true star in his own country, but across the entire continent.

After creating Alain Traore's late goal to clinch a point against Nigeria in their opening Group C game on 21 January, Pitroipa scored a stoppage time goal to round off the 4-0 victory over Ethiopia in the second group game. On the back of these results his country secured top spot in the group ahead of eventual winners Nigeria.

The Cup of Nations got even better for Pitroipa in the knockout stages as he scored a 105th-minute winner against Togo in the 1-0 quarter-final victory before helping his side to a 1-1 draw with Ghana in the semi-finals.

Then disaster struck in extra time against Ghana as Pit was controversially shown a second yellow card for simulation after 117 minutes. He was forced to miss his side's crucial shootout – which they narrowly won 3-2 – and his entire Cup of Nations dream seemed over.

After the match, however, Tunisian official Slim Jdidi admitted to making a mistake and Pitroipa's ban was rescinded, allowing him to take part in the Stallions's first Cup of Nations final. And while his country went on to suffer a 1-0 defeat, this proud moment will undoubtedly be remembered as one of the fondest memories of his career, fittingly rounded off when Pitroipa was named as the tournament's best player.

Since then, Pitroipa came within a whisker of inspiring his country to a first ever World Cup place after starring throughout their qualifying campaign, scoring three times, and taking them all the way in their playoff defeat to Algeria on away goals.

This prominent role in inspiring his country's meteoric rise has seen Pitroipa lauded on a personal level as he was more recently shortlisted for the African player of the year award. Seen as many peoples' outside bet for the competition, the clear favourite for the prize is Manchester City's Yaya Toure but no-one would argue if Pit was crowned champion on 9 January after an impressive year on the global stage.

In Ligue 1, meanwhile, the 2012/13 season ended with Pitroipa amassing 7 goals and 6 assists despite missing two months of action due to his international commitments. A total return of 10 goals and 10 assists in all competitions throughout the season testifies to what has been an exciting 12 months for the Burkina Faso winger.

The current season has started in a more quiet fashion for Pitroipa, with just two assists and no goals in 17 appearances in the league so far, but there have been some outstanding performances already this term – notably in the 5-0 win over Toulouse in October when he was central to so much of his side's good attacking play, linking play and providing key passes to his team-mates in an excellent showing – and there is definitely more to come.

Ultimately, at 27 years old and with considerable experience under his belt, the player is approaching his peak. Having been relatively subdued of late at club level by his own high standards amidst his incredible international exploits, it will be worth keeping a close eye on Pitroipa in the coming months and years as the ambitious winger looks to revive *Les Rouges et Noirs*' fortunes in the league. Who knows where his talent will take him?

'For now, I'm focused on my club. I still have a contract at Rennes and all I can do is keep trying my best to go as far as possible.'

Jonathan Pitroipa

On his future

DID YOU KNOW? Jonathan Pitroipa has his own song dedicated to himself, which plays upon entering his website: www.jonathanpitroipa.com