

Ligue 1 2013/2014: Your Guide to the Season Ahead

Get French Football News

A Note from the Editor:

The transfer window begins to pick up pace as we head to its business end, the month of August. However, there is something that enthuses and excites me far more: football is back.

As I look back on last season, in many ways, I wish we could merely repeat it. Whether it was PSG's magical Champions League run, Saint Etienne's monumental Coupe de la Ligue win or sitting there on a bleak November evening watching Reims's utterly mundane goalless draw with Brest; the 2012/2013 campaign had it all and with some to spare.

Undoubtedly, the majority of the footballing media will next season focus frustratingly on AS Monaco's performances as they look to criticise and accuse them of 'ruining football'. Frankly, it is an all too familiar stance that has been reiterated these past months, and Monaco have yet to kick a ball.

Justly or unjustly so, Monaco will bring competition that will undeniably raise the quality of football in Ligue 1 and give the league a larger following worldwide. However, if there is one thing I want you to take away from the introduction to the Get French Football News Season Preview it is this: try and look past Monaco.

Instead, observe what Philippe Montanier may achieve as he looks to revolutionise Rennes and turn them into a consistent European power; take an interest in the exceptional batch of young French talent that currently dominates Lyon's squad; applaud the way in which Marseille have set about recruiting this summer and take heed of the way Lorient attempt to play and the exceptional example that President Loic Fery is setting in how to run a modern football club.

I implore you to dig further than the forthcoming battle that Monaco and PSG will share in (which will without doubt be as absorbing a title race in terms of quality we may have ever seen in this league) and appreciate the underlying brilliance of the fastest growing division in Europe, if not the world.

Whether you are a Ligue 1 beginner or a seasoned expert, all the essentials for the approaching campaign have been compiled into this guide so that you may enjoy this season's football to the full.

Christian Nourry, Get French Football News.

AC Ajaccio: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Guillermo Ochoa	GK	Mexican	28	2011/2012	Club América
Oumar Sissoko	GK	Malian	25	2012/2013	FC Metz
Anthony Scribe	GK	French	25	2013/2014	Corte
Stefan Popescu	LB	Romanian	20	2013/2014	Marseille
Cedric Hengbart	RB	French	33	2013/2014	Auxerre
Fabrice Begeorgi	RB	French	26	2010/2011	Istres
Laurent Bonnart	RB	French	33	2013/2014	OSC Lille
Ronald Zubar	CB	Guadeloupian	27	2012/2013	Wolves
Denis Tonucci	CB	Italian	24	2013/2014	Cesena
Claude Dielna*	CB	French	25	2013/2014	Olympiakos
Ricardo Faty	DM	Senegalese	26	2012/2013	Aris FC
Jean Baptiste Pierazzi	CM	French	28	2005/2006	-
Mehdi Mostefa	CM	Algerian	29	2011/2012	Nimes
Brandon Deville	CM	French	20	2012/2013	Anderlecht
Paul Lasne	CM	French	24	2011/2012	Bordeaux
Johan Cavalli	CM	French	31	2010/2011	Nimes
Benoit Pedretti	CM	French	33	2013/2014	LOSC Lille
Sigamary Diarra	LW	Malian	29	2012/2013	Lorient
Chakhir Belghazouani	LW/AM	Moroccan	26	2012/2013	Zulte Waregem
Benjamin Andre	RW	French	22	2008/2009	-
Adrian Mutu	ST	Romanian	34	2012/2013	Cesena
Eduardo	ST	Brazilian	32	2013/2014	-
Dennis Oliech	ST	Kenyan	28	2012/2013	Auxerre
Fabrizio Ravanelli	Manager	Italian	44	2013/2014	Juventus
Alain Orsoni	President	French	59	2008/2009	-

*Claude Dielna is currently on a season long loan from Olympiakos

AC Ajaccio: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	17th	40	Adrian Mutu (11)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	16th	41	Eduardo (5)*
2010/2011	Ligue 2	2nd	64	Richard Socrier (12)**
2009/2010	Ligue 2	13th	48	Christian Kinkela (9)
2008/2009	Ligue 2	16th	44	Cheick Diabate (14)

*Ilan and Frederic Sammaritano also scored 5 goals in 2011/2012

** Jean-François Riviere also scored 12 goals in 2010/2011

AC Ajaccio: Likely XI



AC Ajaccio: Squad Analysis:

After a lacklustre 2012/2013 and the sackings of two managers in the process we can expect a new and improved Ajaccio under their latest boss, the flamboyant Fabrizio Ravanelli. Alongside him arrives the disciplinarian that is Giampero Ventrone. The Italian coach has worked with great managers including Marcelo Lippi and will instill the appropriate training regime to improve the current players at the club. Where Albert Emon and Alex Dupont failed, the Italian very much hopes to succeed. Last season culminated in the Corsicans finishing 17th, leaving it to the last day to maintain their Ligue 1 status.

Strengths:

Ajaccio have invested heavily in defensive reinforcements as Ravanelli looks to build from the back. If they can maintain the services of Ochoa in goal, then on paper they have the defence of a top 10 side. Whether or not the new signings will gel at the back is another matter. This paired with a passionate fan base, which is generally pleased with Ravanelli's appointment, which will expect to see an improvement on last year's campaign.

Weaknesses:

An often-lackadaisical midfield that fails to support defensively was Ajaccio's downfall last season. Players like Mehdi Mostefa are the worst fit for a squad like Ajaccio's; complacency is something ACA can simply not afford. Therefore it is essential that Ravanelli is able to distinguish between the players who will help and those that will merely add negativity. Ajaccio also have a tendency to quit when they are behind. With goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa flirting with the idea of a move, they will undoubtedly miss the goalkeeper's stunning performances should he depart. The right-winger Benjamin Andre is also a weakness going forward.

Key Player: **Ronald Zubar**

Zubar made such a difference at the back for Ajaccio towards the end of last season and will certainly continue in such a fine vein of form. The player is strong and powerful in the air and this season he will be supported by a more experienced back 4 that will include players such as Perozo and Bonnart or Hengbart. This, matched with his apparent tranquil nature on and off the pitch, should serve him well as a potential leader of the Corsican side for the upcoming campaign, whether he is awarded the captaincy or not.

Verdict:

Fabrizio Ravanelli will condition his players mentally and physically and is under no illusions as to how difficult next season could prove to be. He promises to escape relegation, and despite the defensive improvements that Ravanelli has strained to make, one finds it difficult to see the Corsican outfit exceeding those assurances. There is definitely a potential dogfight looming over Ajaccio come May and Adrian Mutu must keep fit because he certainly raises the standard of Ajaccio's attack twofold. However, with a solid base they should survive, just. **16th**

AS Monaco: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Sebastien Chabbert	GK	French	35	2010/2011	Charleroi
Danijel Subasic	GK	Croatian	28	2011/2012	Hajduk Split
Flavio Roma	GK	Italian	39	2012/2013	AC Milan
Giorgios Tzavellas	LB	Greek	25	2012/2013	Eintracht Frankfurt
Layvin Kurzawa	LB	French	20	2010/2011	-
Eric Abidal	LB/CB	French	33	2013/2014	FC Barcelona
Ricardo Carvalho	CB	Portuguese	35	2013/2014	Real Madrid
Nicolas Isimat-Mirin	CB	French	21	2013/2014	Valenciennes
Andrea Raggi	CB	Italian	29	2012/2013	Bologna
Andreas Wolf	CB	German	31	2011/2012	Wolfsburg
Marcel Tisserand	CB	French	20	2013/2014	-
Fabinho*	RB	Brazilian	19	2013/2014	Rio Ave
Gary Kagelmacher	RB	Uruguayan	25	2011/2012	Beerschot
Jerome Phoho	RB	French	20	2012/2013	-
Gary Coulibaly	DM	French	27	2011/2012	Istres
Delvin Mdinga	DM	Congolese	25	2012/2013	Auxerre
Jeremy Toulalan	CM	French	29	2013/2014	Malaga
Jessy Pi	CM	French	19	2013/2014	-
Joao Moutinho	CM	Portuguese	26	2013/2014	FC Porto
Jakob Poulsen	CM	Danish	30	2012/2013	FC Midtjylland
Mounir Obbadi	CM	Moroccan	30	2012/2013	ESTAC Troyes
Lucas Ocampos	AM/LW	Argentinian	19	2012/2013	River Plate
Chris Malonga	LW	Congolese	26	2012/2013	AS Nancy Lorraine
Yannick Ferreira Carrasco	LW	Portuguese	19	2012/2013	-
Nabil Dirar	RW	Moroccan	27	2011/2012	FC Bruges
James Rodriguez	RW	Colombian	22	2013/2014	FC Porto
Tristan Dingome	RW	French	22	2011/2012	-
Valere Germain	ST	French	23	2011/2012	-
Falcao	ST	Colombian	27	2013/2014	Atletico Madrid
Anthony Martial	ST	French	17	2013/2014	Lyon
Gaetano Monachello	ST	Italian	19	2013/2014	Olympiakos Nicosia
Terence Makengo	ST	French	21	2012/2013	-
Emmanuel Riviere	ST	French	23	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Claudio Ranieri	Manager	Italian	61	2012/2013	Inter Milan
Dimitri Rybolovlev	President	Russian	46	2011/2012	-

*Fabinho is on a season long loan from Rio Ave

AS Monaco: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 2	1st	76	Ibrahima Toure (18)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	8th	52	Ibrahima Toure (10)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	18th	44	Chung Yung Park (12)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	8th	55	Nene (14)
2008/2009	Ligue 1	11th	45	Alexandre Licata (7)

AS Monaco: Likely XI



AS Monaco: Squad Analysis

Watch out, Monaco are about. After Russian billionaire Dmitry Rybolovlev bought a controlling stake of 66% in the then impoverished club, situated in the smallest country in Europe, in November 2011, in an attempt to pull them out of Ligue 2 mid table mediocrity, many should be impressed by his achievements: It has taken just 18 months for him to do so. Mr Rybolovlev has taken no time at all to flex his financial muscles shortly after the club's status among France's elite for this season was confirmed, spending roughly €139m on new players including the likes of Falcao, Moutinho and James Rodriguez. Many expect them to challenge PSG all the way for the coveted Ligue 1 title.

Strengths:

Without a doubt, the attacking trio of Falcao, Rodriguez and Ocampos is more than mouthwatering. Combine this with the rearguard action Jeremy Toulalan provides alongside the creativity of Joao Moutinho, and you have an excellent case for the most potent attack in France, if not in Europe. Not only this, but Monaco has unquestionably the most exciting young talent coming through their youth squad than any other Ligue 1 side. Watch out for the likes of Jessy Pi, Yannick Ferreira Carrasco and Marcel Tisserand who will be hungry to fight for their places in an otherwise star-studded first team.

Weaknesses:

By all means, Monaco do not have a world-class defensive unit. Experience of Carvalho and Abidal will help, but one questions whether they will be able to truly handle the physical aspects of the league. Isimat-Mirin's genuine abilities were questioned when Gil left him at the heart of Valenciennes' defence in January. Fabinho is exciting but very inexperienced, and Subasic in goal is often erratic. Furthermore, the majority of their pre-season displays had been disappointing to say the least and one wonders whether the lack of squad continuity from last season into this one could damage Monaco's potential for greatness.

Key Man: **Falcao**

After paying in excess of €60m for the 27 year old Colombian prodigy, Monaco are going to expect the maximum return from their investment. Falcao must score goals, and lots of them, as there is no denying the weaknesses that Monaco could potentially in terms of defense. It is likely that Monaco will attempt to 'outscore' teams rather than play measured football in attempt to deemphasize their defensive deficiencies. Falcao will be under intense pressure to produce those moments of magic to grab last minute winners that turn 1 point into 3, or even no points into 1. Although his talent is undeniable is he really up for the task?

Verdict:

There is an almost equally divided opinion in the French media as to whether Monaco will break into the top two this season or not. Some argue that they are attempting to run before they can walk and with the clear divide in the squad with virtually half of it being South American and the other half French, Claudio Ranieri has his work cut out. With another defensive signing before the window shuts, they have all they need. However, their lack of a competent goalkeeper raises alarm bells. Only because Marseille should struggle could Monaco capitalise. **2nd**

AS Saint Etienne: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Stephane Ruffier	GK	French	26	2011/2012	AS Monaco
Jessy Moulin	GK	French	27	2011/2012	-
Baptiste Valette	GK	French	20	2013/2014	Montpellier HSC
Faouzi Ghoulam	LB	Algerian	22	2011/2012	-
Jonathan Brison	LB	French	30	2011/2012	AS Nancy Lorraine
Florentin Pogba	LB	French	22	2012/2013	Sedan
Pierre Yves-Polomat	LB	French	19	2013/2014	-
Paul Baysse	CB	French	25	2013/2014	Stade Brestois 29
Loic Perrin	CB	French	27	2003/2004	-
Moustapha Sall	CB	Senegalese	27	2011/2012	US Goree
Francois Clerc	RB	French	30	2012/2013	OGC Nice
Joshua Guilavogui	DM	French	22	2010/2011	-
Ismael Diomande	DM	Ivorian	20	2012/2013	-
Jeremy Clement	CM	French	28	2011/2012	PSG
Renaud Cohade	CM	French	28	2012/2013	Valenciennes
Fabien Lemoine	CM	French	26	2011/2012	Rennes
Benjamin Corgnet	AM	French	26	2013/2014	FC Lorient
Ibrahim Sissoko*	LW	Ivorian	21	2013/2014	Wolfsburg
Franck Tabanou	LW	French	24	2013/2014	Toulouse FC
Max Gradel	LW	Ivorian	25	2011/2012	Leeds United
Romain Hamouma	RW	French	26	2012/2013	SM Caen
Banel Nicolita	RW	Romanian	28	2011/2012	Steaua Bucharest
Allan Saint-Maximin	RW	French	16	2013/2014	-
Yoric Ravet	RW	French	23	2012/2013	Grenoble
Lynel Kitambala	ST	French	24	2012/2013	FC Lorient
Idriss Saadi	ST	French	21	2012/2013	-
Brandao	ST	Brazilian	33	2012/2013	Marseille
Kevin Mayi	ST	French	20	2012/2013	-
Danijel Alexsic	ST	Serbian	22	2011/2012	Genoa
Christophe Galtier	Manager	French	46	2009/2010	Aris Salonika
Bernard Caiazzo	President	French	59	2009/2010	-
Roland Romeyer	President	French	67	2010/2011	-

*Ibrahim Sissoko is on a season long loan from Wolfsburg

AS Saint Etienne: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	5th	63	Pierre Emerick Aubameyang (19)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	7th	57	Pierre Emerick Aubameyang (16)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	10th	49	Dimitri Payet (13)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	17th	40	Emmanuel Riviere (8)
2008/2009	Ligue 1	17th	40	Bafetimbi Gomis (10)

AS Saint Etienne: Likely XI



AS Saint Etienne: Squad Analysis

After an extremely successful 2012/2013 campaign that culminated in the club's first trophy win in 31 years, Saint Etienne must cope without the formidable Pierre Emerick Aubameyang after he departed to Bundesliga side Borussia Dortmund. Saint Etienne will also have the added difficulty of balancing Ligue 1 duties with their likely Europa League campaign, should they triumph in the remaining qualification rounds for the latter competition. At the time of writing, the club had yet to properly replace Aubameyang and this is certainly a must if they are to compete for continental football again.

Strengths:

With the now very likely retention of Stephane Ruffier and Kurt Zouma, Saint Etienne have done well to keep hold of the two key elements in their defence. Manager Galtier will hope that Clerc and Perrin can carry their excellently consistent form into this season from the last. There will also be large expectations on the shoulders of Joshua Guilavogui who will be expected to give a more mature account of himself this campaign after earning his 1st French cap in June. He must stamp out his disciplinary issues.

Weaknesses:

Unless they find another striker during the remainder of the transfer window, they will struggle to compensate for the goals Aubameyang scored last season. Brandao may have his moments of magic, but he is slower than before and often has attitude issues. On loan from Wolfsburg, Ibrahim Sissoko is unproven down the left, and in defence the likes of Brison and Clerc will struggle to deal with the pace of some of the wingers they will face in Europe and in Ligue 1.

Key Man: **Loic Perrin**

Many would disagree with our choice of key player for Saint Etienne and would have opted for Zouma or Guilavogui instead. However, we chose Loic Perrin simply because of the calibre of his performances last season. The captain is an exemplary leader and can do more than hold his own alongside the frighteningly talented Kurt Zouma. He is experienced and gifted enough to be able to nurture Zouma's talent in a way that enables the pair to form a wonderful defensive partnership. Despite the lack of pace in the back four, especially in terms of Saint Etienne's full backs, Christophe Galtier will more than hope that Perrin and Zouma can make up for them with their bravery and accuracy in tackling, especially from behind.

Verdict:

As much as Saint Etienne fans will hope for last season's heroics to continue, realistically, they won't, or at least not to the same effect. All too often, Pierre Emerick Aubameyang was used as a 'get out of jail card' last time out, and this is something Saint Etienne can simply no longer call upon. The team very much reacts to the support or negativity around them so as long as they begin the season in good form then Saint Etienne fans can remain optimistic. The signings of Baysse and Corgnet give the squad greater depth but Galtier will hope that he can secure two of Wahbi Khazri, Ibrahima Toure and Anthony Mounier before the window closes; because there is simply not enough quality attacking options at his disposal. Unless they win another cup competition, they won't qualify for Europe for 2014/2015. **8th**

EA Guingamp: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Hugo Guichard	GK	French	21	2011/2012	-
Guy Ndy Assembe*	GK	Cameroonian	27	2013/2014	AS Nancy Lorraine
Mamadou Samassa	GK	Malian	23	2008/2009	-
Reynald Lemaitre	LB	French	30	2012/2013	AS Nancy Lorraine
Dorian Leveque	LB	French	23	2010/2011	Boulogne sur Mer
Jeremy Sorbon	CB	French	29	2013/2014	SM Caen
Gregory Cerdan	CB	French	31	2011/2012	Le Mans
Arthur Delalande	CB	French	21	2013/2014	-
Vivian	CB	Brazilian	31	2012/2013	PAOK Salonika
Paul Bablioni	RB	French	23	2012/2013	-
Baissama Sankoh	RB	French	21	2011/2012	-
Jonathan Martins Pereira	RB	French	27	2012/2013	FC Nantes
Thierry Argelier	RB	French	27	2009/2010	Creteil
Mustapha Diallo	DM	Senegalese	27	2009/2010	ASC Diaraf
Laurent Dos Santos	DM	Brazilian	19	2013/2014	-
Christophe Kerbrat	DM	French	26	2011/2012	-
Younousse Sankhare	CM	French	23	2013/2014	Dijon
Lionel Mathis	CM	French	31	2009/2010	Sochaux
Claudio Beauvue	AM	French	25	2013/2014	Chateauroux
Thibault Giresse	LW	French	32	2009/2010	Toulouse FC
Steeven Langil	RW	French	25	2013/2014	Auxerre
Fatih Atik	RW	French	29	2011/2012	USBCO
Ladislav Douniama	RW	Congolese	27	2012/2013	FC Lorient
Mustapha Yatabare	ST	Malian	27	2011/2012	USBCO
Cedric Faure	ST	French	34	2012/2013	Stade de Reims
Christophe Mandanne	ST	French	28	2012/2013	Dijon
Rachid Alioui	ST	Moroccan	21	2011/2012	-
Jocelyn Gourvennec	Manager	French	41	2010/2011	La Roche VF
Bertrand Desplat	President	French	43	2010/2011	-

EA Guingamp: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 2	2nd	70	Mustapha Yatabare (22)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	7th	55	Anthony Knockaert (11)
2010/2011	National	3rd	80	Thibault Giresse (21)
2009/2010	Ligue 2	18th	43	Gilmar (5)
2008/2009	Ligue 2	13th	46	Yohan Riviere (8)

EA Guingamp: Likely XI



EA Guingamp: Squad Analysis

The Ligue 1 new boys secured promotion to the top flight for the first time since 2004 last May and will have the difficult task of remaining there this season. They occupied the final promotion spot in Ligue 2, and with very little to spend on improving the squad during this transfer window some would argue this upcoming campaign looks decidedly bleak for EAG.

Strengths:

In truth, at present the Guingamp squad does not have that many strong points. EAG will hope that their goal machine from last season, Mustapha Yatabare, can transfer his free scoring ways to Ligue 1. Jocelyn Gourvennec has been given the opportunity to continue managing the side and is greatly respected by his players. The fact that the squad is so close-knit can only be a plus in the struggle ahead. Claudio Beauvue, Steeven Langil and Younousse Sankhare will go a long way to give the midfield some direction as they look to maze their way through Ligue 1 defences. If these three individuals can consistently provide for Mustapha Yatabare then Guingamp will certainly have the capability to score several goals this season.

Weaknesses:

An ageing defence supported by a goalkeeper who is error prone could mean several embarrassing scorelines for Guingamp this season. This paralleled with some less impressive midfielders, especially in captain Mathis as well as Kerbrat, meaning that the newly promoted side lacks a real spine. Gourvennec's loss of Gianelli Imbula to Marseille is huge. Also, if anything happens to golden boy Mustapha Yatabare up top, the options to replace him are unequivocally poor.

Key Player: Mustapha Yatabare

The statistics do not lie. In 35 appearances for Guingamp last season he scored 23 goals making him Ligue 2's top overall scorer. Despite a quiet season in 2011-2012, during which he did not manage a single goal in twenty matches, Yatabare knows what it is like to play in Ligue 1 because he did so for Boulogne in the 2009-2010 season. Despite only joining the club in the January transfer window of 2010, the player played seventeen times, scoring twice. He is aware of the physicality he can come up against, and he knows what it is like to fight a relegation battle, even if he lost that fight the first time around (Boulogne were subsequently relegated that season). His pace and shooting accuracy will make him a threat for any Ligue 1 defence but he must have a better mental grip. All too often last season he became frustrated with himself or the team, which affected the side's overall performance.

Verdict:

I would like to say they have a chance of successfully remaining in Ligue 1 for the 2014/2015 season but, honestly, I cannot see it happening. With a lot of hard work on the training ground and the right tactical direction (one which will need to see them play more defensively and look to counter attack instead of immediately imposing themselves on their opposition like they did in Ligue 2 last season) they will make a valiant attempt. However, their central midfield is too brittle and their defence is not dynamic enough. Unfortunately for EAG it is back to Ligue 2 again next season. **19th**

Evian TG FC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Johann Durand	GK	French	32	2002/2003	-
Bertrand Laquait	GK	French	36	2009/2010	Charleroi
Mickael Salamone	GK	French	21	2012/2013	PSG
Fabrice Ehret	LB	French	33	2011/2012	FC Koln
Aldo Angoula	CB	French	32	2008/2009	USBCO
Diaranke Fofana	CB	French	24	2013/2014	-
Jonathan Mensah	CB	Ghanaian	23	2011/2012	Udinese
Cedric Mongongu	CB	Congolese	24	2011/2012	AS Monaco
Cedric Cambon	CB	French	26	2008/2009	Litex
Daniel Wass	RB	Danish	24	2012/2013	SC Benfica
Youssef Sabaly**	RB	French	20	2013/2014	PSG
Brice Dja Djedje	RB	Ivorian	22	2010/2011	PSG
Eric Tie Bi	DM	Ivorian	23	2010/2011	Lyon
Djakaridja Kone	DM	Burkinabe	27	2012/2013	Dynamo Bucharest
Mohammed Rabiou	DM	Ghanaian	23	2011/2012	Udinese
Olivier Sorlin	CM	French	34	2010/2011	PAOK Salonika
Facundo Bertoglio*	AM	Argentinian	23	2013/2014	Dynamo Kiev
Maxime Blanc	AM	French	21	2013/2014	Lyon
Cedric Barbosa	LW	French	37	2009/2010	FC Metz
Nadjib Baoula	RW	French	21	2013/2014	-
Nicolas Benezet	RW	French	22	2013/2014	Nimes
Kevin Berigaud	RW	French	25	2008/2009	-
Andres Escobar*	ST	Colombian	22	2013/2014	Dynamo Kiev
Adrien Thomasson	ST	Danish	19	2013/2014	-
Clarck N'Sikulu	ST	French	21	2013/2014	-
Saber Khilfa	ST	French	26	2011/2012	Esperance
Pascal Dupraz	Manager	French	50	2012/2013	Croix de Savoie
Patrick Trotignon	President	French		2008/2009	-

*Andres Escobar and Facundo Bertoglio are on season long loans from Dynamo Kiev

**Youssef Sabaly is on a season long loan from PSG

Evian TG FC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	16th	40	Saber Khilfa (13)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	9th	50	Yannick Sagbo (10)
2010/2011	Ligue 2	1st	67	Yannick Sagbo (9)*
2009/2010	National	1st	82	-
2008/2009	CFA	-	-	-

*Youssef Adhane also scored 9 goals in 2010/2011

Evian TG FC: Likely XI



Evian TG FC: Squad Analysis:

Evian were a frustrating side to watch last season, inconsistently blowing hot and cold, but doing enough of the former to secure top flight status again this season, their third consecutive season in Ligue 1. Evian's season could have arguably gone either way but after a torrid December to January, missing several key players to the African Cup of Nations, the squad went on a winless run of 10 Ligue 1 games in a row that ultimately forced them into a relegation dogfight. Sadly, President Patrick Trotignon has not been able to provide adequate funding this summer transfer window for Evian to really push on in this impending campaign.

Strengths:

Despite the club generally having a depressing-looking goalkeeping situation which is set to continue on from last season, the 36 year old Bertrand Laquait presently surprised Ligue 1 with his reactions and overall shot stopping ability as he rose to the challenge at the latter end (Evian did concede 53 Ligue 1 goals last season though). Whether or not Evian are wise to keep veteran Laquait in goal for the forthcoming battle is questionable as many argue he is likely to have already peaked in form. Meanwhile the defensive midfield pairing of Mohammed Rabiou and Eric Tie Bi is as robust as many in the French top flight this season. The former is being linked with a move away, and Evian will hope they can convince him to stay: they need his unparalleled creativity from the position where the vast majority of Evian's attacks begin. The signing of Nicolas Benezet down the right wing is as exciting an acquisition as any this summer and was extremely impressive for Nimes in Ligue 2 last season. Evian fans can expect a humble player with an incredible work rate to carve out opportunities for whoever plays up front this season.

Weaknesses:

The centre back pairing was so awful second half of 2012 that Evian made a desperate loan signing in the form of Dynamo Kiev's Betao in an attempt to patch up the holes. Jonathan Mensah and Cedric Mongongu are players who have shown their worth before, with the former even being tipped for international fame whilst he was at Udinese. Both men must improve on last season's half-baked activities for Evian to stand a chance this time around. More worrying is that if Saber Khilfa's departure is finally confirmed, Evian have no squad member who currently has the capacity to play up front. Also, Dupraz's insistence in keeping Olivier Sorlin in the first team must frustrate Evian fans. The 34 year old was tremendously susceptible to losing possession time and time again last year, and it may be to the team's detriment if they insist on keeping him as captain for this season.

Key Player: Cedric Mongongu

Now, it is clear to me that Mongongu is not the most talented player Evian currently own, but the club's potential survival and retention of a Ligue 1 place for 2014/2015 hinges greatly on his performances and consistency this season. The 24 year old played a pivotal role in Monaco's Ligue 1 accomplishments during his four seasons at the Principality but he has failed to find that form ever since he moved to Evian in 2011. He is a daunting centre back who, despite his obvious size has surprisingly good mobility, is comfortable enough with the ball at his feet to make incisive passes out of the back of Evian's defence. It is absolutely vital Evian's defence is performing to the best of its ability this season.

Verdict:

A defence that may be accused of complacency regarding its ability, a goalkeeper who may struggle to remain at Ligue 1 standard and a weak attack may spell relegation for Evian. They have to hope they can find more than adequate replacements for Yannick Sagbo and Saber Khilfa in the remaining days of the transfer window to stand a chance to even be able to fight when it comes to the business end of the season. **18th**

FC Lorient: Squad List:

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Benjamin Lecomte	GK	French	22	2010/2011	-
Fabien Audard	GK	French	35	2004/2005	Toulouse FC
Florent Chaigneau	GK	French	29	2011/2012	Le Poire Sur Vie
Lucas Mareque	LB	French	30	2011/2012	Dijon
Raphael Guerreiro	LB	French	19	2013/2014	SM Caen
Lamine Kone	CB	French	24	2010/2011	Chateauroux
Bruno Ecuele Manga	CB	Gabonese	25	2010/2011	Angers SCO
Wesley Lautoa	CB	French	25	2011/2012	Sedan
Yohann Wachter	CB	French	21	2013/2014	-
Maxence Derrien	CB	French	19	2013/2014	-
Pedrinho	RB	Portuguese	28	2011/2012	Academica
Maxime Baca	RB	French	30	2009/2010	Havre AC
Lamine Gassama	RB	Senegalese	23	2011/2012	Lyon
Mathieu Coutadeur	CM	French	27	2011/2012	AS Monaco
Mario Lemina	CM	French	19	2012/2013	-
Remi Mulumba	CM	French	20	2012/2013	-
Alain Traore	AM	Burkinabe	24	2012/2013	Auxerre
Enzo Reale	AM	French	21	2012/2013	Lyon
Maxime Barthelme	LW	French	24	2010/2011	-
Bryan Pele	LW	French	21	2013/2014	-
Yann Jouffre	RW	French	29	2007/2008	EA Guingamp
Kevin Monnet Paquet	RW	French	24	2011/2012	RC Lens
Jeremie Aliadiere	ST	French	30	2011/2012	-
Fabien Robert	ST	French	24	2011/2012	-
Giles Sunu	ST	French	22	2011/2012	Arsenal FC
Julien Quercia	ST	French	26	2011/2012	Auxerre
Vincent Aboubakar	ST	Cameroonian	21	2013/2014	Valenciennes
Christian Gourcuff	Manager	French	58	2003/2004	Al Gharafa
Loic Fery	President	French	39	2009/2010	-

FC Lorient: Form Guide:

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	8th	53	Jeremie Aliadiere (15)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	17th	39	Kevin Monnet Paquet (6)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	11th	49	Kevin Gameiro (22)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	7th	58	Kevin Gameiro (17)
2008/2009	Ligue 1	10th	45	Kevin Gameiro (10)

FC Lorient: Likely XI



FC Lorient: Squad Analysis:

After a relegation knife fight in 2011/2012, manager Christian Gourcuff and President Loic Fery worked extremely hard in tandem to avoid that same fate in 2012/2013, and they achieved exactly that, finishing 8th. Although their objective of a Coupe de France title win and European football for this season was a little unrealistic, and something they did not achieve last campaign, it is certainly an attainable goal this time around.

Strengths:

Some of Lorient's short passing game, paralleled with their swift counter attacking brilliance, was wonderful to watch last season, an ethos that Christian Gourcuff has spent years trying to perfect for Lorient. Their style of football was unique last season and helped to identify them as a top ten side. Their leader at the back, Bruno Ecuele Manga, who was missing for the majority of last season through injury, has returned to full fitness, and Lorient will hope he can make the impact a new acquisition often makes as he steadies the ship defensively. Meanwhile youngsters Kevin Monnet Paquet and Maxime Barthelme are set to continue to cause havoc down their respective wings as they did so often for opposition defences last season.

Weaknesses:

With some very canny signings and an emphasis on building a squad centred on youth, FC Lorient's team looks to be in really promising shape ahead of the forthcoming campaign. One would hope to see Lamine Gassama given more of a chance at right back, and Giles Sunu similarly in attack. Lorient's main weakness is not, however, team selection. It is instead without a doubt their puzzling goalkeeping situation. It is unclear whether Christian Gourcuff will remain with Fabien Audard as his first choice between the sticks or whether this will be the breakthrough season for Benjamin Lecomte. Audard was too inconsistent at times last season. His deliveries from goal-kicks and other such set pieces were poor and he often failed to find the target. It is a question of whether or not manager Gourcuff has the guts to back Lecomte.

Key Player: Bruno Ecuele Manga

It is clear for all to see just how talented the 25 year old centre back is and why clubs across the continent have come knocking on Lorient's door this summer. His most underrated quality has to be the leadership skills he possesses. His temperament and exemplary mentality allows him to command instant respect from his teammates. Unlike many players who were the subject of possible moves away from their current clubs this summer in France, Ecuele Manga never went public about his intentions to leave Lorient (if he actually had any). Instead he continued in a professional manner, and it looks like Lorient will hold on to their captain. His one weakness is his lack of an ability to head the ball. He is very much a modern centre back who is able to implement Lorient's style of play from the back of end of the team with intricate passing ability.

Verdict:

Christian Gourcuff has some very important decisions to make in terms of team selection. As I mentioned earlier he must back one of his two goalkeepers in Audard and Lecomte at the start of the season and then continue to support him. Then he must tackle the difficult situation that is Jeremie Aliadiere. The 30 year old was undoubtedly Lorient's most potent threat up front last season but refused to play in a friendly last month because he wanted to leave the club. Although this issue has now supposedly been resolved the incident has driven a clear wedge between manager and player. Lorient's transfer business has been quiet but effective so far, and one hopes that Raphael Guerreiro and Vincent Aboubakar get the minutes they deserve this season: two players with enormous potential. **6th**

FC Nantes: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Remy Riou	GK	French	25	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Erwin Zelazny	GK	French	21	2009/2010	-
Maxime Dupe	GK	French	20	2011/2012	-
Olivier Veigneau	LB	French	28	2011/2012	Duisburg
Papy Djilobodji	CB	Senegalese	24	2009/2010	Senart-Moissy
Gabriel Cichero	CB	Venezuelan	29	2013/2014	Caracas FC
Oswaldo Vizcarrondo	CB	Venezuelan	29	2013/2014	Lanus
Issa Cissokho	RB	Senegalese	28	2011/2012	-
Chaker Alhadhur	RB	Comorian	21	2011/2012	-
Koffi Djidji	RB	French	20	2011/2012	-
Birama Toure	DM	Malian	21	2012/2013	
Lucas Deaux	DM	French	24	2012/2013	Stade de Reims
Jordan Veretout	CM	French	20	2011/2012	-
Saad Trabelsi	AM	Tunisian	21	2012/2013	-
Adrien Trebel	AM	French	22	2011/2012	-
Vincent Bessat	LW	French	27	2011/2012	Boulogne
Fabrice Pancrate	RW	French	33	2011/2012	AEL Larissa
Yohann Eudeline	RW	French	33	2011/2012	Sedan
Serge Gakpe	ST	Togoan	26	2011/2012	AS Monaco
Adama Niane	ST	Malian	20	2013/2014	-
Ismael Bangoura	ST	Guinean	28	2012/2013	Al Nasr
Filip Djordjevic	ST	Serbian	25	2008/2009	Red Star Belgrade
Fernando Aristeguieta	ST	Venezuelan	21	2013/2014	Caracas FC
Michel Der Zakarian	Manager	Armenian	50	2012/2013	Clermont Foot
Waldemar Kita	President	Polish	60	2007/2008	FC Lausanne

FC Nantes: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 2	3rd	69	Filip Djordjevic (20)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	9th	51	Sylvain Wiltord (8)
2010/2011	Ligue 2	13th	47	Filip Djordjevic (12)
2009/2010	Ligue 2	15th	45	Jean Claude Darcheville (6)*
2008/2009	Ligue 1	19th	37	Mamadou Bagayoko (7)

*Stephane Darbion and Tenema N'Diaye also scored 6 goals in 2009/2010

FC Nantes: Likely XI



FC Nantes: Squad Analysis

Les Canaris have their work cut after a 5-year stint away from France's top division. Their fans may have the passion, but there is no hiding from it: their squad appears inadequate to deal with the rigours of the ever increasing difficulty and pace of Ligue 1 football. A late dip in form at the end of last season's Ligue 2 campaign nearly saw them drop out of the promotion places; although they certainly deserved the bump up to top flight life after some gutsy performances overall. The coy Michael Der Zakarian is generally well perceived by fellow professionals, but he knows the nature of the task that lies ahead.

Strengths:

There are only a handful of players who have the ability to be playing Ligue 1 football this season, one of which is talented defensive midfielder Jordan Veretout, who was part of the U20's World Cup winning side this summer. He will hopefully provide some stability for Les Canaris in the middle of the park. Also, the three forwards in Filip Djordjevic, Fernando Aristeguieta and Serge Gakpe managed 33 goals between them in last season's Ligue 2 endeavour and are all individuals who can carve out chances for themselves and produce something special.

Weaknesses:

The easiest place to exploit FC Nantes at the moment is down the flanks. Although I really like the captain Olivier Veigneau he has very little presence in the air and never provides the best options going forward. Vincent Bessat at left midfield will work hard, but, in truth, he seems to lack confidence to make necessary and pretty basic decisions on the pitch (e.g. where to pass, where to move).

Key Player: Oswaldo Vizcarrondo

It would have been all too easy for me to pick one of the three very competent strikers in Les Canaris' squad here. Instead I have gone for one of the few players Nantes have managed to bring in this summer: (an ongoing battle with CAS (Court of Arbitration of Sport) regarding a transfer embargo they were under, imposed by FIFA, meant all the other Ligue 1 sides had a head start on signings) Vizcarrondo has arrived from Argentinean outfit Lanus. The beast of a centre back has a brilliant reputation back in South America as a commanding and fearless player with a fighting spirit (something Nantes will need desperately). He is likely to partner fellow countryman Gabriel Cichero at the heart of Les Canaris defence. A lot depends on how quickly he is able to acclimatise to the French game, but watch out for this one.

Verdict:

A lot of pundits will not give Nantes a chance of staying up this season, and honestly, that is unfair. They have a compelling attacking trio who will keep Ligue 1 defences guessing. They will be dependent on Veretout to lead the midfield at the tender age of 20, which will prove to be a tough task and there are no guarantees the youngster will be able to fulfill this great task ahead of him. Sadly, because of the nature of the competition in Ligue 1 this season, I fear that Nantes will be obliterated down the flanks, and this will be their ultimate downfall. **20th**

FC Sochaux-Montbéliard: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Pierrick Cros	GK	French	22	2009/2010	-
Simon Pouplin	GK	French	28	2012/2013	SC Freiburg
Demba Camara	GK	Senegalese	20	2011/2012	Sporting Braga
Jerome Roussillion	LB	French	20	2012/2013	-
David Sauget	LB	French	33	2010/2011	Grenoble 38
Lionel Zouma	CB	French	19	2013/2014	-
Carlaio	CB	Brazilian	27	2008/2009	Corinthians
Cedric Kante	CB	Malian	34	2012/2013	Panathinaikos
Mathieu Peybernes	CB	French	22	2009/2010	-
Loic Poujol	CB	French	24	2009/2010	-
Joachim Eickmayer	RB	French	20	2013/2014	-
Sebastien Corchia	RB	French	22	2011/2012	Le Mans
Julien Faussurier	RB	French	26	2013/2014	ESTAC Troyes
Thierry Doubai	DM	Ivorian	25	2012/2013	Udinese
Joseph Lopy	DM	Senegalese	21	2012/2013	-
Vincent Nogueira	CM	French	25	2007/2008	-
Kalliou Traore	CM	Malian	25	2012/2013	Odense Boldklub
Petrus Bounal	CM	French	20	2012/2013	-
Rafael Dias	AM	Portuguese	22	2010/2011	-
Ryad Boudebouz	AM	Algerian	23	2008/2009	-
Sebastien Roudet	LW	French	32	2011/2012	RC Lens
Sanjin Prcic	RW	Bosnian	19	2012/2013	-
Sloan Privat	ST	French	24	2010/2011	-
Roy Contout	ST	French	28	2012/2013	Auxerre
Edouard Butin	ST	French	25	2008/2009	-
Cedric Bakambu	ST	French	22	2010/2011	-
Eric Hely	Manager	French	48	2012/2013	-
Laurent Pernet	President	French	48	2012/2013	-

FC Sochaux-Montbéliard: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	15th	41	Sloan Privat (9)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	14th	42	Modibo Maiga (9)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	5th	58	Modibo Maiga (15)*
2009/2010	Ligue 1	16th	41	Stephane Dalmat (4)
2008/2009	Ligue 1	14th	42	Mevlut Erding (11)

*Brown Ideye also scored 15 goals in 2010/2011

FC Sochaux-Montbéliard: Likely XI



FC Sochaux-Montbeilard: Squad Analysis

Sochaux will look to put a disappointing 2012/2013 behind them, despite their attempts to make things right during the off-season. Eric Hely is lucky to still have a job with the Peugeot owned outfit after failing to live up to the hopes of the fans and the expectations of the board. Sochaux narrowly avoided relegation to Ligue 2, arguably thanks to the excellent resurgence in form of central midfielder Vincent Nogueira in the final 5 games of the Ligue 1 calendar.

Strengths:

Without a doubt, we will marvel at the performances (collectively and individually) of the aforementioned central midfield trio in Joseph Lopy, Vincent Nogueira and Thierry Doubai. The latter two individuals have serious Ligue 1 experience and certainly played a significant role in Sochaux's escaping from the drop. 21-year-old Joseph Lopy's game time was restricted last season due to a spate of unfortunate injuries, but he is certainly one to watch out for.

Weaknesses:

Sochaux did not finish near the bottom of the Ligue 1 standings last season because they were unlucky. No, Loic Poujol, Carlao and Mathieu Peybernes were consistently instable in their defensive performances as centre backs last season and at times ultimately let the rest of the team down. There were also serious issues when Sochaux attempted to score goals last season. The January loan signing of Giovanni Sio turned out to be a phenomenal gamble by FCSM and also played a big role in their Ligue 1 survival. Sochaux were forced into this move because Sloan Privat and Ryad Boudebouz had their worst ever season's on record at the club. Boudebouz played without the flair and tenacity we have seen from him in recent campaigns and instead seemed disinterested. Meanwhile, Sloan Privat's deficiencies were finally exposed for all to see.

Key Man: Joseph Lopy

I was completely won over by Joseph Lopy after just ten minutes of watching him play. There is no denying that playing as a defensive midfielder is one of the most challenging roles to fulfill on a football pitch. At the age of 21, Lopy has the temperament of a player who is ten years older and more experienced than him. Furthermore, his decision-making shows a type of maturity, which is a rare commodity for any defensive midfielder to possess, whatever age. I hope that Hely renews the faith he instilled in this young Senegalese man at the latter end of last season so that we are all able to enjoy and admire the gift Lopy possesses.

Verdict:

There are promising signs for Sochaux for this upcoming campaign. Jerome Roussillon, Mathieu Peybernes and Loic Poujol may have committed their fair share of defensive blunders last season, but they are young and are progressing month by month. If Hely's midfield can live up to my expectations, then Sochaux fans are likely to get a great deal of joy out of their team's Ligue 1 performances if they are able to sign a striker that is. Everything is in place otherwise; after a season of transition, Sochaux will fight back up the table. **13th**

Girondins de Bordeaux: Squad List:

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Azbe Jug	GK	Slovenian	21	2010/2011	Maribor
Cedric Carrasso	GK	French	31	2009/2010	Toulouse FC
Kevin Olimpa	GK	French	25	2009/2010	-
Maxime Poundje	LB	French	20	2011/2012	-
Lucas Orban	LB	Argentinian	24	2013/2014	Tigre
Vujadin Savic	CB	Serbian	23	2012/2013	Red Star Belgrade
Henrique	CB	Brazilian	30	2005/2006	Flamengo
Jeremie Brechet	CB	French	33	2013/2014	ESTAC Troyes
Ludovic Sane	CB	Senegalese	26	2009/2010	-
Marc Planus	CB	French	31	2002/2003	-
Matthieu Chalme	RB	French	32	2012/2013	OSC Lille
Julien Faubert	RB	French	29	2012/2013	Elazigspor
Mariano	RB	Brazilian	27	2011/2012	Fluminense
Landry N'Guemo	DM	Cameroonian	27	2011/2012	AS Nancy Lorraine
Andre Biyogo Poko	DM	Gabonese	20	2011/2012	US Bitam
Jaroslav Plasil	CM	Czech	31	2009/2010	Osasuna
Gregory Sertic	CM	Croatian	23	2010/2011	-
Ludovic Obraniak	CM	Polish	28	2011/2012	OSC Lille
Rodrigo Castro	LW	Argentinian	20	2013/2014	-
Jussie	LW	Brazilian	29	2012/2013	RC Lens
Nicolas Maurice-Belay	LW	French	28	2011/2012	FC Sochaux
Hadi Sacko	LW	French	19	2012/2013	-
Fahid Ben Khalfallah	RW	Tunisia	30	2010/2011	Valenciennes
Abdou Traore	RW	Malian	25	2010/2011	-
Henri Saivet	RW	French	22	2010/2011	-
Diego Rolan	ST	Uruguayan	20	2012/2013	
David Bellion	ST	French	30	2010/2011	OGC Nice
Cheick Diabate	ST	Malian	25	2009/2010	-
Francis Gillot	Manager	French	53	2011/2012	FC Sochaux
Jean Louis Tiraud	President	French	63	1996/1997	-

Girondins de Bordeaux: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	7th	55	Henri Saivet (8)*
2011/2012	Ligue 1	5th	61	Yoann Gouffran (14)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	7th	51	Anthony Modeste (10)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	6th	64	Wendel (11)
2008/2009	Ligue 1	1st	80	Marouane Chamakh (13)**

*In 2012/2013, Cheick Diabate and Yoann Gouffran also scored 8 goals.

**In 2008/2009, Fernando Cavenaghi also scored 13 goals.

Girondins de Bordeaux: Likely XI:



Girondins de Bordeaux: Squad Analysis:

'Bore-deaux' is what Girondins were often brandished last season. Gillot's lack of attacking options once Yoann Gouffran left for Newcastle halfway through the preceding campaign were all too obvious. They partook in an astonishing number of 0-0 draws in Ligue 1, eight in total. Jean Louis Tiraud, the President of the champions of France's top flight just five years ago is under no illusions regarding the club's financial instability, and Bordeaux have not really been able to add to the squad. They have merely replaced Benoit Tremoulinas, the now Dynamo Kiev owned left back with Tigre's Lucas Orban. Last season culminated in a surprising Coupe de France final victory, securing Bordeaux European football once again. There are however large question marks as to whether Bordeaux can hang onto this privilege this time around.

Strengths:

Undoubtedly, the Bordeaux team is an experienced one and knows what it takes balance Thursday night continental duties with the ever more demanding Ligue 1 matches at the weekend. Ludovic Sane and Marc Planus provide a very solid base at the back and are rarely caught by surprise defensively (conceding just 34 goals last season, less than a goal a game). Mariano is a very underrated full back and Gillot will hope he continues to provide an attacking option when he bombs down the right hand flank in combination with his tireless defensive work. Lucas Orban has big shoes to fill after Benoit Tremoulinas' departure but Bordeaux have done well to secure this signing: he was sounded out by many Premier League clubs.

Weaknesses:

Despite undoubtedly having one of the best Ligue 1 defenses, simplistically speaking Bordeaux lack the firepower to score goals. Cheick Diabate's late discovery of form last season certainly made the difference to ensure Girondins' finish in the top ten of the French first division. He is, however, a frustrating forward who is not yet able to carve out his own opportunities for himself. Instead, he must rely on Ludovic Obraniak or Henri Saivet to supply him with multiple occasions and even then, his conversion rate is not good enough for the main striker of a team pushing for European qualification. Having said this, he is improving all the time and arguably is not Bordeaux's main area of concern. Against quality opposition, Bordeaux are caught out in the defensive midfield area time and time again. Captain Jaroslav Plasil is frankly past it and Gregory Sertic lacks the pace to rectify errors such as loose passes or being caught in possession.

Key Player: [Ludovic Obraniak](#)

The Polish attacking midfielder is a player that Bordeaux can absolutely not afford to lose during the remainder of this transfer window. He was regularly the sole source of attacking creativity, always playing behind the main striker. He has publically stated he would like to leave the club this summer but 'not for just anything'. He brings precision and mobility to an otherwise sluggish and static midfield trio. There is nobody that Bordeaux could attract in this current market that would adequately replace Obraniak if he were to leave. Jean Louis Tiraud must stand firm.

Verdict:

With so many clubs making forward strides during the off-season in terms of improving their respective squads, Bordeaux have had to sit on their hands because of their lack of funds. Further, Les Girondins were particularly fortunate to finish last season winning silverware, and one fears that as footballing luck goes, they have used it all up. The retention of Obraniak and Sane are a must. If they can be sure of this then with their reliable defence they should make the top ten, but not Europe.

LOSC Lille: Squad List:

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Vincent Enyeama	GK	Nigerian	30	2012/2013	Hapoel Tel Aviv
Steeve Elana	GK	French	33	2012/2013	Stade Brestois 29
Barel Mouko	GK	Congolese	34	2009/2010	FC Gueugnon
Pape Souare	LB	Senegalese	23	2012/2013	-
Simon Kjaer	CB	Danish	24	2013/2014	Wolfsburg
Julian Jeanvier	CB	French	21	2013/2014	AS Nancy Lorraine
David Rozehnal	CB	Czech	33	2011/2012	Hamburg
Marko Basa	CB	Montenegrin	30	2011/2012	Lokomotiv Moscow
Djibril Sidibe	RB	French	21	2012/2013	ESTAC Troyes
Franck Beria	RB	French	30	2007/2008	FC Metz
Jonathan Delaplace	DM	French	27	2013/2014	Zulte Waregem
Souahilo Meite	DM	French	19	2012/2013	Auxerre
Rio Mavuba	DM	French	29	2008/2009	Villarreal
Florent Balmont	CM	French	33	2008/2009	OGC Nice
Idrissa Gueye	CM	Senegalese	23	2010/2011	-
Marvin Martin	AM	French	25	2012/2013	FC Sochaux
Florian Thauvin	AM/LW	French	20	2012/2013	SC Bastia
John Jairo Ruiz	RW	Costa Rican	19	2012/2013	Deportivo Saprissa
Ryan Mendes	RW/ST	Cape Verdean	23	2012/2013	Havre AC
Ronny Rodelin	RW/ST	French	23	2011/2012	FC Nantes
Salomon Kalou	ST	Ivorian	27	2012/2013	Chelsea FC
Tulio de Melo	ST	Brazilian	28	2008/2009	Palermo
Nolan Roux	ST	French	25	2011/2012	Stade Brestois 29
Divock Origi	ST	French	18	2013/2014	-
Rene Girard	Manager	French	59	2013/2014	Montpellier HSC
Michel Seydoux	President	French	65	2001/2002	-

LOSC Lille: Form Guide:

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	6th	62	Salomon Kalou (14)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	3rd	74	Eden Hazard (20)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	1st	76	Moussa Sow (25)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	4th	64	Pierre Alain Frau (13)*
2008/2009	Ligue 1	5th	64	Michel Bastos (14)

*Yohan Cabaye and Gervinho also scored 13 goals in 2009/2010

LOSC Lille: Likely XI



LOSC Lille: Squad Analysis

After a torrid start to their 2012/2013 campaign, Lille were always facing an uphill battle as they looked to claw their way back into contention for European qualification as the season came to a close. They failed to reach high enough, and many blame their shambolic string of performances in their Champions League group stage against opposition such as Bayern Munich and Valencia. Either way, Rudi Garcia struggled to find the right combination of attackers to form a cohesive offensive unit right until the dying weekends of the Ligue 1 season, when Salomon Kalou particularly shone. Lille have a clean state to begin from going into this campaign after the departure of Rudi Garcia to Serie A giants AS Roma. After some consideration, it was decided that Rene Girard would take the reins for 2013/2014.

Strengths:

Despite the high profile departures of Lucas Digne to PSG and Dimitri Payet to Marseille there is still plenty of talent available to Rene Girard this season. The midfield three of Florent Blamont, Idrissa Gueye and Rio Mavuba have just about everything one could wish for: experience, energy, intricate passing ability, and all three men are born fighters. If Rene Girard can give this midfield trio a chance with a string of games early on this season then it has the potential to be one of the best in the French top flight. Furthermore, if Salomon Kalou and Florian Thauvin remain at the club (the latter has asked to leave Lille having yet to play a single minute for them) then Les Dogues hold two of the most ruthless and potent attacking players in the league. If Salomon Kalou is able to continue the form he was in after the African Cup of Nations earlier this year into this season, then Lille will have somebody they can depend upon week in, week out to provide goal-scoring opportunities. However, Kalou can do more than this. With the 14 goals he scored last season combined with his marvelous eye for the right ball to penetrate the opposition's defences he can rule the league this season. If Lille can tame the beast that is Flo-Thauv (he recently gave himself this nickname) then they have a player who will do more than carve out opportunities for Les Dogues. Arguably, Thauvin's greatest asset is his movement off the ball. He works tirelessly to provide options for his central midfielders, even if they decide not to play the ball he is offering. It is this especially, which makes him cut out for future success. He is by no means a player with a lack of motivation or drive to become the best of his kind, at least on the pitch.

Weaknesses:

A lot depends on the performances of the two aforementioned attacking individuals. If they fail to find form then Lille will struggle to score the necessary goals this season for a side that wants continental qualification. The young Divock Origi may well be Rene Girard's wildcard up front, but if this overwhelms the youngster, who has played very little professional football, then Lille will encounter the same problems in the first half of the 2012/2013. The signing of Simon Kjaer was necessary after the departure of Aurelien Chedjou, but if the big Dane fails to adapt then Lille's centre back options are second-rate. In the full back area a lot of responsibility will be placed on the shoulders of the 20 year old left back Pape Souare to fill Lucas Digne's shoes, and that is a difficult expectation for any left back in the world to live up to.

Key Player: Vincent Enyeama

As Lille's defensive deficiencies are their main area of weakness at the moment, it is all the more important that the big Nigerian goalkeeper steps up to the plate. After spending a season on loan at Maccabi Tel Aviv, Nigeria's number one goalkeeper returns to Lille as Rene Girard's first choice. All too often last season (after the calamitous fall out between Mickael Landreau and Lille which culminated in the player walking out on the club in November) Steeve Elana made costly blunders at crucial moments in key games that defined Lille's season in 2012/2013. With a leaky defence, Enyeama must be one hundred percent focused on keeping as many clean sheets this season to help the Lille cause.

Verdict:

Payet and Digne leave, but Lille are collectively more experienced. Rene Girard to succeed. **5th**

Montpellier HSC: Squad List:

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Laurent Pionnier	GK	French	31	2007/2008	-
Geoffrey Jourden	GK	French	27	2006/2007	-
Jonathan Ligali	GK	French	22	2010/2011	-
Siaka Tiene	LB	Ivorian	31	2013/2014	PSG
Cyril Jeunechamp	LB	French	37	2009/2010	OGC Nice
Hilton	CB	Brazilian	35	2011/2012	Marseille
Teddy Mezague	CB	French	23	2011/2012	FC Martigues
Abdelhamid El Kaoutari	CB	Moroccan	23	2008/2009	-
Daniel Congre	CB	French	28	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Garry Bocaly	RB	French	25	2010/2011	Marseille
Vincent Di Stefano	RB	French	20	2013/2014	-
Mathieu Deplagne	RB	French	21	2011/2012	-
Joris Marveaux	DM	French	30	2008/2009	Clermont Foot
Bryan Dabo	DM	French	21	2012/2013	-
Benjamin Stambouli	CM	French	22	2010/2011	-
Jamel Saihi	CM	Tunisian	26	2006/2007	-
Jeffrey Assoumin	CM	French	20	2013/2014	-
Jonas Martin	CM	French	23	2011/2012	-
Remy Cabella	AM	French	23	2010/2011	-
Morgan Sanson	AM	French	18	2013/2014	Le Mans
Anthony Mounier	LW	French	25	2012/2013	OGC Nice
Karim Ait Fana	LW	Moroccan	24	2006/2007	-
Souleymane Camara	RW	Senegalese	30	2008/2009	OGC Nice
Djamel Bakar	RW	French	24	2013/2014	AS Nancy Lorraine
Jonathan Tinhan	RW	French	24	2012/2013	Havre AC
Emanuel Herrera	ST	Argentinian	26	2012/2013	CD Union Espanola
Victor Montano	ST	Colombian	29	2013/2014	Stade Rennais
Bengali Fode Koita	ST	French	22	2012/2013	-
Jean Fernandez	Manager	French	58	2013/2014	AS Nancy Lorraine
Louis Nicollin	President	French	70	1977/1978	-

Montpellier HSC: Form Guide:

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	9 th	52	Younes Belhanda* (10)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	1 st	82	Olivier Giroud (21)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	14 th	47	Olivier Giroud (12)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	2 nd	66	Victor Montano (11)
2008/2009	Ligue 2	2 nd	66	Victor Montano (15)

*Souleymane Camara also scored 10 goals in 2012/2013

Montpellier HSC: Likely XI



Montpellier HSC: Squad Analysis

After winning the Ligue 1 title in 2011/2012, Rene Girard's Montpellier were brought crashing back down to earth last season, only scraping into the top 10, finishing 9th. Pointing fingers at the loss of the goal scoring Olivier Giroud as the determining factor for their turn in fortunes from one season to the next is not exactly accurate. The side struggled to find consistency week in week out during the last campaign, and they desperately grappled to balance Champions League showdowns with Ligue 1 duties. The squad was neither big nor robust enough, and Girard's insistence on putting out his strongest team for every game meant that, due to a lack of match fitness, they underperformed in both. Similarly to Lille, Montpellier saw a slight resurgence in form in Ligue 1 once they were dumped out of the Champions League but the side's negative approach to matches (the serial offender of this was Younes Belhanda) ultimately meant they failed in their main objective to finish high enough to play European football again this season.

Strengths:

After an increased focus in developing a proper youth setup in recent years, this project seems to have paid off. The likes of Benjamin Stambouli and Remi Cabella have had the luxury of receiving a lot of exposure to Ligue 1 football at such an early age. We can only expect more from these promising youngsters this time as they already played an integral role in the Montpellier squad last season. The new boss Jean Fernandez had an impressive track record as a respected manager until he walked out on Nancy last season in December. The Frenchman looked like he had jumped ship but yet he has managed the most Ligue 1 games out of any current Ligue 1 manager. He will make sure the group is close-knit and instill the right values in his players.

Weaknesses:

There are question marks surrounding the solidity of the defence. Daniel Congre had his fair share of frankly appalling performances last season, and whilst Mezague and El Kaoutari are improving, they often make simple mistakes and frequently lose focus, either due to their inexperience or maybe their incompetence. The jury is still out on the two 23 year olds.

Key Man: [Remi Cabella](#)

Montpellier must ensure they draw the absolute maximum out of the 23 year old this season, because it is likely to be the attacking midfielder's last campaign with the club. The masterful control Cabella has over the football is arguably his greatest quality. The footballing relationship he has with striker Emanuel Herrera is an exceptional one. Cabella seems able to sense where the Argentinean is at all times, halving the amount of time it takes for the Frenchman to find the delicate and ideal pass to put his teammate through on goal. Unsurprisingly, Cabella has been the subject of summer interest from multiple clubs but made the wise decision to remain another season at the Paillade.

Verdict:

I think the Montpellier squad will initially find it difficult to adapt to new manager Jean Fernandez's more patient style of play, and this will take time to remedy. This paralleled with my belief that Siaka Tiene does not satisfactorily replace Henri Bedimo as well as the fact that both centre backs are in my opinion not good enough for Ligue 1 means that MHSC will fail to make the top 10 this season. A lot hinges on how many goals Herrera and company can grab to compensate for the inevitable defensive failures. **12th**

OGC Nice: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
David Ospina	GK	Colombian	24	2008/2009	Atletico Nacional
Lucas Veronese	GK	French	22	2012/2013	-
Joris Delle	GK	French	23	2012/2013	FC Metz
Mouez Hassen	GK	French	18	2012/2013	-
Timothee Kolodziejczak	LB	French	21	2012/2013	Lyon
Nemanja Pejcinovic	CB	Serbian	25	2010/2011	Hertha BSC Berlin
Kevin Gomis	CB	French	24	2011/2012	Naval
Gregoire Puel	RB	French	21	2012/2013	-
Lloyd Palun	RB	Gabonese	24	2011/2012	Trinite SFC
Moussa M'Bow	RB	Senegalese	21	2012/2013	-
Romain Genevois	RB	Haitian	25	2012/2013	Tours FC
Diacko Fofana	RB	French	19	2012/2013	-
Stephan Raheriharimanana	DM	Madagascan	19	2013/2014	-
Didier Digard	DM	French	27	2011/2012	Middlesborough
Nampalys Mendy	DM	French	21	2013/2014	AS Monaco
Fabien Dao Castellana	DM	French	20	2012/2013	-
Fabrice Abriel	CM	French	34	2011/2012	Marseille
Mahamane Traore	CM	Malian	24	2011/2012	FC Metz
Valentin Eysseric	CM	French	21	2012/2013	AS Monaco
Luigi Bruins	CM	Dutch	26	2012/2013	Gent
Christian Bruls*	LW	Belgian	23	2013/2014	Excelsior
Eric Bautheac	LW	French	25	2012/2013	Dijon
Jeremy Pied	RW	French	24	2012/2013	Lyon
Alexy Bosetti	ST	French	20	2012/2013	-
Abraham Guie Guie	ST	Ivorian	27	2012/2013	Tours FC
Jordan Astier	ST	French	23	2013/2014	-
Xavier Pentecote	ST	French	26	2011/2012	Toulouse FC
Dario Cvitanich	ST	Argentinian	29	2012/2013	Ajax
Neal Maupay	ST	French	16	2012/2013	-
Stephane Bahoken	ST	French	21	2012/2013	-
Claude Puel	Manager	French	51	2012/2013	Lyon
Jean Pierre Rivere	President	French	56	2011/2012	-

*Christian Bruls is on a season long loan from Gent

OGC Nice: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	4 th	64	Dario Cvitanich (19)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	13 th	42	Fabian Monzon (8)*
2010/2011	Ligue 1	17 th	46	Eric Mouloungui (8)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	15 th	44	Loic Remy (14)
2008/2009	Ligue 1	9 th	50	Loic Remy (11)

*Anthony Mounier also scored 8 goals in 2011/2012

OGC Nice: Likely XI



OGC Nice: Squad Analysis

Historic: one word to sum up OGC Nice's 2012/2013 season. Claude Puel took the reins and immediately instilled an innovative incisive counter attacking philosophy which was an instant success in dismantling Ligue 1 opponents left, right and centre. He has groomed and nurtured a youthful but hard working squad who strive for success. Despite the disappointing departure of Renato Civelli to Bursaspor, with whom Nice have lost a natural leader and inspiration to the other players in the squad, the team is roughly the same as last season, and Rivere will hope his Aiglons can match the success which culminated in their qualification for the Europa League.

Strengths:

The core team spirit is strong and feisty which was one of the reasons why Nice were overachieving last season; the squad was hungry to work together to produce the best results by giving the maximum collectively. Dario Cvitanich proved to be an absolute revelation for his performances in the Nice shirt, scoring 19 goals and after costing less than €400k! He was invariably labeled 'bargain of the year' and is certainly one of the most important assets that Nice currently own. Also, the only signing that OGC Nice have been able to make this summer transfer window at the time of writing is in my view an excellent one, that of Nampalys Mendy. The defensive midfielder left the riches of Monaco to join a club where he could guarantee to be looked after instead of being discarded in one or two years. The 21 year old has said that 'this is what he always wanted' and that 'he can be closer to his family and he can play in Europe'. One of his greatest qualities is that he does not dive into tackles but instead approaches defending intelligently and cautiously but decisively.

Weaknesses:

The squad is still fairly inexperienced, but that is not the main problem. OGC Nice have failed to find a replacement for Renato Civelli at centre back and now have very limited options in that position. Kevin Gomis is likely to have a place in the starting XI when he really is not good enough to be playing at a continental level. The 24 year old is very weak in the air but is also not the born leader Civelli is. Claude Puel will have to hope that Didier Digard shows more of the required attributes on the pitch as the club's captain.

Key Man: David Ospina

When OGC Nice managed to convince the 24-year-old Colombian shot stopper to extend his contract, which was to run out in June of this year at the last minute, the response was one of euphoria from the fans. After having identified the weak link in Les Aiglons' team as one of the centre backs, Ospina is going to have to work even harder to continue to produce the reflex saves he often baffled Ligue 1 strikers with last season as he constantly denied them of their goals. However, his distribution from goal kicks can often be erratic and inaccurate. This is something for the Colombian to work on if he harbours ambitions to become Ligue 1's best keeper.

Verdict:

2012/2013 was very much a breakthrough season for OGC Nice, and Claude Puel will know all too well that Les Aiglons will struggle to balance Thursday night Europa League matches with the Ligue 1 duties at the weekend. However, I believe that Puel's raw breed of football should see them finish in a top 10 position in the French flight this season, even if their squad simply has not got the depth to compete effectively in the Europa League. **7th**

Olympique de Marseille: Squad List:

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Gennaro Bracigliano	GK	French	33	2011/2012	AS Nancy Lorraine
Brice Samba	GK	French	19	2012/2013	Havre AC
Steve Mandanda	GK	French	28	2008/2009	Havre AC
Benjamin Mendy	LB	French	19	2013/2014	Havre AC
Jeremy Morel	LB	French	29	2011/2012	FC Lorient
Nicolas N'Koulou	CB	Cameroonian	23	2011/2012	AS Monaco
Lucas Mendes	CB	Brazilian	23	2012/2013	Coritiba Foot Club
Souleymane Diawara	CB	Senegalese	34	2009/2010	Bordeaux
Senah Mango	CB	French	21	2012/2013	-
Kassim Abdallah	RB	Comorian	26	2012/2013	Sedan
Rod Fanni	RB	French	31	2010/2011	Stade Rennais
Laurent Abergel	RB	French	20	2013/2014	-
Rafidine Abdallah	DM	French	19	2012/2013	-
Alaixys Romao	DM	Togolese	29	2012/2013	FC Lorient
Gilbert Imbula	DM	French	20	2013/2014	EA Guingamp
Benoit Cheyrou	CM	French	32	2007/2008	Auxerre
Kevin Osei	CM	French	22	2011/2012	-
Foued Kadir	AM	Algerian	29	2012/2013	Valenciennes
Mathieu Valbuena	AM	French	28	2006/2007	Libourne-St-Seurin
Dimitri Payet	LW	French	26	2013/2014	LOSC Lille
Alexander N'Doumbou	LW	Gabonese	21	2012/2013	-
Andre Ayew	LW	Ghanaian	23	2009/2010	-
Morgan Amalfitano	RW	French	28	2011/2012	FC Lorient
Modou Sougou	RW	Senegalese	28	2012/2013	CFR Cluj
Jordan Ayew	ST	Ghanaian	21	2009/2010	-
Andre Pierre Gignac	ST	French	27	2010/2011	Toulouse FC
Elie Baup	Manager	French	58	2012/2013	FC Nantes
Vincent Labrune	President	French	42	2011/2012	-

Olympique de Marseille: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	2nd	71	Andre Pierre Gignac (13)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	10th	48	Loic Remy (12)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	2nd	68	Loic Remy (15)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	1st	78	Mamadou Niang (18)
2008/2009	Ligue 1	2nd	77	Mamadou Niang (14)

Olympique de Marseille: Likely XI



Olympique de Marseille: Squad Analysis

Order was restored for the noisy Marseillais as they secured Champions League football for this season after pushing PSG virtually all the way for the title, but falling at the final hurdle, finishing 2nd in Ligue 1. In an attempt to compete with the aggressive transfer policies of PSG and Monaco, Sporting Director Jose Anigo has formulated a strategy to buy homegrown, young talent; consequently, while ASM and PSG may have the stars of the moment, Marseille have the stars of the future.

Strengths:

Marseille might have played some of the most boring football in recent years, guided by the steady and precautionous hand of the rather conservative Elie Baup, but no one can argue that it was mostly effective. Marseille's ability to find late winners and hold their nerve in Ligue 1 matches in protecting one goal leads proved invaluable last season, and they will need to call on this power again. Out of the 21 league matches Marseille triumphed in last season, 18 were won by just one goal! The swagger that comes with being a Marseille player instills that belief that enables individuals in the squad to come up with moments of magic at timely instances.

Weaknesses:

The signing of Benjamin Mendy finally spells the beginning of the end of Jeremy Morel's reign at the left back position. Morel has been brandished in the past as one of the worst players to perform in an OM shirt and, whilst that is an inequitable view, his impulsive attitude to join every possible attack often leaves him exposed at the back. He is also regarded as a player with a weak mental attitude and when he feels there is a lack of confidence in his ability from the fans, fellow teammates or the manager then his performances suffer as a result. Marseille also have only two recognisable strikers in their squad this year, and while they are working to add one more by the end of the transfer window, OM fans can be forgiven for worrying. While Andre Pierre Gignac is lethal when he has the ball at his feet and through on goal, he struggles to get to that position in the first place and is also unimpressive in the air considering his physical height. The other option is Jordan Ayew who has serious disciplinary issues, stemming from a lack of footballing maturity. Hopefully he can eradicate these as this campaign takes course because he possesses a more natural goal scoring instinct than his more experienced teammate.

Key Player: [Mathieu Valbuena](#)

When your agent is having talks with Barcelona, you have to be doing something right. The 28 year old was indisputably Marseille's attacking engine last season, working tirelessly in his rather free role behind Gignac, but also as the first line of attack. The control he has is second to none out of his Marseille teammates, and his pinpoint set pieces are often the source of goals for l'OM. His ability to spin off defenders when he does not have the ball at his feet is perhaps due down to his petite size. It now looks as if Marseille will be able to keep hold of him for at least one more season, and the player has admitted he is delighted to be joined by Dimitri Payet this campaign. The pair were tied first in the Ligue 1 assists table last season and there is therefore no doubt that Gignac will be given ample opportunity to score.

Verdict:

Opinion is very much split as to whether or not AS Monaco have what it takes to overrun Marseille in the first season after their return from Ligue 2. I am inclined to believe that whilst ASM have quite a wonderful collection of players Marseille's vast Ligue 1 experience should be enough to fend the nouveau-riche side off. However, for their own good Marseille must form a more efficient defensive unit. They conceded 36 goals last season and scored 42. This shows perhaps just how fortunate they were. However, I believe Imbula and Payet are pronounced enough reinforcements that will enable Marseille to produce the same overall performance as last season. [2nd](#)

Olympique Lyonnais: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Remy Vercoutre	GK	French	33	2004/2005	Montpellier HSC
Anthony Lopes	GK	French	22	2011/2012	-
Mathieu Gorgelin	GK	French	22	2011/2012	-
Theo Defourny	GK	French	21	2013/2014	-
Jeremy Frick	GK	Swiss	20	2013/2014	-
Henri Bedimo	LB	Cameroonian	29	2013/2014	Montpellier HSC
Mouhamadou Dabo	LB	French	26	2011/2012	Sevilla
Bakary Kone	CB	Burkinabe	25	2011/2012	EA Guingamp
Milan Bisevac	CB	Serbian	29	2012/2013	PSG
Naby Sarr	CB	French	19	2013/2014	-
Samuel Umtiti	CB	French	19	2011/2012	-
Romaric N'Gouma	CB	French	18	2013/2014	-
Mehdi Zeffrane	RB	French	21	2012/2013	-
Miguel Lopes*	RB	Portuguese	26	2013/2014	Sporting Lisbon
Gueida Fofana	DM	French	22	2011/2012	Havre AC
Jordan Ferri	DM	French	21	2012/2013	-
Maxime Gonalons	CM	French	24	2009/2010	-
Sidy Kone	CM	French	21	2012/2013	-
Steed Malbranque	CM	French	33	2012/2013	-
Arnold Mvuemba	CM	French	28	2012/2013	FC Lorient
Clement Grenier	AM	French	22	2008/2009	-
Yoann Gourcuff	AM	French	28	2010/2011	Bordeaux
Fares Bahlouli	AM	French	18	2013/2014	-
Nabil Fekir	AM	Algerian	20	2013/2014	-
Rachid Ghezzal	LW	Algerian	21	2012/2013	-
Gael Danic	LW	French	31	2013/2014	Valenciennes
Alassane Plea	RW	French	20	2012/2013	-
Alexandre Lacazette	RW	French	22	2009/2010	-
Jimmy Briand	RW	French	27	2010/2011	Stade Rennais
Clinton N'Jie	RW	French	19	2013/2014	-
Zakarie Labidi	ST	French	18	2013/2014	-
Lisandro Lopez	ST	Argentinian	30	2009/2010	FC Porto
Bafetimbi Gomis	ST	French	28	2009/2010	AS Saint Etienne
Yassine Benzia	ST	French	18	2012/2013	-
Harry Novillo	ST	French	21	2012/2013	-
Mohamed Yattara	ST	French	20	2012/2013	-
Remi Garde	Manager	French	47	2011/2012	-
Jean Michel Aulas	President	French	64	1987/1988	-

*Miguel Lopes is on a season long loan from Sporting Lisbon

Olympique Lyonnais: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	3rd	67	Bafetimbi Gomis (16)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	4th	64	Lisandro Lopez (16)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	3rd	64	Lisandro Lopez (17)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	2nd	72	Lisandro Lopez (15)
2008/2009	Ligue 1	3rd	71	Karim Benzema (17)

Olympique Lyonnais: Likely XI



Olympique Lyonnais: Squad Analysis:

Jean Michel Aulas's obsession with developing the best youth setup in France is finally paying off. The money-hungry President is always looking for ways to make Lyon profitable after several seasons without silverware. Without a doubt, Lyon have some of the most exciting French youngsters at their disposal. After struggling to get there, Lyon secured a chance to qualify for the Champions League this season, finishing 3rd in 2012/2013. At the time of writing they have reached the playoffs after beating Grasshoppers over two legs. Remi Garde's team is now ideally built to face both the challenges that wait competitively continentally as well as nationally. The group is one of the largest in Ligue 1 this season.

Strengths:

As I mentioned before, the quality of the young players coming through the Lyon system is as exciting as ever. In Samuel Umtiti and Naby Sarr, who equally played large roles in France's U20 World Cup win this summer, Lyon have two centre backs who can become international stars. Disappointingly, it appears that Remi Garde still prefers to pick the arguably inadequate Burkinabe Bakary Kone to play ahead of the two young Frenchmen as he has done in the pre-season matches. The trio of Clement Grenier, Alexandre Lacazette and Maxime Gonalons are all fantastic players in their own right and continue to grow in confidence and in reputation as the seasons go by. The first is perhaps the most electrifying.

Weaknesses:

Probably the most obvious weakness to the Lyon outfit is the lack of available strikers in the squad. With the impending departure of Bafetimbi Gomis, Remi Garde only has the veteran Argentinian striker Lisandro Lopez at his disposal, and there is an assumption that 'Licha' is past his best. Lopez was often made captain last season, and this had a seriously negative effect on his performances personally, as if the extra responsibility distracted him from his own game. The centre back pairing of Milan Bisevac and Bakary Kone is shambolic. The pair often get in each others way when it comes to defensive duties and neither are that apt at ridding the ball from the opponents feet. However, both are extremely competent in accurately passing the ball to a teammate when under pressure or otherwise.

Key Player: [Clement Grenier](#)

2012/2013 was the season in which football fans around the world first took notice of Clement Grenier. In truth, the player had a mixed season for Les Gones but he flourished in Lyon's final games, which were key in securing the final Champions League spot. Indeed, there were games when Grenier frustrated Lyon fans with his inability to grab a hold of the game and dominate that attacking midfield area. Sometimes, he spent ninety minutes almost like a ghost, invisible and failing to accomplish anything of note. Yet there were other performances that had us captivated. He scored some stunning free kicks, notably against Nice that all but confirmed Lyon's Champions League place for this season. Moreover, Grenier is versatile. He has played the defensive midfield role in the past but thrives the most just behind the main striker. Unquestionably, this kid has got talent but will the fact that the world is now expectantly watching affect him?

Verdict:

Lyon have not lost anybody this transfer window of any great importance and with the continued improvement of a pool of youngsters with great potential who are gaining experience all the time, the outlook for Les Gones on the pitch is not as bleak as some are making out. Anthony Lopes should hopefully compensate for the inevitable blunders the Bisevac-Kone combination will commit, but it will be difficult. Monaco to overtake them. **4th**

PSG: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Nicolas Douchez	GK	French	33	2011/2012	Stade Rennais
Mike Maignan	GK	French	17	2013/2014	-
Salvatore Sirigu	GK	Italian	26	2011/2012	Palermo
Maxwell	LB	Brazilian	31	2011/2012	FC Barcelona
Lucas Digne	LB	French	20	2013/2014	LOSC Lille
Thiago Silva	CB	Brazilian	28	2012/2013	AC Milan
Mamadou Sakho	CB	French	23	2007/2008	-
Marquinhos	CB	Brazilian	19	2013/2014	AS Roma
Zoumana Camara	CB	French	34	2007/2008	AS Saint Etienne
Alex	CB	Brazilian	31	2011/2012	Chelsea FC
Antoine Conte	CB	French	19	2013/2014	-
Gregory van der Wiel	RB	Dutch	25	2012/2013	Ajax
Christophe Jallet	RB	French	29	2009/2010	FC Lorient
Mohamed Sissoko	DM	Malian	28	2012/2013	Juventus
Thiago Motta	DM	Italian	30	2011/2012	Inter Milan
Blaise Matuidi	DM	French	26	2011/2012	AS Saint Etienne
Mathieu Bodmer	DM	French	30	2012/2013	Lyon
Clement Chantome	CM	French	25	2006/2007	-
Marco Verratti	CM	Italian	20	2012/2013	Pescara
Adrien Rabiot	CM	French	18	2012/2013	-
Javier Pastore	AM/LW	Argentinian	24	2011/2012	Palermo
Neeskens Kebano	LW	French	21	2012/2013	-
Lucas	RW	Brazilian	20	2012/2013	Sao Paulo
Jeremy Menez	RW	French	26	2011/2012	AS Roma
Ezequiel Lavezzi	ST	Argentinian	28	2012/2013	Napoli
Edinson Cavani	ST	Uruguayan	26	2013/2014	Napoli
Zlatan Ibrahimovic	ST	Swedish	31	2012/2013	AC Milan
Jean-Eudes Maurice	ST	Haitian	27	2012/2013	-
Hervin Ongenda	ST	French	18	2013/2014	-
Kingsley Coman	ST	French	17	2013/2014	-
Laurent Blanc	Manager	French	47	2013/2014	France
Nasser Al Khelaifi	President	Qatari	39	2010/2011	-

PSG: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	1st	83	Zlatan Ibrahimovic (30)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	2nd	79	Nene (21)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	4th	60	Nene (14)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	13th	47	Melvut Erding (15)
2008/2009	Ligue 1	6th	64	Guillaume Hoarau (17)

PSG: Likely XI



PSG: Squad Analysis

CHAMPION MON FRERE! were the words of Lucas Moura after PSG secured the Ligue 1 title against Evian doing so for the first time in 19 years. The heavy investment from the Qatari group QSI, spearheaded by Nasser Al Khelaifi has completely transformed Les Parisiens into a team who expect to challenge all the way for the Champions League title in the coming seasons. Carlo Ancelotti did an excellent job in managing all the egos in the PSG squad but left fans disappointed with his decision to leave the club for Real Madrid this summer. After a drawn out process in which it appeared that several top managers rejected the chance to join the club, PSG finally appointed Laurent Blanc as the new boss. The saga did however show the broken reality of a club, which has perhaps grown too quickly for its own good.

Strengths:

On paper, PSG have a mouth-watering squad. Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Edinson Cavani have the chance to form possibly one of the greatest striking partnerships football has ever seen. Supported down the flanks by the pacey Lucas Moura and Ezequiel Lavezzi, it is the best attacking quartet around. Behind these four unbelievably talented individuals stands the defensive midfielder of the moment Blaise Matuidi who has been praised by pundits across the globe for his consummate work rate, defensive intelligence and eye for a pass. Alongside him plays the young Italian who is generally accepted to be 'the next Andrea Pirlo' in Marco Verratti. Although he has a bad temperament at times, his raw talent in picking out the inch-perfect pass consistently paralleled with the delightful creativity he possesses which inspires his teammates makes him one of the most hotly tipped youngsters in the game. If this was not enough, PSG also have the best centre back in the world in their team, Thiago Silva; a man whose talents need no explaining.

Weaknesses:

The last time Laurent Blanc was faced with a squad that contained a lot of egos in it; he lost control. See Euro 2012 as the prime example, he simply could not connect with the majority of his players when he managed France. This should worry PSG, because when matches are invariably lost the blame game will not be pretty. Zlatan Ibrahimovic admitted he did not know if he would stay at PSG after the departure of Carlo Ancelotti and you feel that if Blanc cannot win over the big Swede fallout could occur. There is also the potential for a domino effect and for other players to raise discontent, and before you know it Al Khelaifi has no choice but to sack Blanc. Also, certain individuals lack the motivation to compete and play to the best of their ability in Ligue 1 because they feel they are above it. The main culprit of this is Javier Pastore who showed this ugly side already this season when he gave a lacklustre performance in PSG's narrow Trophée des Champions triumph over Bordeaux at the beginning of August.

Key Player: [Thiago Silva](#)

In all honesty, Thiago Silva had a truly fantastic season and has been an absolutely pivotal element to PSG's title winning campaign. The defender has all the qualities that a modern day centre back embodies, and he has been able to adapt his game to the French style of play. At the start of the last season, he appeared to lack strength, but he has clearly worked on this and is now able to nudge people off the ball fairly easily. The player, despite making no assists last season, also started numerous attacks from the defence by intercepting the ball and passing it forward by hoofing it into attacking positions. After reportedly agreeing a contract extension with PSG until 2018, Thiago Silva must put his leadership skills to good use and keep the PSG squad from falling apart.

Verdict:

With the signings of Lucas Digne, Marquinhos and Edinson Cavani PSG's squad has arguably gone to yet another level of brilliance. Yes, Monaco will look to compete but in reality PSG have all the advantages over them. Les Parisiens' squad has been together for longer; they have more Ligue 1 experience all of which Monaco do not have. If PSG can avoid complacency and approach every match in the same way, then they will repeat last season's feat. **1st**

SC Bastia: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Mickael Landreau	GK	French	34	2012/2013	OSC Lille
Jean Louis Leca	GK	French	27	2013/2014	Valenciennes
Thomas Vincensini	GK	French	19	2013/2014	-
Julian Palmieri	LB	French	25	2012/2013	Istres
Fethi Harek	LB	Algerian	30	2007/2008	Rodez
Maka Mary	CB	French	24	2010/2011	Havre AC
Francois Modesto	CB	French	34	2013/2014	Olympiakos
Sebastien Squillaci	CB	French	32	2013/2014	Arsenal FC
Matthieu Sans	CB	French	25	2010/2011	Arles Avignon
Drissa Diakite	RB	Malian	28	2013/2014	Olympiakos
Gilles Cioni	RB	French	29	2010/2011	-
Yannick Cahuzac	DM	French	28	2005/2006	-
Julien Sable	DM	French	32	2012/2013	OGC Nice
Romaric	CM	Ivorian	30	2013/2014	Real Zaragoza
Sambou Yatabare	CM	Malian	24	2012/2013	AS Monaco
Wahbi Khazri	AM	Tunisia	22	2009/2010	-
Adama Ba	AM	Mauritanian	19	2013/2014	Stade Brestois 29
Florent Andre	LW	French	22	2012/2013	-
Ludovic Genest	RW	French	25	2012/2013	Stade Lavallois
Florian Raspentino*	RW/LW	French	24	2013/2014	Marseille
Toifilou Maoulida	RW	French	34	2011/2012	RC Lens
Gianni Bruno*	ST	French	21	2013/2014	OSC Lille
Claudiu Keseru	ST	Romanian	26	2013/2014	Angers SCO
Ilan	ST	Brazilian	32	2012/2013	AC Ajaccio
Frederic Hantz	Manager	French	49	2009/2010	Le Havre
Pierre-Marie Geronimi	President	French		2009/2010	-

SC Bastia: Form Guide:

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	12th	47	Anthony Modeste (15)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	1st	71	Toifilou Maoulida (13)
2010/2011	National	1st	91	David Suarez (20)
2009/2010	Ligue 2	20th	39	Pierre Yves Andre (14)
2008/2009	Ligue 2	11th	48	Pierre Yves Andre (10)

SC Bastia: Likely XI



SC Bastia: Squad Analysis:

After three seasons of battling in three different leagues consecutively, from National to the top flight, SC Bastia's 2012/2013 campaign firmly rooted them amongst the best in France and ensured their Ligue 1 status for this year. Guided by the unbreakable 47 year old Frederic Hantz, who's counter attacking minded style of football brought a breath of fresh air to Ligue 1 last season, he will hope to push on with this campaign after making some canny signings and break into the top 10. Whether or not they can achieve this, after the losses of Florian Thauvin and Wahbi Khazri (in the latter's case imminent), they are likely to be short of creativity going forward.

Strengths:

One must marvel at the success of manager Frederic Hantz in these recent seasons. After instilling the core principles of hard work and mental strength into his players, he had quickly formed a platform on which to build as they rose through 2 consecutive divisions in as many seasons. The Bastia squad is lucky to have a manager with such a tight leash on his troops, and they know it. The Corsican's midfield looks extremely durable this season as the excellent Sambou Yatabare and veteran Yannick Cahuzac will look to gel with Ivorian international Romaric who will add physical presence and European experience to an otherwise fairly humble squad. Florent Raspentino causes problems for every opposition in the league, and this canny loan signing could go some way to fulfilling the creative void left by Thauvin.

Weaknesses:

Perhaps, the only perceivable weakness for Bastia for the upcoming campaign is that their defence is unproven at the Ligue 1 level. This may sound odd at first, but think about it. Sebastien Squillaci is a player with very low confidence, and the nature of competition in France's top flight has changed considerably since his time at AS Monaco. Similarly, Francois Modesto returns to his former club after jumping ship when Bastia were struggling to maintain their Ligue 2 status. Anthony Modeste may have frustrated some but was certainly reliable in terms of finding the net. In terms of striking force, they have brought in two very promising but inexperienced players at Ligue 1 level in Claudiu Keseru and Gianni Bruno. However, honestly, these are not serious issues in the grander scheme of things.

Key Man: [Mickael Landreau](#)

Whilst there are many exciting individuals to watch out for as the Corsican side begin their Ligue 1 campaign, few can argue with the importance of arguably the best French goalkeeper playing in France at the moment. If last season's adventures were anything to go by, then Landreau is expected to have a lot of work on his hands, a challenge which he will no doubt rise to. If he can keep as many clean sheets as possible then Bastia's potential knows virtually no bounds for the season ahead.

Verdict:

There is no doubt in my mind that Bastia have been the best recruiters this summer transfer window at the time of writing. Every addition to the squad can make a huge improvement immediately. Whether it is the experience and talent of Squillaci and Modesto at the heart of the defence, the pace and skill of Florent Raspentino down the wing, the Yaya Toure-esque performances expected from Romaric or the exciting evolutions of prospects Adama Ba and Gianni Bruno - Bastia's squad is potentially as talented as it has ever been. A fulfilling season hinges on Hantz's ability to get the squad to gel as quickly as possible and to continue to breed the tough mentality he tasks his players with having. 2013/2014 is a really exciting season to come for Bastia. **10th**

Stade de Reims: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Jeremy Malherbe	GK	French	22	2012/2013	Gap FC
Kossi Agassa	GK	Togolese	35	2009/2010	Hercules
Johnny Placide	GK	Haitian	25	2012/2013	Havre AC
Franck Signorino	LB	French	31	2012/2013	Stade Lavallois
Mohamed Fofana	CB	Malian	28	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Mickael Tacalfred	CB	French	32	2008/2009	Dijon
Anthony Weber	CB	French	26	2010/2011	Paris FC
Aissa Mandi	RB	Algerian	24	2011/2012	-
Christopher Glombard	RB	French	24	2011/2012	Bordeaux
Grzegorz Krychowiak	CM	Polish	23	2012/2013	Bordeaux
Prince Oniangue	CM	Congolese	24	2013/2014	Tours FC
Alexis Peugot	CM	French	22	2012/2013	Strasbourg
Antoine Devaux	CM	French	28	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Mads Albaek	CM	Danish	23	2013/2014	FC Midtjylland
Bocundji Ca	CM	Guinean	26	2011/2012	AS Nancy Lorraine
Florent Ghisolfi	CM	French	28	2010/2011	SC Bastia
Quentin Pereira	CM	French	21	2011/2012	FC Sochaux
Floyd Ayite	AM	Togolese	24	2011/2012	Bordeaux
Diego	LW	Brazilian	25	2012/2013	Tours FC
Odair Fortes	RW	Cape Verdean	26	2008/2009	UJA Alfortville
Bilal Ouali	RW	Algerian	19	2013/2014	-
Kamel Ghilas	ST	Algerian	29	2012/2013	Hull City
Eliran Atar	ST	Israeli	26	2013/2014	Maccabi Tel Aviv
Nicolas de Preville	ST	French	22	2012/2013	Istres
Gaetan Courtet	ST	French	24	2010/2011	FC Lorient
Gaetan Charbonnier	ST	French	24	2013/2014	Montpellier HSC
Hubert Fournier	Manager	French	45	2009/2010	FC Gueugnon
Jean Pierre Caillot	President	French	52	2003/2004	-

Stade de Reims: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	14th	43	Gaetan Courtet (9)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	2nd	65	Cedric Faure (15)
2010/2011	Ligue 2	10th	49	Julien Toudic (16)
2009/2010	National	2nd	71	Cedric Faure (25)
2008/2009	Ligue 2	20th	36	Yann Kermorgant (9)

Stade de Reims: Likely XI



Stade de Reims: Squad Analysis

'Operation maintien' was completed by Reims as they now look to stabilise their Ligue 1 status further, vying to remain in the top flight for a 3rd successive season. With the increased confidence the group of players, who have now rubbed shoulders with the best in France, Reims should make an easier time of life in Ligue 1.

Strengths:

Frankly, there is nothing outstanding about this Reims team. The one thing that the vast majority of the team has is experience. They have the graft and the determination to work hard to win every game. In addition, there is the added excitement of some very promising youngsters rising through the ranks including centre forward Nicolas de Preville who we believe is destined for great things. Reims have also made some intelligent additions to their squad including Israel's best striker at the moment, Eliran Atar. The player scored 22 goals in 31 games last season with Maccabi Tel Aviv. Danish central midfielder Mads Albaek is tipped to provide Reims with some necessary creativity in the midfield too.

Weaknesses:

The squad might lack depth, but overall Fournier has tailored his side into a perfect engine to complete the specific job of remaining in Ligue 1 again next season. Perhaps it is time to start finding eventual replacements for Franck Signorino at left back and Mickael Tacalfred, who showed signs of wear and tear last season. Both have lost a yard or so in pace. Finally, Fournier must accept that this is the year he must make goalkeeper Johnny Placide his first choice. The 35 year old Kossi Agassa is perfectly solid and surprisingly agile for his age, but he is hampering Placide's growth as a player, and this is a real shame because he has great potential.

Key Player: Grzegorz Krychowiak

Bordeaux will be regretting letting go of the 23 year old Pole who was Reims' stand out player last season. What impresses me about Krychowiak is his adaptability to different scenarios. It is atypical for a player of his age to change his own positioning when the score in a match changes, without being told to by Fournier. For example, if Reims go ahead Krychowiak will automatically drop and be less inclined to go forward. It is like he leads the team in these situations. Not only that, but he is just as technically gifted as he is aware in terms of his position.

Verdict:

Reims is a team that is certainly on the rise but will quietly mind their own business during this Ligue 1 campaign. Hopefully Fournier shows Placide some faith and appoints him as the number one between the sticks this season; the former Le Havre man deserves as much. They won't struggle, and the relegated sides should be obvious fairly early on in the game. Reims will be more than safe. **17th**

Stade Rennais FC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Benoit Costil	GK	French	26	2011/2012	Sedan
Abdoulaye Diallo	GK	French	21	2009/2010	-
Cheick N'Diaye	GK	Senegalese	28	2010/2011	Noisy-le-Sec
Kevin Theophile-Catherine	LB	French	23	2008/2009	-
Onyekachi Apam	CB	Nigerian	26	2010/2011	OGC Nice
Jean Armel Kana-Biyik	CB	Cameroonian	24	2010/2011	Havre AC
John Boye	CB	Ghanaian	26	2009/2010	Heart of Lions
Sylvain Armand	CB	French	32	2013/2014	PSG
Yassine Jebbour	RB	Moroccan	22	2012/2013	-
Dimitri Foulquier	RB	French	20	2011/2012	-
Romain Danze	RB	French	27	2006/2007	-
Jean Il Makoun	DM	Cameroonian	30	2012/2014	Aston Villa
Vincent Pajot	DM	French	22	2010/2011	-
Anders Konradsen	CM	Danish	23	2012/2013	Stromsgodset IF
Abdoulaye Doucoure	CM	French	20	2012/2013	-
Julien Feret	AM	French	31	2011/2012	AS Nancy Lorraine
Sadio Diallo	AM	Guinean	22	2012/2013	SC Bastia
Axel Ngando	AM	French	20	2012/2013	-
Romain Alessandrini	LW	French	24	2012/2013	Clermont
Jonathan Pitroipa	RW	Burkinabe	27	2011/2012	Hamburg
Abdoulaye Sane	RW	Senegalese	20	2012/2013	-
Mevlut Erding	ST	Turkish	26	2010/2011	PSG
Wesley Said	ST	French	18	2013/2014	-
Cheikh Diarra	ST	Malian	21	2012/2013	-
Nelson Oliveira*	ST	Portuguese	21	2013/2014	SC Benfica
Philippe Montanier	Manager	French	48	2013/2014	Real Sociedad
Frederic de Saint-Sernin	President	President	55	2012/2013	-

*Nelson Oliveira is on a season long loan from SC Benfica

Stade Rennais FC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	13th	46	Julien Feret (11)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	6th	60	Jires Kembo Ekoko (10)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	6th	56	Victor Montano (9)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	9th	53	Asamoah Gyan (13)
2008/2009	Ligue 1	7th	61	Moussa Sow (9)

Stade Rennais FC: Likely XI



Stade Rennais FC: Squad Analysis

Rennes fans are optimistic for the season which lies ahead after the board finally grew tired of the brutish manner in which Frederic Antonetti went about his business as manager of the club. They therefore decided not to extend his contract and have pulled off a real in coup for his replacement, Philippe Montanier. The established French manager left Real Sociedad, who will be playing Champions League football this season, in order to join Rennes on a 3-year deal, and Rennes are not even in a European competition! Montanier claims the potential success he could have at Rennes persuaded him to join. Without a doubt, he will find it exceedingly difficult to impose his style of play on a rather habitual Rennes team who are not used to change.

Strengths:

The squad oozes with Ligue 1 experience from goalkeeper Benoit Costil to Mevlut Erding up front. Antonetti got the team playing a very direct style of football which often left them in trouble defensively. It is thought that Montanier will bring a more Spanish style of play with a lot of patient build up. With Montanier, Rennes will be identified more easily and could spark a long-term future for the club in Europe and in the top 10 places in Ligue 1. Romain Alessandrini is one of the best wingers in the league, and Montanier will be expected to find a way of implementing the young Frenchman into his new style of play.

Weaknesses:

The uncomfortable truth is, if Montanier does try and replicate what he did at Sociedad with Rennes he is going to struggle for a large portion of this Ligue 1 season. The players in the squad are really not suited to Montanier's preferred way to play the game and unless he can bring in more players like Nelson Oliveira who understand the way the new boss wants Rennes to play, then it is going to take a lot of reeducation for the philosophy to be effective on the pitch. Also, Rennes have a historical problem of not finding the right defensive combination. The jury is still out as to whether or not John Boye actually deserves another chance for Rennes after a handful of below par performances in recent seasons.

Key Player: **Julien Feret**

Feret was Rennes' main source of creativity last season and also bagged more goals than any of his teammates in Ligue 1. This is a seasoned professional who is well respected by his colleagues. If Philippe Montanier can convince Feret with this new way of playing then his job suddenly becomes a lot easier convincing everybody else in the squad. Furthermore, the partnership he has formed with Erding is one of the most lethal in the league. In Feret, Rennes have a rare breed of attacking midfielder which is rapidly becoming extinct from the modern game. He is terribly underrated and Rennes are fortunate to have him.

Verdict:

Although I am really looking forward to witnessing the Montanier revolution at Rennes this season, I think it will take longer than most fans anticipate. Everyone connected with the club must remain patient and give Montanier the space to try and turn this team into something matchless in Ligue 1 and perhaps in Europe. He has turnaround Sociedad in just two seasons; give him the same amount of time at Rennes. It will not be pretty at the start. **11th**

Toulouse FC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Marc Vidal	GK	French	22	2009/2010	-
Olivier Blondel	GK	French	34	2012/2013	ESTAC Troyes
Ali Ahamada	GK	French	21	2010/2011	-
Issiaga Sylla	LB	Guinean	19	2012/2013	Horoya AC
Cheikh M'Bengue	LB	Senegalese	25	2007/2008	-
Jonathan Zebina	CB	French	35	2012/2013	Stade Brestois 29
Mickael Firmin	CB	French	22	2012/2013	SAS Epinal
Uros Spajic	CB	Serbian	20	2013/2014	Red Star Belgrade
Steeve Yago	CB	Burkinabe	20	2012/2013	-
Aymen Abdennour	CB	Tunisian	23	2011/2012	Etoile du Sahel
Gael Vena	CB	French	20	2013/2014	-
Jean Daniel Akpa Akpro	RB	Ivorian	20	2011/2012	-
Serge Aurier	RB	Ivorian	20	2011/2012	RC Lens
Pavle Ninkov	RB	Serbian	28	2011/2012	Red Star Belgrade
Pantxi Sirieix	DM	French	32	2004/2005	Auxerre
Etienne Capoue	DM	French	25	2007/2008	-
Etienne Didot	CM	French	30	2008/2009	Stade Rennais
Mihai Roman	RW	Serbian	28	2013/2014	Rapid Bucharest
Oscar Trejo	RW/AM	Spanish	25	2013/2014	Sporting Gijon
Adrien Regattin	RW	Moroccan	21	2011/2012	-
Sana Zaniou	RW	Burkinabe	18	2012/2013	-
Wissam Ben Yedder	ST	French	22	2010/2011	UJA Alfortville
Eden Ben Basat	ST	Israeli	26	2012/2013	Stade Brestois 29
Amadou Soukouna	ST	French	21	2012/2013	-
Alain Casanova	Manager	French	51	2008/2009	-
Oliver Sedran	President	French	44	2001/2002	-

Toulouse FC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	10th	51	Wissam Ben Yedder (15)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	8th	56	Umut Bulut (5)*
2010/2011	Ligue 1	8th	50	Federico Santander (5)**
2009/2010	Ligue 1	14th	47	Andre Pierre Gignac (8)
2008/2009	Ligue 1	4th	64	Andre Pierre Gignac (24)

*Emmanuel Riviere also scored 5 goals in 2011/2012

**Moussa Sissoko and Daniel Braaten also scored 5 goals in 2010/2011

Toulouse FC: Likely XI



Toulouse FC: Squad Analysis

Toulouse's 2012/2013 season went pear-shaped after the departure of Moussa Sissoko to Newcastle. The energetic central midfielder was one of Toulouse's only sources of attacking impulse and creativity. The other was of course Franck Tabanou who has now subsequently quit the club to sign for rivals Saint Etienne. As you can already tell, this could be a tough campaign for Toulouse.

Strengths:

Toulouse have some individually talented players (although there are nearly none left) but struggle to collectively give positive results. Serge Aurier's announcement that he would stay at Toulouse this season would have brought a sigh of relief from manager Alain Casanova. Aurier was certainly one of the most recognized full backs last season and rightly so. The Ivorian produced unswervingly concrete performances down the right hand side combining immeasurably well with Franck Tabanou going forward in what proved to be a lethal combination. The signing of giant Serb Uros Spajic should help secure the defence. Jonathan Zebina has seen better days as a centre back and the man from Red Star Belgrade is a perfect replacement.

Weaknesses:

Alain Casanova is sticking with the risky 3-5-2 formation he deployed at the end of last season. It is a very unique way of playing and perhaps does not play to Toulouse's strengths. They now have three more than adequate centre backs in Aymen Abdennour, Jonathan Zebina and Uros Spajic, not to mention the ever improving Mickael Firmin and Steeve Yago. By utilising this 3-5-2 setup Casanova limits the defenders he can put in his starting XI. He is also hoping that one of Wissam Ben Yedder or Eden Ben Basat can find unfailing goal scoring form by not investing in any strikers this summer transfer window, something neither really achieved last time out. Finally, the squad is very thin in places. Toulouse have just three central midfielders in their official LFP squad (to date) and if Tefeci are hit with one or two injuries as the rigorous season starts to take shape, Casanova could be faced with a selection headache. This is of course assuming that Etienne Capoue is finally sold.

Key Player: *Oscar Trejo*

The Spaniard arrives from Gijon for close to €2m and from what we have seen of the attacking midfielder he could well be exactly what Toulouse need. He seems to be a belated replacement for Moussa Sissoko. What Toulouse really missed when Sissoko left for the Magpies was a competent bridge between Etienne Capoue/ Etienne Didot and Ben Basat/Ben Yedder. Trejo looks like a skillful midfielder with a good temperament and whilst he is not as energetic as Moussa Sissoko; he perhaps has a better eye for the right pass to open opposition defences up.

Verdict:

Toulouse are in for a difficult season. The loss of Etienne Capoue seems inevitable and no matter who is available to replace him, there will be no one who can match the French defensive midfielder's calibre. It will be intriguing to see if Casanova's master plan of playing with 3 defenders can be a success in Ligue 1 but I suspect Toulouse will have a season they will want to quickly forget. There is simply not enough quality in the squad to replace the likes of Franck Tabanou. **15th**

Valenciennes FC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Nicolas Penneteau	GK	French	32	2006/2007	SC Bastia
Magno Novaes	GK	Brazilian	30	2013/2014	SC Bastia
Paul Charruau	GK	French	20	2012/2013	-
Loris Nery	LB	French	22	2012/2013	AS Saint Etienne
Arthur Masuaku	LB	French	19	2013/2014	-
Gaetan Bong	LB	Cameroonian	25	2009/2010	Dijon
Benjamin Angoua	CB	Ivorian	26	2009/2010	Budapest Honved
Lindsay Rose	CB	French	21	2012/2013	-
Yves-Marie Kerjean	CB	French	19	2013/2014	-
Mody Traore	RB	French	33	2010/2011	AS Nancy Lorraine
Kenny Lala	RB	French	21	2011/2012	-
Rudy Mater	RB	French	32	2002/2003	AS Nancy Lorraine
David Ducourtieux	DM	French	35	2007/2008	Sedan
Eloge Enza-Yamissi	DM	Central African	30	2013/2014	ESTAC Troyes
Pape Camara	DM	Senegalese	21	2011/2012	Standard Liege
Jose Saez	DM	French	31	2004/2005	LOSC Lille
Marco da Silva	DM	French	21	2012/2013	-
Maor Melikson	AM	Israeli	28	2012/2013	Wiala Krakow
Tongo Doumbia**	AM	Malian	24	2013/2014	Wolves
Dusan Djuric	LW	Swedish	28	2011/2012	FC Zurich
Aurelian Chitu	LW	Romanian	22	2013/2014	Viitorul Constanta
Mathieu Dossevi	RW	French	25	2010/2011	Le Mans
Jean-Christophe Bahebeck*	ST	French	20	2013/2014	PSG
Opa Nguette	ST	French	19	2012/2013	-
Anthony Le Tallec	ST	French	28	2012/2013	Auxerre
Kama Massampu	ST	French	21	2011/2012	-
Gregory Pujol	ST	French	33	2007/2008	Sedan
Daniel Sanchez	Manager	French	59	2011/2012	Tours FC
Jean Raymond Legrand	President	French	56	2010/2011	-

*Jean Christophe Bahebeck is on a season long loan from PSG

**Tongo Doumbia is on a season long loan from Wolverhampton Wanderers

Valenciennes FC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2012/2013	Ligue 1	11th	48	Gregory Pujol (8)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	12th	43	Renaud Cohade (7)*
2010/2011	Ligue 1	12th	48	Gregory Pujol (17)
2009/2010	Ligue 1	10th	52	Fahid Ben Khalfallah (7)**
2008/2009	Ligue 1	12th	44	Gregory Pujol (7)***

*Gael Danic also scored 7 goals in 2011/2012

**Mamadou Samassa and Johan Audel also scored 7 goals in 2009/2010

***Johan Audel also scored 7 goals in 2008/2009

Valenciennes FC: Likely XI



Valenciennes XI: Squad Analysis

After the departure of Brazilian centre back Gil in the January transfer window, everything proceeded to fall apart for Valenciennes. The attacking trident of Danic, Pujol and Le Tallec were in free scoring form up until the turn of the year and in 2013 things got ugly for VAFC. They have won just 4 Ligue 1 games in this calendar year and that ultimately brought their surprising push for a top seven place to a grinding halt in early March. Instead they had to contend with 11th. Things will not get any easier for Valenciennes this season after the high profile departures of Nicolas Isimat Mirin to Monaco and veteran Gael Danic to Lyon.

Strengths:

Attacking will be Valenciennes' main strength this season. VAFC will hope that Melikson can play a more pivotal role in his first full season at the club. The 28 year old was playing well in terms of providing opportunities for the strikers in the latter half of the season when he first arrived and Sanchez will count on the Israeli to continue in this vein of form and hopefully score one or two of his own along the way. Gaetan Bong is a very good full back who knows the league inside out even if he has been playing at centre back in Valenciennes' pre-season friendlies because of their distinct lack of players in that department. Speaking about pre-season, Valenciennes had an absolutely excellent set of warm-up matches, remaining unbeaten in all 5 friendly encounters.

Weaknesses:

They desperately need to sign some centre backs who are just as apt as Nicolas Isimat Mirin and Gil. The two of them were the core to the first half of last season's success and, with a solid defensive base that the other teammates are able to rely on, the rest of the players become more comfortable and concentrate more principally on their own roles which should evoke an overall better team performance. If they can right this then they can ensure that they will have just as satisfactory season as in 2012/2013.

Key Player: Mathieu Dossevi

The right-winger's outstanding performances were classically overlooked again last season. The 25 year old played with a newfound confidence that enabled him to be more creative and take greater risks when looking for the right crosses or passes to play. In addition, he often made right-back Rudy Mater's job extremely easy as Dossevi provided the necessary support for his fellow countryman to concentrate more on giving the appropriate orders to his colleagues to adequately complete his captaincy duties.

Verdict:

VAFC can trust President Legrand to make the right transfer calls in the remaining weeks of this summer transfer window and should be ensured a similar outcome to last season. The loss of Gael Danic for less than €1m was a bitter blow and VAFC have lost a true legend in that regard. The young Aurelian Chitu has some big shoes to fill but with the loan signing of J-C Bahebeck, Valenciennes are guaranteed to cope offensively, no matter what happens defensively. **14th**