

Ligue 1 2015/2016: Your Guide to the Season Ahead

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A Note from the Editor:

Explosive: not a word commonly associated with French football's top flight in the 21st century. However, the 2014/15 campaign lived up to the aforementioned tag in some style, with Alexandre Lacazette-led surprise package Olympique Lyonnais taking PSG to the final pair of matches for the Ligue 1 top spot, not to mention Marcelo Bielsa's revolutionary attempts at a magnificent, but unsustainable title charge with Marseille which fell to pieces come the turn of the calendar year.

The introduction of so many new faces sitting on the end of substitute benches (or in some cases on top of ice boxes) across France injected a certain amount of unpredictability into Ligue 1's 2014/15 edition which saw the league make positive strides, at least with regards to the entertainment factor. Leonardo Jardim, Hubert Fournier, Ghislain Printant and Willy Sagnol, to name a few, have all, in very short spaces of time, revolutionized their respective clubs' reputations, for better or for worse. With such a vast array of tactical approaches, 2014/15 was the season during which Ligue 1 truly became the most ferociously volatile division in Europe. SC Bastia and Guingamp felled PSG, Lyon were dismantled by Nice at home and Marseille were embarrassed by Lorient. The lack of pan-club consistency made for frustrating viewing for hardcore fans, but enthralled the neutrals.

As if 10 months of action-packed league football was not enough, French football has a way of making headlines, even during the off season. Whether it was the now infamously controversial French football financial watchdog the DNCG's initial decision to bar SC Bastia and ESTAC Troyes from competing in the forthcoming campaign due to financial inconsistencies (decisions that have since been reversed), or the LFP's gob-smacking verdict to reduce the amount of sides promoted to and relegated from Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 from three to two, effective from 2015/16 onwards (also later annulled), there has been plenty for the press and fans alike to get passionate about. The latter decision, would arguably have had a severely negative impact on the nature of the competition in France's top two divisions, for the sake of, as the notorious LFP President Frédéric Thiriez likes to put it, club's "financial security".

On the topic of finances, Ligue 1's flagship outfit PSG received excellent news at the beginning of July after UEFA informed them that the restrictions that had previously been imposed on Les Parisiens by Financial Fair Play were to be scrapped immediately. Expect PSG to take full advantage of being unchained with their summer dealings. It is undeniable that, from a Ligue 1 perspective, the general slacking of FFP is good news, as potential investors will hopefully again see the attractiveness of buying into a club in a league that is becoming notorious for purchasing cheap and selling high; although apparently not as high as in the Premier League if this summer's dealings are anything to go by. English sides have cottoned on to the quality of youth

coaching and player development orchestrated by their colleagues across the Channel and have thus executed what can only be described as a systematic, brutal pillage of some of Ligue 1's finest talents. Will Ligue 1 be able to fight back? Mr Hollande's decision to scrap the 75% tax rate is exceptional news for the financial health of French football, but it is simply more profitable for the majority of outfits to produce even more young talent from academies, rather than to flex their growing financial muscles on the transfer market. In any case, the value of French football TV rights mean that Ligue 1 generally cannot compete on a financial level with Europe's elite. PSG, AS Monaco and to an extent Marseille are the only three sides spending anything considerable this summer and the latter two are only able to do so after selling large.

Off-field antics aside again, and the changes in personnel for 2015/2016 are not as radical as they were in 2014/15. Hervé Renard steps into arguably his biggest job yet at Lille and has been given full backing to put his vision to test. He is another fantastic character, with a steely ambition to bring LOSC back into contention for continental places. Along with René Girard, we said goodbye to the captivating Pascal Dupraz as classic relegation dogfighters Evian were finally put to the sword. The largely disappointing Metz join ETG in Ligue 2 this season, alongside RC Lens, whose tragic tale of ownership issues condemned Antoine Kombouaré to tackling the 2014/15 campaign with only a smattering of experienced heads, with the majority of his squad being made up by a group of kids.

Angers, ESTAC Troyes and Gazelec Ajaccio make up the trio of new faces for the latest campaign, with the latter achieving back-to-back promotions last season to seal their spot among French football's elite. Angers and Troyes have prior experience in Ligue 1 and have spent the early part of the summer transfer window recruiting intelligently. In stark contrast, Gazelec Ajaccio are about to embark upon their maiden Ligue 1 fight. With a peculiar history, a passionate fan base, but a very thin squad, barring some late transfer window magic, it will be a tricky, but undoubtedly enchanting experience for GFCO.

If 2015/16 can learn from its predecessor, it would be wise to continue to provide that certain "je ne sais quoi", that last season allowed Ligue 1 to form an undeniable charm, which it had previously, wholeheartedly been lacking. In order for people to get excited about French football, French football needs to be exciting. This time last year, I wrote that it was time to take Ligue 1 seriously. Following PSG and AS Monaco's formidable exploits in the Champions' League last time out, France's top flight might have more people paying attention to it than ever before in 2015/16. The challenge is now for Ligue 1 to use that momentum to further improve its standing on the continent.

Christian Nourry, Get French Football News

Angers SCO: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Ludovic Butelle	GK	French	32	2014/2015	Arles Avignon
Alexandre Letellier	GK	French	24	2010/2011	PSG B
Yoann Andreu	LB	French	26	2015/2016	Gazelec Ajaccio
Ibrahim Diallo	LB	Guinean	29	2012/2013	Waasland-Beveren
Arnold Bouka Moutou	CB	Congolese	26	2012/2013	-
Kalifa Traore	CB	Malian	24	2014/2015	PSG
Ismael Traore	CB	Ivorian	28	2015/2016	Stade Brestois
Antar Yahia	CB	Algerian	33	2014/2015	Real Madrid
Romain Thomas	CB	French	27	2013/2014	Carquefou
Gael Angoula	RB	French	33	2013/2014	SC Bastia
Romain Saiss	DM	French	25	2015/2016	Havre AC
Ismael Keita	DM	Malian	25	2013/2014	FC Nantes
Cheikh Ndoeye	DM	Senegalese	29	2015/2016	US Créteil
Thomas Mangani	DM	French	28	2015/2016	Chievo Verona
Olivier Auriac	CM	French	31	2007/2008	Stade Brestois
Vincent Manceau	CM	French	26	2008/2009	-
Guy N'Gosso	CM	Cameroonian	30	2014/2015	Luzenac AP
Jonas-Henrique Pessalli	AM	Brazilian	24	2012/2013	Gremio
Charles Diers	AM	French	34	2008/2009	Clermont
Yohann Eudeline	AM	French	33	2014/2015	FC Nantes
Pierrick Capelle	AM	French	28	2015/2016	Clermont
Mathias Serin	AM	French	24	2015/2016	Romorantin
Abdoul Razzagui Camara	LW	Guinean	25	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Gilles Sunu	LW/RW	French	24	2015/2016	Evian TG
Billy Ketkeophomphone	LW/RW	French	25	2015/2016	Tours FC
Slimane Sissoko	ST	French	24	2015/2016	Lucon
Jean-Pierre N'Same	ST	Cameroonian	22	2011/2012	-
Ludovic Ajorque	ST	French	21	2014/2015	-
Stephane Moulin	Manager	French	47	2011/2012	SO Chatellerault
Said Chabane	President	Algerian	52	2011/2012	-

Angers SCO: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 2	3rd	64	Jonathan Kodjia (15)
2013/2014	Ligue 2	9th	55	Mohamed Yattara (11)
2012/2013	Ligue 2	5th	61	Claudiu Keseru (17)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	11th	51	Gaetan Charbonnier (12)
2010/2011	Ligue 2	6th	57	Claudiu Keseru (10)

Angers SCO: Likely XI



Angers SCO: Squad Analysis

After several attempts under the leadership of manager Stephane Moulin who joined in 2011, Angers have finally secured a place among French football's elite for the first time since 1993/1994. On the pitch, star striker Jonathan Kodjia and captain Oliver Auriac led SCO throughout to sneak into the final promotion spot in Ligue 2, a fight that virtually came down to the very last day of the 2014/2015 season. Now, the club's mission is to establish themselves as regulars in Ligue 1, and they intend to achieve this goal by primarily relying on experienced heads and second-chancers, rather than concentrating on youth. Under the leadership of thrifty, progressive Algerian businessman Said Chabane, who is to stay that Angers cannot establish themselves as French top-flight stalwarts in the years to come.

Strengths:

Angers have the potential to come a long way this season if they can perfect the basics necessary for Ligue 1 survival: a solid defensive midfield base. In players like Romain Saiss and Thomas Mangani, Angers have individuals who have the ability to maintain defensive shape whilst providing for teammates in more advanced positions on the pitch. If Angers can be courageous with their 4-3-3 setup and prevent themselves from dropping too deep when they are without the ball, then their exciting attacking talent, namely Billy Ketkeophomphone and Slimane Sissoko, will have ample opportunities to score goals. At the back, Romain Thomas and Ismael Traore have the potential to become established Ligue 1 central defenders, but they must seize the opportunity in front of them this season to realise their obvious talent.

Weaknesses:

The decision on behalf of the Angers coaching staff to place their faith in Ludovic Butelle as the side's number one goalkeeper for the forthcoming campaign is at least worrying and at best questionable. The man between the sticks has been involved in Ligue 1 campaigns with two clubs in Metz and Lille during his career, but failed to play a prominent role for either side. On paper, the squad is largely unproven at the top level and Angers have yet to sign an established Ligue 1 talent during the summer transfer window, with the departure of last season's talismanic attacker Jonathan Kodjia to Bristol City a shocking blow. The signing of Gilles Sunu as their first choice attacking option should also raise eyebrows. The former Arsenal youth product has yet to score more than three goals in a Ligue 1 season. Putting it nicely, a lot of individuals need to surprise in a positive way in all positions for Angers to have a realistic chance at survival.

Key Man: Thomas Mangani

The seasoned French midfielder has participated in 99 Ligue 1 games over the course of his career and his experience in this regard, (only 4 members of the squad have ever played in Ligue 1) could prove invaluable in the middle of the park. Not only will he likely be fired up for a return to the French first division, but there is an added incentive to prove that he is still cut out for the top level, having catastrophically failed to succeed in Serie A with Chievo Verona. Angers was his lifeline back into French football back then, now he must be Angers' lifeline for survival this season. His height and ability to pick a pass are two qualities that can allow Mangani to become the cornerstone of this Angers side, should he be able play that bridging role between defence and attack.

Verdict:

The outcomes of Ligue 1 relegation dogfights are often delicate matters to predict, but there is no doubt that Angers will be in or around the bottom five this season. Their lack of collective Ligue 1 experience, on and off the pitch, should see them struggle to stay afloat throughout the campaign. Having said that, they can take comfort from the fact that, generally speaking, this tight-knit bunch is very familiar with each other. If Moulin focuses on making his side hard to beat, by applying a counter attacking style of play, then they might just cling on at the death, but most probably not. **20th**

AS Monaco: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Paul Nardi	GK	French	21	2014/2015	AS Nancy
Danijel Subasic	GK	Croatian	30	2011/2012	Hajduk Split
Seydou Sy	GK	Senegalese	19	2014/2015	AC Milan
Layvin Kurzawa	LB	French	22	2010/2011	-
Elderson Echiejile	LB	Nigerian	27	2013/2014	Sporting Braga
Ricardo Carvalho	CB	Portuguese	37	2013/2014	Real Madrid
Aymen Abdennour	CB	Tunisian	25	2014/2015	Toulouse FC
Andrea Raggi	CB	Italian	31	2012/2013	Bologna
Wallace*	CB	Brazilian	20	2015/2016	SL Braga
Raphaël Diarra	CB	French	20	2015/2016	-
Kevin N'Doram	CB	French	19	2015/2016	-
Mehdi Beneddine	CB	French	19	2015/2016	-
Fabinho	RB	Brazilian	21	2013/2014	Rio Ave
Almamy Toure	RB	French	19	2014/2015	-
Tiémoué Bakayoko	DM	French	20	2014/2015	Stade Rennais
Abdou Aziz Thiam	DM	French	18	2014/2015	-
Jeremy Toulalan	CM	French	31	2013/2014	Malaga
Joao Moutinho	CM	Portuguese	28	2013/2014	FC Porto
Jonathan Mexique	CM	French	20	2013/2014	-
Mario Pasalic*	CM	Croatian	20	2015/2016	Chelsea FC
Bernardo Silva	AM	Portuguese	20	2014/2015	SL Benfica
Fares Bahlouli	AM	French	20	2015/2016	Olympique Lyonnais
Adama Traore	AM	Malian	20	2015/2016	Lille OSC
Thomas Lemar	AM	French	19	2015/2016	SM Caen
Dominique Pandor	AM	French	22	2013/2014	-
Helder Costa*	LW/RW	Portuguese	21	2015/2016	SL Benfica
Ivan Cavaleiro	LW/RW	Portuguese	21	2015/2016	SL Benfica
Nabil Dirar	RW	Moroccan	28	2011/2012	FC Bruges
Anthony Martial	ST	French	19	2013/2014	Olympique Lyonnais
Guido Carrillo	ST	Argentinian	24	2015/2016	Estudiantes
Stephan El Shaarawy*	ST	Italian	22	2015/2016	AC Milan
Edgar Salli	ST	Cameroonian	22	2011/2012	-
Lacina Traore	ST	Ivorian	25	2013/2014	Anzhi
Leonardo Jardim	Manager	Portuguese	41	2012/2013	Sporting Lisbon
Dimitri Rybolovlev	President	Russian	48	2011/2012	-

*Denotes a player who is currently on loan at AS Monaco

AS Monaco: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	3rd	71	Bernardo Silva & Anthony Martial (9)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	2nd	80	Emmanuel Riviere (10)
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)

AS Monaco: Likely XI



AS Monaco: Squad Analysis

AS Monaco's 2014/2015 campaign marked the beginning of a totally new project that triggered a radical change in transfer policy: shifting from buying established names for inflated prices to signing exciting youth prospects with the hope of nurturing their talent, before selling them on to Europe's finest at a large profit. Claudio Ranieri was replaced by the unknown Leonardo Jardim, cueing Ligue 1 pundits to bemoan Monaco's lack of ambition. 12 months later, and those pundits would be embarrassed to admit to what they had said back then. By focusing on developing a strong defensive unit, Jardim's Monaco proved to be the Champions' League surprise package, knocking out Arsenal before falling just short in the quarterfinals against Juventus. In the league, after a shaky start, they hoisted themselves up to 3rd place, giving them the chance to compete in Europe's elite competition again in 2015/2016.

Strengths:

Rapidly becoming Ligue 1's version of FC Porto, Monaco is today home to some of the brightest footballing prospects in the world. While the squad has undergone a considerable makeover during the summer period, Jardim has skillfully managed to ensure that an adequate mix of established quality and potential is present in each position. Barring the possible departure of Abdennour, the players available in defensive positions remain the same. This should allow for tactical continuity in defensive areas, a crucial ingredient for success under a Jardim system. The additions of Guido Carrillo and Stephan El Shaarawy upfront, alongside the exciting Anthony Martial, should also enable Monaco to score more goals, making up for their major weakness last term.

Weaknesses:

From a Ligue 1 perspective, AS Monaco's squad no longer harbours any major potential fissures and one fully expects them to replicate another top table finish. Questions can be asked about the squad's general inexperience, especially for a side that will be competing in the Champions' League. The physicality of the French top flight might also pose a problem for Monaco's more technique-reliant attacking players, especially for the outfit's most recent exports from Portugal and Argentina. The quality of the side's central defensive depth is also a little borderline for a side aiming to rub shoulders with Europe's finest.

Key Man: **Bernardo Silva**

After a breakthrough season in 2014/2015, the diminutive Portuguese wizard will have a central role to play for Leonardo Jardim as the attacking heartbeat of this Monaco setup. With quick feet and even quicker thinking on and off the ball, Silva is becoming a rare breed of attacking midfielder who can dribble and cross as well as he can shoot. A pit-bull-like figure inside the box, Silva is also sharp enough to get the better of Ligue 1's most aggressive and resilient central defenders. If Silva can maintain that determination and desire from last season and match that with an even more refined pallet of technical ability, then Monaco will not only fulfill their potential as one of the most dangerous teams in the league, but also demonstrate themselves to be one of the most pleasing to watch.

Verdict:

Financial Fair Play might have caused Monaco owner Dimitri Rybolovlev to cease his big spending, but the alternative strategy that the club has adopted is arguably even more exciting and mouth-watering. While they do not have €100m worth of quality in each position on the pitch, which they would realistically need to successfully challenge PSG this term, the squad possesses a rawness in terms of talent which will likely translate into footballing excellence. Under the light but ambitious touch of Leonardo Jardim, AS Monaco 2.0 are all set to better last season's success, in all competitions. **2nd**

AS Saint Etienne: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Stephane Ruffier	GK	French	28	2011/2012	AS Monaco
Jessy Moulin	GK	French	29	2011/2012	-
Jonathan Brison	LB	French	32	2011/2012	AS Nancy Lorraine
Benoit Assou-Ekotto	LB	Cameroonian	31	2015/2016	Tottenham Hotspur
Florentin Pogba	CB	French	24	2012/2013	CS Sedan
Paul Baysse	CB	French	27	2013/2014	Stade Brestois 29
Loic Perrin	CB	French	29	2003/2004	-
Moustapha Sall	CB	Senegalese	29	2011/2012	US Goree
Benjamin Karamoko	CB	Malian	20	2015/2016	-
Francois Clerc	RB	French	32	2012/2013	OGC Nice
Kevin Theophile-Catherine	RB	French	25	2015/2016	Cardiff City
Ismael Diomande	DM	Ivorian	22	2012/2013	-
Jeremy Clement	CM	French	30	2011/2012	PSG
Renaud Cohade	CM	French	30	2012/2013	Valenciennes FC
Fabien Lemoine	CM	French	28	2011/2012	Stade Rennais
Vincent Pajot	CM	French	24	2015/2016	Stade Rennais
Benjamin Cornet	AM	French	28	2013/2014	FC Lorient
Yohan Mollo	LW	French	26	2014/2015	AS Nancy Lorraine
Romain Hamouma	RW	French	28	2012/2013	SM Caen
Jonathan Bamba	RW	French	19	2015/2016	-
Kevin Monnet-Paquet	RW/LW	French	26	2014/2015	FC Lorient
Nolan Roux	ST	French	27	2015/2016	Lille OSC
Christophe Galtier	Manager	French	48	2009/2010	Aris Salonika
Bernard Caiazzo	President	French	61	2009/2010	-
Roland Romeyer	President	French	69	2010/2011	-

AS Saint Etienne: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	5th	69	Max Gradel (17)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	4th	69	Romain Hamouma (9)
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)

AS Saint Etienne: Likely XI



AS Saint Etienne: Squad Analysis

Fast becoming Ligue 1's version of Arsene Wenger, the enigmatic Christophe Galtier astoundingly secured St Etienne yet another top five finish last season, giving Les Verts another shot at Europa League qualification for 2015/2016. Relying on a tight-knit squad and uninspiring defensive tactics, Galtier has managed to perfect the formula for moderate, consistent success in Ligue 1. In terms of talent, linchpin squad members Franck Tabanou and Max Gradel were unable to resist the allure of the Premier League and St Etienne were unable to oppose their departures for healthy transfer fees. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, the squad in its current state will provide Galtier with his unkindest task for several years in terms of replicating a top 5 finish. On the other hand, every year the same is said and every year Galtier's boys successfully rout the doubters.

Strengths:

As previously mentioned, manager Christophe Galtier subscribes more to the theory that it is the end result that is most important and not the way in which you seek to achieve it. With this in mind, we will likely see the return of the three-at-the-back system that so often stood as an impassable wall in front of Ligue 1's finest attackers last term. Sall, Perrin and Pogba are established, continually improving central defenders, who provide ASSE with the necessary stability at the back. The introduction of Benoit Assou Ekotto at left-back should also be an exciting sight for Les Verts fans, with the Cameroonian's arrival likely to be his final chance to prove his abilities in a major European league. The feisty Ismael Diomande and silver fox Fabien Lemoine are two excellent players who provide St Etienne with midfield resilience and a basis for creating opportunities in the final third.

Weaknesses:

The squad is thinner than ever, especially with the surprising departures of Mevlut Erding and wonderkid Allan Saint Maximin. Galtier is, in the majority of positions, lacking the necessary strength in depth to adequately compete in Ligue 1 and in the Europa League simultaneously. While Nolan Roux is, in many ways, a classic Galtier signing, a Frenchman with experience in Ligue 1, he has never proven himself to be one of Ligue 1's more proficient attackers and, as Les Verts' only apparent option upfront, he has an incredible weight on his shoulders, something that he historically does not respond well to. Besides Lemoine, St Etienne are also fast running out of creative options in advanced midfield positions that can bridge the gap between defence and attack.

Key Man: **Loic Perrin**

The captain remains an exemplary leader and marshals his troops accordingly. He has vast Ligue 1 experience and is a fan favourite, having spent his entire career with Les Verts. His experience and knowhow should further aid to nurture the talents of the vast selection of propitious youngsters in the squad. With a fantastic ability to read an opponent's next move, Perrin is widely considered as one of the most accomplished central defenders in France. If Mr Consistent can produce yet another flawless campaign at the head of this St Etienne outfit, then he will be in serious contention to represent France at EURO 2016.

Verdict:

Some might suggest that with his consistently negative tactics and his uninspiring exploits in the transfer market, Christophe Galtier is purposefully trying to make life difficult for himself. The reality of the situation is that his role is to safeguard consistency, to churn out results and to sign players in as low-risk a way as possible. By focusing on signing French footballers who he already has considerable knowledge of, Galtier is yet again reforming a dependable Ligue 1 outfit. With the depth of the squad as it is, it is physically impossible for ASSE to give the best of themselves across all competitions. Perhaps this is the season where the luxury of Europa League football is taken away from them. **8th**

EA Guingamp: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Theo Guivarch	GK	French	19	2015/2016	-
Jonas Lössl	GK	Danish	26	2014/2015	FC Midtjylland
Mamadou Samassa	GK	Malian	24	2008/2009	-
Reynald Lemaitre	LB	French	32	2012/2013	AS Nancy Lorraine
Dorian Leveque	LB	French	25	2010/2011	Boulogne sur Mer
Jeremy Sorbon	CB	French	31	2013/2014	SM Caen
Benjamin Angoua	CB	Ivorian	28	2014/2015	Valenciennes FC
Christophe Kerbrat	CB	French	29	2011/2012	Plabennec
Lars Jacobsen	RB	Danish	35	2014/2015	FC Copenhagen
Maxime Baca	RB	French	32	2014/2015	FC Lorient
Mustapha Diallo	DM	Senegalese	29	2009/2010	ASC Diaraf
Franck Hery	DM	French	22	2015/2016	-
Laurent Dos Santos	DM	Brazilian	22	2013/2014	-
Julien Cardy	DM	French	33	2014/2015	AC Arles Avignon
Younousse Sankhare	CM	French	25	2013/2014	Dijon FCO
Marcus Coco	CM	French	19	2014/2015	-
Lionel Mathis	CM	French	33	2009/2010	Sochaux
Nill De Pauw	AM	Belgian	25	2015/2016	Lokeren
Yannis Salibur	AM	French	24	2014/2015	Clermont Foot
Thibault Giresse	LW	French	34	2009/2010	Toulouse FC
Nicolas Benezet	LW/RW	French	24	2015/2016	Evian TG FC
Jimmy Briand	RW/ST	French	29	2015/2016	Hannover 96
Karim Achahbar	ST	Moroccan	19	2014/2015	-
Sloan Privat*	ST	French	26	2015/2016	Gent
Mana Dembele	ST	Malian	26	2013/2014	Clermont Foot
Jules-Antoine Begue	ST	French	21	2015/2016	-
Jocelyn Gourvennec	Manager	French	43	2010/2011	La Roche VF
Bertrand Desplat	President	French	45	2010/2011	-

*Denotes a player who is currently on loan at EA Guingamp

EA Guingamp: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	10th	49	Claudio Beauvue (17)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	16th	42	Mustapha Yatabare (11)
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)

EA Guingamp: Likely XI



EA Guingamp: Squad Analysis

En Avant de Guingamp manager Jocelyn Gourvennec is creating quite a legacy at the head of a football club in a town with a population of little over 7,000. EAG seized the opportunity to compete in the Europa League in 2014/2015 with both hands, afforded to them by their hard-fought Coupe de France win in the previous campaign. They did the unthinkable, progressing through the group stages only to be knocked out in admirable fashion to seasoned competitors on the continent, Dynamo Kiev. The thinly layered squad's extensive accomplishments across Europe did not prevent them from making positive strides domestically, finishing inside the top ten in Ligue 1. Without a European competition to compete in during the 2015/2016 campaign, EAG will be able to focus exclusively on consolidating their top flight status. The question is, has a club with such a limited budget reached its natural ceiling of achievement? With Gourvennec it seems, impossible is nothing.

Strengths:

The squad is unanimously united behind their manager Jocelyn Gourvennec and EAG have made some thrilling additions to their squad ahead of this new season. Considering their lack of funding, Guingamp have pulled off some sublime dealings through the signings of Jimmy Briand and Nicolas Benezet. Not only have they numerically compensated for the departure of Claudio Beauvue, but these signings are also relatively low-risk, with both individuals having enjoyed portions of success in Ligue 1 prior to their imminent adventures with Guingamp. Gourvennec's system emphasizes the importance of dependable, individual sources of goals, rather than a collective approach to goal scoring. The abovementioned duo, as well as exciting talent Yannis Salibur, on paper, can counterbalance the goal-glut that Christophe Mandanne and Claudio Beauvue experienced last term.

Weaknesses:

Jonas Lossil was something of an enigma in goal last season, offering some highlight reel-worthy howlers in between the sticks at times, but performing prodigiously well at others. Inconsistency at the back was generally a problem for Guingamp last term and they have not yet attempted to change personnel in that area of the field through the medium of the summer transfer window. Ideally, Gourvennec also needs an individual to take the responsibility that prolific Claudio Beauvue bore last season of producing moments of attacking magic to grab points at the death. While Moustapha Diallo and Lionel Mathis are adequately experienced, their age and diminishing levels of quickness will likely leave potentially lethal holes in Guingamp's midfield.

Key Player: Jimmy Briand

After an adventure in Germany that ended prematurely in the form of the termination of his contract with Hannover, former Lyon stalwart Jimmy Briand returns to the top French flight to prove his worth yet again, at the age of just under 30. The Frenchman's experience at the highest level should not only elevate the quality of Guingamp's attacking play, but also ensure the expedited nurturing of the younger, unrefined potential Ligue 1 stars in the squad. With a fantastic talent for crossing and considerable pace, expect Briand to provide Dembele and Privat with an extensive amount of opportunities to put their aerial abilities to good use.

Verdict:

So long as Jocelyn Gourvennec remains at the head of this club, it is difficult to see Guingamp's Ligue 1 status coming under threat. Add that to the fact that their attack is now made up of more established names than ever before and it should be another solid season for EAG, even in the absence of two of their most integral players from last season, Claudio Beauvue and Christophe Mandanne. If possible, a couple of more youthful additions at the heart of the defence could see them better last season's top 10 finish. **11th**

ESTAC Troyes: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Mathieu Dreyer	GK	French	26	2012/2013	Frejus St Raphael
Franck Grandel	GK	French	37	2013/2014	Dunkerque
Denis Petric	GK	Slovenian	27	2013/2014	FC Istres
Paul Bernardioni	GK	French	18	2014/2015	-
Carlens Arcus	LB/CB	Haitian	19	2015/2016	-
Mory Kone	CB	French	21	2014/2015	Parma
Matthieu Saunier	CB	French	25	2011/2012	Rodez AF
Rincon	CB	Brazilian	28	2011/2012	Chievo Verona
Mahamadou N'Diaye	CB	Malian	25	2013/2014	Vitoria Guimaraes
Jonathan Martins Pereira	RB	French	29	2014/2015	EA Guingamp
Jessy Pi*	DM	French	21	2015/2016	AS Monaco
Guillaume Lacour	DM/RB	French	34	2014/2015	Evian TG FC
Thiago Xavier	DM	Brazilian	31	2011/2012	Chateauroux
Thomas Ayasse	DM	French	28	2014/2015	AS Nancy
Chaouki Ben Saada	CM	Tunisian	31	2014/2015	AC Arles Avignon
Benjamin Nivet	CM	French	38	2012/2013	SM Caen
Stephane Darbion	CM	French	31	2012/2013	Skoda Xanthi
Fabien Camus	AM	French	30	2015/2016	Genk
Karim Azamoum	AM	French	25	2013/2014	FC Hyeres
Georges Gope-Fenepej	LW	French	26	2011/2012	Magenta
Yoann Court	LW	French	25	2013/2014	CS Sedan
Quentin Othon	LW/LB	French	27	2011/2012	RC Strasbourg
Lossemy Karaboue	RW	French	27	2015/2016	AS Nancy
Jimmy Cabot	RW	French	21	2013/2014	-
Christian Bekamenga	ST	Cameroonian	29	2015/2016	Stade Lavallois
Babacar Gueye	ST	Senegalese	21	2014/2015	-
Jimmy Cabot	ST	French	22	2013/2014	LOSC Lille
Corentin Jean*	ST	French	20	2015/2016	AS Monaco
Deniz Hummet	ST	Turkish	18	2015/2016	Malmo FF
Henri Bienvenu Ntsama	ST	Cameroonian	27	2014/2015	Eskisehirspor
Jean Marc Furlan	Manager	French	57	2010/2011	FC Nantes
Daniel Masoni	President	French	58	2009/2010	-

*Denotes a player who is currently on loan at ESTAC Troyes

ESTAC Troyes: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 2	1st	78	Benjamin Nivet (11)
2013/2014	Ligue 2	10th	52	Ghislain Gimbert (14)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	19th	37	Benjamin Nivet (10)
2011/2012	Ligue 2	3rd	64	Marcos (12)
2010/2011	Ligue 2	16th	46	Marcos (9)

ESTAC Troyes: Likely XI



ESTAC Troyes: Squad Analysis

ESTAC Troyes return to the top flight of French football after a two-year absence but, interestingly, they have the same manager now as they did back then. Often, newly relegated sides decide to sack the manager of hour, but Jean Marc Furlan was given the chance to rebuild and reshape this side so that they could take another shot at successfully installing themselves in Ligue 1. That faith has been repaid handsomely through an almost immediate return to the French top flight. However, there is no guaranteeing that Furlan's second shot will be any more successful than his first.

Strengths:

Last season's Ligue 2 champions enter the new campaign with what is largely the same squad that took them to the title in May. Denis Petric, Jessy Pi and veteran Benjamin Nivet formed the backbone of this ESTAC side last season, and they have been given a mandate to replicate their stunningly consistent performances in 2015/2016, but this time at the highest domestic level in Ligue 1. Combine the aforementioned with certain hopefuls like nippy forward man Corentin Jean and the rapid and powerful Lossemy Karaboue, and, on paper, Troyes have enough talent to mount a serious fight to avoid relegation. Central defender Mory Kone, despite a recent failed spell at Parma, also remains one to watch.

Weaknesses:

It is seldom the case that Ligue 2's top individual performers turn into accomplished Ligue 1 players without a transition period. This is an issue that one expects Troyes will face, during a campaign where they ideally need to hit the ground running. The shape of their current squad is also peculiar in that it contains a host of very young players and another swarm of much older individuals, without really establishing a middle ground. While that is not necessarily a recipe for failure, in areas like the defensive midfield, one has to question whether the likes of Thomas Ayasse and Thiago Xavier will be able to cope with the added exigency and pace of the Ligue 1 game. Add these worries to the fact that the defence, barring Jonathan Martins Pereira, has barely any prior experience in this division, and the wool could unravel in worrying fashion for Troyes' faithful.

Key Player: [Jessy Pi](#)

Pi is a player that has been on our radar for some time, quite simply because of his early maturity in the defensive midfield role. An AS Monaco youth product, Pi is starting his second consecutive campaign on loan with Troyes after turning into something of a Ligue 2 revelation in a breakout season for the Frenchman last term. The 21 year old will be responsible for giving the attacking players the freedom to push forward without leaving the side exposed at the back, whilst dealing with the added difficulty of the physically more demanding rhythm of Ligue 1. This is a make-or-break style of campaign for Pi, who has a golden chance to show Leonardo Jardim that he can eventually replace the ageing Jeremy Toulalan in the AS Monaco first team.

Verdict:

On paper, ESTAC Troyes stand the strongest chance out of any of the newly promoted sides of ensuring that this campaign does not merely represent a year long sabbatical away from Ligue 2 normality. Their manager harbours the added bonus of recent, first-hand experience of a Ligue 1 relegation dogfight. While Furlan admittedly lost out then, if he can add another defensive midfielder before that fateful day at the end of August, then ESTAC fans have much to be quietly confident about heading into what will require a grueling effort regardless. **16th**

FC Lorient: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Benjamin Lecomte	GK	French	24	2010/2011	-
Ibrahima Sy	GK	French	19	2015/2016	Marseille
Florent Chaigneau	GK	French	31	2011/2012	Le Poire Sur Vie
Raphael Guerreiro	LB	French	21	2013/2014	SM Caen
Vincent Le Goff	LB	French	25	2014/2015	Istres
Lamine Kone	CB	French	26	2010/2011	Chateauroux
Francois Bellugou	CB	French	28	2014/2015	AS Nancy
Wesley Lautoa	CB	French	27	2011/2012	CS Sedan
Yohann Wachter	CB	French	23	2013/2014	-
Hamadou Karamoko	CB	French	19	2015/2016	-
Abdou Pape Paye	RB	French	25	2015/2016	Dijon FCO
Lamine Gassama	RB	Senegalese	25	2011/2012	Lyon
Mehdi Mostefa	DM	Algerian	29	2014/2015	AC Ajaccio
Rafidine Abdullah	CM	French	21	2013/2014	Marseille
Remi Mulumba	CM	French	22	2012/2013	-
Pierre Lavenant	CM	French	19	2014/2015	-
Ibrahim Ndong	CM	Gabonese	21	2014/2015	CS Sfax
Alain Traore	AM	Burkinabe	26	2012/2013	Auxerre
Walid Mesloub	AM	Algerian	29	2014/2015	Le Havre
Enzo Reale	AM	French	23	2012/2013	Olympique Lyonnais
Walid Mesloub	AM/ST	Algerian	29	2014/2015	Havre AC
Maxime Barthelme	LW	French	27	2010/2011	RC Paris
Romain Philippoteaux	LW	French	27	2014/2015	Dijon FCO
Yann Jouffre	RW	French	31	2007/2008	EA Guingamp
Valentin Lavigne	RW/ST	French	21	2014/2015	-
Benjamin Moukandjo	RW/ST	Cameroonian	26	2015/2016	Stade de Reims
Moryké Fofana	ST/LW	Ivorian	23	2015/2016	Lillestrom
Benjamin Jeannot	ST	French	23	2014/2015	AS Nancy
Majeed Waris	ST	Ghanaian	23	2015/2016	Trabzonspor
Sylvain Ripoll	Manager	French	43	2014/2015	-
Loic Fery	President	French	41	2009/2010	-

FC Lorient: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	16th	43	Jordan Ayew (12)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	8th	49	Vincent Aboubakar (16)
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)

FC Lorient: Likely XI



FC Lorient: Squad Analysis

Lorient struggled extensively last season to maintain their Ligue 1 status, with the changeover from previous manager Christian Gourcuff to current man Sylvain Ripoll not occurring as smoothly as club President Loic Fery would have liked. There were two ultimate reasons why Les Merlus went from being top 10 certainties to dabbling with the devil that is relegation. These came in the form of two crucial departures, which were inadequately remunerated, causing a decrease in the overall quality of the squad. The recently departed Jordan Ayew simply could not meet the prolific levels of goal-getting exhibited by his predecessor Vincent Aboubakar. Arguably even more destructive to Les Merlus was the loss of talismanic captain and outstanding defender Bruno Ecuele Manga. While Lorient cannot be blamed or have been expected to find like-for-like replacements for these individuals that they successfully molded into fantastic footballers, one wonders whether they could have been better prepared for their departures. As far as 2015/2016 is concerned, these deficiencies remain, but to a lesser extent, with other individuals striving to come to the fore.

Strengths:

Sylvain Ripoll's ethos is based almost exclusively on the swift counter-attacking style of play that his predecessor Christian Gourcuff put into practice. Over the last 12 months, Lorient have brought in individuals, such as Walid Mesloub and Romain Phillippoteaux, who are technically gifted enough to implement Les Merlus' favoured short passing play, paralleled with their necessary quick-thinking skills required to deliver stunning counter-attacking blows to their opponents. In fact, there are talented individuals all over the pitch, from highly rated left-sided player Raphael Guerreiro to fantastically underrated goalkeeper Benjamin Lecomte to unyielding defensive midfielder Ibrahim Ndong. The challenge that FCL now face is to form a more consistently and physically robust team out of the smatterings of raw ability at their disposal.

Weaknesses:

The departure of Jordan Ayew has eliminated a bigheaded character from the side, but a poor squad mentality is also believed to have emanated from a lack of collective belief in Sylvain Ripoll's abilities to take Les Merlus further than his forerunner. Standout performances, such as a 5-3 win at the Velodrome over Marseille last season, proved that this team does not lack the talent, but rather the focus or perhaps the coaching staff lacks the tactical nous to consistently churn out the results necessary for levels of success typical of the Gourcuff era. While it might be last chance saloon for Ripoll, Lorient also desperately need to sign an experienced striker, with Benjamin Jeannot only showing flashes of a goal-scoring instinct last term. The additions of Benjamin Moukandjo and Majeed Waris are excellent and will provide FCL with goals, but while Valentin Lavigne is also a very exciting prospect, he would progress more rapidly under the tutelage of a more experienced head.

Key Player: **Raphael Guerreiro**

This tricky Portuguese full-back-come-winger perfectly encompasses Lorient's club philosophy: create talent from scratch under the principles of putting attractive football before concentrating on the more commonly emphasized physical attributes of 21st century football. As a result, Guerreiro might not be the strongest, but he has an excellent positional awareness, which allows him to see crossing opportunities before opposition defenders (ironically his wavelength is often too far ahead of even his own teammates, who fail to anticipate the cross). Using this highly developed footballing intelligence, the Portuguese international is also able to select the right moments to charge into the opposition box to produce tidy finishes on goal. While defensively he provides solidity, Ripoll's decision to deploy him in left-midfield last season means that the defensive side has not been given as much of a chance to develop lately. A terrific talent nevertheless.

Verdict:

Lorient have a talented enough squad to move in a positive direction this season, but it is very much "sink or swim" for the Sylvain Ripoll regime. **14th**

FC Nantes: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Remy Riou	GK	French	27	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Maxime Dupe	GK	French	22	2011/2012	-
Olivier Veigneau	LB	French	30	2011/2012	Duisburg
Wilifried Moimbe	LB	French	26	2015/2016	Stade Brestois
Papy Djilobodji	CB	Senegalese	26	2009/2010	Senart-Moissy
Oswaldo Vizcarrondo	CB	Venezuelan	31	2013/2014	Lanus
Koffi Djidji	CB	French	22	2011/2012	-
Léo Dubois	RB	French	20	2015/2016	-
Birama Toure	DM	Malian	23	2012/2013	-
Remi Gomis	DM	Senegalese	31	2013/2014	Levante
Valentin Rongier	DM	French	20	2015/2016	-
Lucas Deaux	DM	French	26	2012/2013	Stade de Reims
Adrien Thomasson	CM	French	21	2015/2016	Evian TG FC
Adryan*	AM	Brazilian	20	2015/2016	Flamengo
Alejandro Bedoya	AM	American	28	2013/2014	Helsingborgs IF
Johan Audel	LW	French	31	2013/2014	Stuttgart
Kolbeinn Sigthorsson	ST	Icelandic	25	2015/2016	Ajax
Yacine Bammou	ST	French	23	2014/2015	-
Ismael Bangoura	ST	Guinean	30	2012/2013	Al Nasr
Emiliano Sala	ST	Argentinian	24	2015/2016	Bordeaux
Michel Der Zakarian	Manager	Armenian	52	2012/2013	Clermont Foot
Waldemar Kita	President	Polish	62	2007/2008	FC Lausanne

*Denotes a player who is currently on loan at FC Nantes

FC Nantes: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	14th	45	Jordan Veretout (7)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	13th	46	Filip Djordjevic (9)
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)

FC Nantes: Likely XI



FC Nantes: Squad Analysis

In many ways, the 2015/2016 campaign represents a fresh start for Les Canaris. Their FIFA-imposed transfer embargo has expired, player's that were emblematic of the Nantes side that won promotion in 2012/2013 have departed and Michel Der Zakarian now has the chance, voluntarily or otherwise, to remold his squad in a way that allows FCN to further consolidate their top flight status. The 2014/2015 campaign was merely a continuation of the second half of the previous season: Nantes's imperious home form enabling them to comfortably stay afloat, despite an inapt attack force who struggled to score goals.

Strengths:

Manager Michel der Zakarian has proved to be one of the most tactically versatile coaches in Ligue 1. He prefers to adapt Nantes' style of play to the opposition they come up against rather than imposing the same blueprint upon every football match, a skill that has served him and FCN well. Nantes have not wasted any time to dip into the transfer market, engineering some intelligent pick ups including that of emerging striker Emiliano Sala from Bordeaux and Adrien Thomasson from Evian. Combine those additions with the deals for Ajax's Kolbeinn Sigthorsson and Flamengo's fiery attacking midfielder Adryan and, for the first time since the Filip Djordjevic era, der Zakarian has the talent at his disposal necessary to form one of the more potent attacks in the division. As is so often the case in Ligue 1, expect youth to be given a chance by der Zakarian; Valentin Rongier and Koffi Djidji are in line to have breakout seasons.

Weaknesses:

It is somewhat ironic that the summer during which Nantes are finally able to sign players again is the time when the old guard decides to desert the project: Issa Cissokho, Jordan Veretout, Chaker Alhadhur and Papy Djilobodji (imminently) have all adopted challenges elsewhere. Regardless of whether this exodus is a sign of a lack of faith in Der Zakarian and the club's current trajectory, it has left gaping holes in FCN's squad. Djilobodji in particular, as one of the most talented central defenders in the division, will be an irreplaceable difference. Serious questions will be asked if Nantes fail to recruit in that sector of the pitch before the end of August, with the shaky Oswaldo Vizcarrondo the only centre back with anything near considerable top flight exposure. Likewise, counteracting for Jordan Veretout's departure will be neither an immediate nor a straightforward process, with the new Aston Villa player having carried Nantes through fixtures at times during the previous campaign. The squad itself is very thin and it would be accurate to say that Les Canaris' setup is deficient in both established quality and quantity going into the new season, at least compared with last term.

Key Player: **Emiliano Sala**

The ugly duckling of Bordeaux transformed into a swan during a loan spell with Caen last season, netting 5 times in 13 appearances. Despite his obvious success, Willy Sagnol refused to include Sala concretely in his first-team plans for Les Girondins for the forthcoming campaign. As a result, Nantes have themselves a blossoming talent, who, when he applies himself fully, has the ability to become that reliable source of goals that they have so obviously lacked over the previous 18 months. He is a sensible choice for "Key Player", because his prior Ligue 1 experience will enable him to hit the ground running with Nantes, when compared with an individual like Kolbeinn Sigthorsson for example.

Verdict:

If pre-season is anything to go by, then Nantes will favour a formation that focuses on dominating proceedings in the middle of the park, shifting away from the utilization of wingers in an attacking sense. Without Djilobodji and an adequate replacement however, the progress they have made in attacking positions might be thwarted by the inaptitude of their defence. Not in danger, but they are no yet in a position to really produce anything stunning. **7th**

Gazelec Ajaccio: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Clément Maury	GK	French	29	2010/2011	Toulouse Fontaines
Jules Goda	GK	Cameroonian	26	2013/2014	AEL 1964
Issiaga Sylla*	LB	Guinean	21	2015/2016	Toulouse FC
Pablo Martinez	LB	French	26	2012/2013	ES Uzès
Amos Youga	CB/DM	Central African	22	2014/2015	Vannes OC
Roderic Filippi	CB	French	26	2012/2013	-
Kader Mangane	CB	Senegalese	32	2015/2016	Kayseri Erciyesspor
Jeremie Brechet	CB	French	35	2014/2015	Bordeaux
Alassane Toure	RB/CB	French	26	2015/2016	Tours FC
David Ducourtieux	DM	French	37	2014/2015	Valenciennes FC
Jerome Le Moigne	DM	French	32	2015/2016	RC Lens
Louis Poggi	CM/RW	French	31	2007/2008	Toulon
Pierre-Francois Sinapi	CM	French	25	2010/2011	AC Ajaccio
Damjan Djokovic	CM	Croatian	25	2015/2016	Bologna
Mohamed Larbi	AM/LW	Tunisian	27	2013/2014	Luçon VF
Rafi Boujedra	LW/RW	French	22	2013/2014	AS Valence
Kevin Mayi	ST	French	22	2014/2015	St Etienne
Gregory Pujol	ST	French	35	2014/2015	Valenciennes FC
John Tshibumbu	ST	Conoglese	26	2013/2014	Charleroi
Khalid Boutaib	ST	French	28	2014/2015	Luzenac
Thierry Laurey	Manager	French	51	2013/2014	Arles Avignon
Olivier Minconi	President	French	40	-	-

*Denotes a player who is currently on loan at GFC Ajaccio

Gazelec Ajaccio: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 2	2nd	65	Mohamed Larbi (8)
2013/2014	National	3rd	60	Famara Diedhiou (13)
2012/2013	Ligue 2	20th	25	Idriss Saadi (7)
2011/2012	National	3rd	66	Nicolas Verdier (14)
2010/2011	CFA (Group C)	1st	102	-

Gazelec Ajaccio: Likely XI



Gazelec Ajaccio: Squad Analysis

You simply could not make up Gazelec Ajaccio's journey to Ligue 1 prominence. After achieving back-to-back promotions in 2014 and 2015, Corsica's youngest club is set to embark upon their maiden French top-flight campaign. It really will be a David and Goliath type of story for Thierry Laurey's men this season and they will need every single one of the 5000 seats in the Ange Casanova stadium to be filled during their home games. While it seems unlikely that fervent support from their fans will make up for the collective lack of Ligue 1 knowhow that GFCA possess, there is no doubt that this side will win over a lot of French football neutrals throughout the campaign.

Strengths:

For a squad that was previously devoid of any Ligue 1 experience, Gazelec Ajaccio have done well to recruit players that are well versed in the rhythm of top flight life. The loan signing of Issiaga Sylla from Toulouse and the signing of former Lens midfielder Jerome Le Moigne adds to a pre-existing Ligue 1 old guard that boasts Jeremie Brechet, David Ducourtieux and Gregory Pujol. Kader Mangane is a robust and surprisingly deft central defender too. The general consensus is that this is a side that are technically one of the weakest in the division, but one that exhibits the necessary characters to ensure that heads do not drop if the Corsican outfit gets off to a bad start. Their manager, Thierry Laurey, must also be praised for his ingenuity and man management skills that have played a major role in bringing GFCA this far. He will no doubt add to an already very high standard of coaching in this division.

Weaknesses:

There are many, but the single most worrying aspect of the side's pre-season was the lack of pace that certain players showcased, particularly in central positions. While the addition of Mangane will help to buck this trend, Le Moigne and Ducourtieux are unlikely to be able to prevent the vast majority of opposition midfielders from piercing through, bypassing them to face an unprotected back four. Numerically, it is currently the smallest squad in the division. While not an immediate problem, a couple of injuries back-to-back and Laurey would have to deploy players in positions where they are previously untested, which is not something he or GFCA can afford.

Key Player: Kevin Mayi

Not an obvious choice, but the talented 22 year old showed flashes of brilliance in Ligue 2 last season and has a point to prove in the top flight after being let go all too easily by his previous club St Etienne. If he can prove to Laurey in training that he is worthy of a place in the starting XI, that he deserves to dethrone the ageing Pujol because he offers greater liveliness off the ball, then he has the potential to become invaluable to his side in what will be a virtually impossible relegation scrap.

Verdict:

Nobody is ever destined for relegation, but Laurey has undoubtedly the biggest task on his hands when compared with his nineteen other colleagues in the division. A lot could depend on any business that they are able to complete in the final weeks of this summer transfer window. A passionate club and a peculiar history, but one fears that Gazelec Ajaccio's Ligue 1 fairytale will be of the Grimm brothers' variety. **19th**

Girondins de Bordeaux: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Former Club
Cedric Carrasso	GK	French	33	2009/2010	Toulouse FC
Jerome Prior	GK	French	19	2014/2015	-
Maxime Poudje	LB	French	22	2011/2012	-
Diego Contento	LB	German	25	2014/2015	Bayern Munich
Theo Pellenard	LB	French	21	2014/2015	-
Nicolas Pallois	CB	French	27	2014/2015	Chamois Niortais
Ludovic Sane	CB	Senegalese	28	2009/2010	-
Cedric Yambere	CB	French	24	2014/2015	-
Milan Gajic	RB	Serbian	19	2015/2016	OFK Belgrade
Frederic Guilbert	RB	French	20	2015/2016	-
Andre Biyogo Poko	DM	Gabonese	22	2011/2012	US Bitam
Jaroslav Plasil	CM	Czech	33	2009/2010	Osasuna
Clement Chantome	CM	French	27	2014/2015	PSG
Gregory Sertic	CM	Croatian	25	2010/2011	-
Abdou Traore	CM	Malian	27	2008/2009	-
Valentin Vada	AM	Argentinian	19	2014/2015	-
Kevin Soni	AM	Cameroonian	17	2015/2016	-
Wahbi Khazri	LW	Tunisian	24	2014/2015	SC Bastia
Jussie	LW/ST	Brazilian	31	2012/2013	RC Lens
Nicolas Maurice-Belay	LW	French	30	2011/2012	FC Sochaux
Henri Saivet	RW/AM	French	24	2010/2011	-
Diego Rolan	ST	Uruguayan	22	2012/2013	Defensor
Issac Kiese Thelin	ST	Swedish	23	2014/2015	Malmö FF
Gaetan Laborde	ST	French	21	2013/2014	-
Cheick Diabate	ST	Malian	27	2009/2010	-
Thomas Toure	ST	French	21	2014/2015	-
Enzo Crivelli	ST	French	20	2014/2015	-
Willy Sagnol	Manager	French	38	2014/2015	France U21s
Jean Louis Tiraud	President	French	64	1996/1997	-

Girondins de Bordeaux: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	6th	63	Diego Rolan (15)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	7th	53	Cheick Diabate (12)
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)

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

Girondins de Bordeaux: Likely XI



Girondins de Bordeaux: Squad Analysis

Willy Sagnol made, by all means, a tenacious start to his revolution of Girondins de Bordeaux last season, in what represented his first campaign as a club football manager. The Francis Gillot "Bordeaux" era already seems far behind us, with a host of exciting young talents showing indications during the previous campaign that they could be all set to perform spectacularly during 2015/2016. With the Nouveau Stade de Bordeaux having opened at the end of last season, consequently marking the closure of the Stade Chaban Delmas, it genuinely feels as if new-look Bordeaux can attempt to obtain the most coveted prizes in French football once again.

Strengths:

Bordeaux have earned the right to attempt to qualify for the Europa League this season, with the added pleasure of knowing that they are one of the few Ligue 1 sides with a large enough squad to successfully compete on both fronts. Barring the right-back situation, there is impressive depth across each position, making life tough for Sagnol in terms of choosing a starting XI. In an attacking sense, Bordeaux is currently home to some of the hottest prospects, with the likes of Thomas Toure and Diego Rolan proving last season that despite their lack of experience, they are not frightened to successfully embarrass more established opponents with their trickery, frightening pace and game-reading abilities. The midfield duo of Andre Biyogo Poko and Clement Chantome adds an unadulterated mix of strength and exigency from the former and passing ability and experience from the latter. If this pairing can stay injury-free, then it even has a realistic chance of handling the likes of PSG in the middle of the park.

Weaknesses:

From a defensive point of view, the appointment of Lamine Sane as club captain last season baffled many, further distracting the Senegalese international from the already previously precarious execution of his duties at the back. When he returns from his medium-term injury, he still has it all to prove. Sane's inconsistencies have a knock-on effect on an otherwise talented back four, which boasts the likes of Diego Contento and Nicolas Pallois, who now have a first season of Ligue 1 action under their respective belts. Questions were also asked of Sagnol's antics on the touchline last season, with the former Bayern Munich man taking far too frequent pops at French football officials. If Sagnol truly wants to make his tenure special at Bordeaux, then he must carry himself in a way that makes fans and pundits alike want to actively wish success upon him, not the opposite.

Key Player: [Clement Chantome](#)

The use of the term "the bridge" is far too common when describing footballers nowadays, but this is the vital role that former PSG man Clement Chantome will surely be asked to undertake this season. Having left the Ligue 1 champions in January of this calendar year, Chantome's first six months with Bordeaux were hardly celebrated and certainly understated. Having taken over from Gregory Sertic (who is now deployed even at centre back by Sagnol), Chantome will play a crucial role in building rapid, attacking moves as the midfield metronome if you will. With the hocus-pocus abilities of FCGB's widemen, such as Nicolas Maurice Belay and Wahbi Khazri, Chantome's quick-thinking, high pass completion rate and consistency at the top level will maximise the time and space that Bordeaux's attacking players create for themselves. You can be sure that Chantome will not be Bordeaux's poster boy, he will not be the goal getter or the vital interceptor of play, but he will be hugely responsible for any success that Bordeaux have during this campaign.

Verdict:

Bordeaux's on-pitch performances are starting to live up to the prestige that the club's name brings yet again. With a squad deep enough to feasibly have great success in the Europa League whilst fighting for a top four position, Sagnol's men, despite their lack of window shopping, are set for a fine season. **5th**

LOSC Lille: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Vincent Enyeama	GK	Nigerian	32	2012/2013	Hapoel Tel Aviv
Steeve Elana	GK	French	35	2012/2013	Stade Brestois 29
Jean Butez	GK	French	20	2015/2016	-
Pape Souare	LB	Senegalese	25	2012/2013	-
Julian Jeanvier	CB	French	23	2012/2013	AS Nancy
Renato Civelli	CB	Argentinian	31	2015/2016	Bursaspor
Stoppila Sunzu*	CB	Zambian	26	2015/2016	Shanghai Shenhua
Benjamin Pavard	CB	French	19	2014/2015	-
Adama Soumaoro	CB	French	23	2011/2012	-
Marko Basa	CB	Montenegrin	32	2011/2012	Lokomotiv Moscow
Djibril Sidibe	RB	French	23	2012/2013	ESTAC Troyes
Sebastien Corchia	RB	French	24	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Franck Beria	RB	French	32	2007/2008	FC Metz
Ibrahim Amadou	DM	French	22	2015/2016	AS Nancy
Souahilo Meite	DM	French	21	2012/2013	Auxerre
Rio Mavuba	DM	French	31	2008/2009	Villarreal
Florent Balmont	CM	French	35	2008/2009	OGC Nice
Mounir Obbadi	CM	Moroccan	32	2015/2016	AS Monaco
Marvin Martin	AM	French	27	2012/2013	FC Sochaux
Sofiane Boufal	AM	Moroccan	21	2014/2015	Angers SCO
Eric Bautheac	LW	French	27	2015/2016	OGC Nice
Romain Jamrozik	LW	French	17	2015/2016	-
John Jairo Ruiz	RW	Costa Rican	21	2013/2014	Saprissa
Ryan Mendes	RW/ST	Cape Verdean	25	2012/2013	Havre AC
Ronny Rodelin	RW/ST	French	25	2011/2012	FC Nantes
Michael Frey	ST	Swiss	21	2014/2015	Young Boys
Sehrou Guirassy	ST	French	19	2015/2016	Stade Lavallois
Junior Tallo	ST	Ivorian	22	2015/2016	AS Roma
Baptiste Guillaume	ST	Belgian	20	2015/2016	RC Lens
Herve Renard	Manager	French	46	2015/2016	Ivory Coast
Michel Seydoux	President	French	67	2001/2002	-

*Denotes a player currently on loan at LOSC Lille

LOSC Lille: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	8th	56	Nolan Roux (9)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	3rd	71	Salomon Kalou (16)
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)

LOSC Lille: Likely XI



LOSC Lille: Squad Analysis

All change at Lille this summer. Long-respected chairman Michel Seydoux decided that this was the appropriate time for a complete shake-up of a team that had been lacking inspiration under recently sacked boss Rene Girard. Up steps the charismatic and captivating journeyman manager that is Herve Renard, fresh from his latest African success in the form of the African Cup of Nations with the Ivory Coast. Cue a discreet, but necessary squad overhaul that has comprised of the withdrawal of just as much driftwood (Nolan Roux and David Rozenthal) as it has key men (Idrissa Gueye and Simon Kjaer). With a transfer policy centered on youth, Lille appear to be in for a bumpy, but likely positive 2015/2016.

Strengths:

The efficacy of Lille's defence that was relied upon during the 2013/2014 campaign was simply not enough to replicate another season of overachievement in 2014/2015. Marko Basa and Vincent Enyeama were good last term, but not impenetrable. Stoppila Sunzu and Renato Civelli are largely expected to form Renard's central defensive partnership of choice, which is certainly a relieving prospect for Lille fans. Both are commanding leaders (Sunzu by example, Civelli with a mixture of bravery & spoken motivation) and have an excellent track record in Ligue 1. Lille fans have more to smile about too, with Renard's style of play likely to be more exciting and attack-minded, especially with the numerous speedy attacking players that he has added to the squad this summer. Junior Tallo and Sehrou Guirassy will have to hope that the Divock Origi-sized curse that seemed to bewitch Lille strikers last season into performing poorly is a thing of the past. Mounir Obbadi's arrival will add even more experience and freshen up a midfield that has previously had an undesirable habit of complacency. Fiery Renard will certainly not tolerate players who decide that pressing when Lille are without the ball is merely optional.

Weaknesses:

With such wholesale changes being made at Lille this summer, it is almost impossible that Renard will have the finished product that he desires come matchday one. Tactical consistency, let alone consistency in individuals' performances is likely to be an objective rather than a reality as Renard and his new-look Lille outfit find their feet during these opening months. We must not forget that despite all of the self-confidence that Renard displays, his first Ligue 1 rodeo actually ended in the worst possible way, in the form of relegation with Sochaux. He must surround himself with a coaching staff that is adequately able to compliment his man motivating-heavy style of management with rigorous tactical and technical preparation. This is especially significant for a side where such a substantial portion of the squad labeled as "diamonds in the rough" that need polishing.

Key Player: **Rio Mavuba**

You have heard about the radical changes that Lille have undergone, but what ever happened to the "change through continuity" strapline? Well, Renard pulled off a major coup when he convinced club captain Rio Mavuba to stay at LOSC when his contract was coming to an end in June, doing a U-turn to commit to a new, long term deal under a new regime. While Mavuba's stint in the French national team is most probably over and his physical capabilities are waning, he can positively put his leadership qualities to use by focusing on ensuring that the plethora of new faces in this Lille setup gel as quickly as possible by imposing an open and relaxed atmosphere on the dressing room. On the field, he remains a vital cog owing to his defensive midfield resilience and booming vocals.

Verdict:

The mere possibility of entertaining football this season should be enough to keep Les Dogues happy. LOSC have given Renard the licence to rebuild the squad, now they must give him adequate time to develop it. A season of progress in the offing, even if the jury is still out on the aptitude of Renard's ability with regards to coaching at club level. **6th**

Montpellier HSC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Laurent Pionnier	GK	French	33	2007/2008	-
Geoffrey Jourden	GK	French	29	2006/2007	-
Jonathan Ligali	GK	French	24	2010/2011	-
Jerome Roussillon	LB/RB	French	22	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Daniel Congre	LB/CB	French	30	2012/2013	Olimpo
Hilton	CB	Brazilian	37	2011/2012	Marseille
William Remy	CB	French	24	2015/2016	Dijon FCO
Ramy Bensebaini	CB	Algerian	20	2015/2016	AC Paradou
Dylan Gissi	CB/RB	Swiss	24	2014/2015	Olimpo
Mamadou N'Diaye	RB	French	20	2015/2016	-
Mathieu Deplagne	RB	French	23	2011/2012	-
Joris Marveaux	DM	French	32	2008/2009	Clermont Foot
Bryan Dabo	DM	French	23	2012/2013	-
Elleys Skhiri	DM	French	20	2015/2016	-
Paul Lasne	CM	French	26	2014/2015	AC Ajaccio
Jamel Saihi	CM	Tunisian	28	2006/2007	-
Jonas Martin	CM	French	25	2011/2012	-
Jean Deza	AM/LW	Peruvian	22	2014/2015	CDU San Martin
Ryad Boudebouz	AM	Algerian	25	2015/2016	SC Bastia
Morgan Sanson	AM	French	20	2013/2014	Le Mans
Gianni Seraf	AM	French	21	2014/2015	-
Sebastien Wuthrich	LW	Swiss	25	2014/2015	FC Sion
Anthony Mounier	LW	French	27	2012/2013	OGC Nice
Souleymane Camara	RW/ST	Senegalese	32	2008/2009	OGC Nice
Djamel Bakar	RW	French	26	2013/2014	AS Nancy Lorraine
Florian Sotoca	RW	French	24	2014/2015	AS Beziers
Kevin Berigaud	ST/AM	French	27	2014/2015	Evian TG FC
Steve Mounie	ST	Beninese	20	2014/2015	-
Quentin Cornette	ST	French	21	2013/2014	-
Rolland Courbis	Manager	French	61	2013/2014	USM Alger
Louis Nicollin	President	French	72	1977/1978	-

Montpellier HSC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	7th	56	Lucas Barrios (11)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	15th	42	Remy Cabella (14)
2012/2013	Ligue 1	9th	52	Younes Belhanda (10)*
2011/2012	Ligue 1	1st	82	Olivier Giroud (21)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	14th	47	Olivier Giroud (12)

*Souleymane Camara also scored 10 goals in 2012/2013

Montpellier HSC: Likely XI



Montpellier HSC: Squad Analysis

Montpellier were, without a shadow of a doubt, the surprise package of last season's edition of Ligue 1. A second-half of the season purple patch for the previously much maligned Lucas Barrios led MHSC to their highest league table finish since their title win in 2012. No-nonsense boss Rolland Courbis's understated genius is in his rich knowledge of opposing clubs' strengths & weaknesses and the cutthroat counter-attacking style of play that he has installed, previously centered around the now seriously injured Morgan Sanson. As a result and with the departure of Barrios, some tactical tinkering will have to be employed to replicate last season's success.

Strengths:

Even though veteran Hilton was surprisingly excellent last season, Montpellier have wisely freshened up their defensive ranks through the signings of Ramy Bensebaini, William Remy and Jerome Roussillon. While the former name in the aforementioned list is an unknown quantity, the latter two proved themselves to be some of the best Ligue 2 defensive talent last season and have the necessary attributes to rapidly settle into Ligue 1 life. Midfielder Jonas Martin will certainly be able to provide unassuming protection to a new-look Montpellier back four that will undoubtedly need time to settle. Martin is not the only under-estimated individual in this MHSC, with experienced winger Anthony Mounier proving last season to be one of the slipperiest in the division.

Weaknesses:

Montpellier's biggest problem is that they have thus far failed to compensate for the departure of Lucas Barrios by delving into the transfer market. By entrusting Kevin Berigaud with the role of first choice striker, Courbis is taking an inordinate gamble. The former Evian man struggled extensively to replicate his goal-scoring presence under Pascal Dupraz for his new club during the previous campaign. Ryad Boudebouz has been brought in to replenish the creative spark that MHSC will sorely miss, owing to Morgan Sanson's long-term injury, but the quality and consistency of the Algerian international's productivity in terms of goal-scoring chances for his teammates in recent seasons has been lacking somewhat. Overall, Montpellier will be reliant upon a mixture of mediocre Ligue 1 performers and top-flight virgins in certain positions in the starting XI, at least at the beginning of the campaign.

Key Man: [Anthony Mounier](#)

Montpellier might be well advised to think outside of the box in order to fill the Morgan Sanson-sized void in their attacking midfield force this season, especially if Ryad Boudebouz gets off to an unconvincing start. A player who is certainly more partial to the odd mazy run but is perfectly capable of pulling the counter-attacking strings is established winger Anthony Mounier. The Frenchman was set to leave MHSC this summer after reaching a gentleman's agreement with infamous club president Louis Nicollin, but has since been persuaded to postpone his eventual departure by another twelve months. Mounier proved last season that he not only possesses an ingenuity that keeps opposition defenders guessing, but that he retains a rich ability to select the appropriate pass at timely moments, a characteristic that one more commonly associates with central midfield players these days. Wherever Courbis eventually decides to deploy Mounier on the pitch, there is no doubt that the former Nice man will provide some crucial goals and assists over the course of what is likely to be his last campaign with MHSC.

Verdict:

The start of this season is a little daunting from a Montpellier perspective, with their star man suffering a severe injury and a new-look defence and, to some extent, attack that will need to hastily acclimatize itself. While Rolland Courbis is a feisty manager who very much mirrors the characteristics of his president Louis Nicollin, he heads into 2015/2016 with a lack of recognized firepower. A reiteration of last season's events seems conspicuously unlikely. **10th**

OGC Nice: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Yoan Cardinale	GK	French	21	2014/2015	-
Simon Pouplin	GK	French	30	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Mouez Hassen	GK	French	20	2012/2013	-
Olivier Boscagli	LB	French	18	2015/2016	-
Kevin Gomis	CB	French	26	2011/2012	Naval
Maxime Le Marchand	CB	French	25	2015/2016	Le Havre
Lucas Rougeaux	CB	French	21	2013/2014	-
Mathieu Bodmer	CB/CM	French	32	2013/2014	PSG
Romain Genevois	RB/CB	Haitian	27	2012/2013	Tours FC
Nampalys Mendy	DM	French	23	2013/2014	AS Monaco FC
Jean Michael Seri	DM	Ivorian	24	2015/2016	Pacos de Ferreira
Albert Rafetraniaina	DM	Madagascan	18	2014/2015	-
Niklas Hult	CM	Swedish	25	2014/2015	IF Elfsborg
Mahamane Traore	CM	Malian	26	2011/2012	FC Metz
Valentin Eysseric	AM	French	23	2012/2013	AS Monaco
Hatem Ben Arfa	AM	French	28	2015/2016	Newcastle United
Vincent Koziello	AM	French	19	2014/2015	-
Jeremy Pied	RW	French	26	2012/2013	Olympique Lyonnais
Julien Vercauteren	RW	Belgian	22	2014/2015	Lierse SK
Said Benrahma	RW	Algerian	19	2014/2015	-
Valere Germain*	ST	French	25	2015/2016	AS Monaco
Bryan Constant	ST	French	21	2014/2015	-
Alassane Plea	ST	French	22	2014/2015	Olympique Lyonnais
Claude Puel	Manager	French	53	2012/2013	Olympique Lyonnais
Jean Pierre Rivere	President	French	58	2011/2012	-

*Denotes a player currently on loan at OGC Nice

OGC Nice: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	11 th	48	Carlos Eduardo (10)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	17 th	42	Dario Cvitanich (8)
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)

*Anthony Mounier also scored 8 goals in 2011/2012

OGC Nice: Likely XI



OGC Nice: Squad Analysis

In general, OGC Nice fans continue to have stupidly unrealistic expectations for their players and board to meet, with some of the more “passionate” sections of Les Aiglons’ faithful threatening manager Claude Puel, his players and president Jean-Pierre Rivere with physical violence at different points over the course of the 2014/2015 season if performances failed to improve. If we leave the idiocy to one side for a moment, these troublemakers would be wise to note that last season was one where improvements occurred internally for the club, rather than more tangibly on the field, as Nice only earned six more points compared to their 2013/2014 horror show. A collection of exciting youngsters were able to gain an increased amount of Ligue 1 minutes under their respective belts; experience that they can use to transform Nice back into the established top ten side that fans were dreaming of seeing develop following their 4th placed finish in 2012/2013.

Strengths:

The widespread solicitations of OGC Nice players this summer is testament to a project that is succeeding from a financial prospective alongside the repeatedly successful retention of Ligue 1 status. The signing of Hatem Ben Arfa must be considered as an enormous coup for Les Aiglons, with the former Newcastle man already forming a salivating attacking troika with on-loan striker Valere Germain (another piece of canny business) and rapid and powerful frontman Alassane Plea during pre-season. Physical newcomer Jean Michel Seri will partner coveted starlet Vincent Koziello in the middle of the park, with captain and excellent ball-gatherer Nampalys Mendy filling in behind. Based on raw talent alone, this sextet has all the necessary tools to become one of the most feared forces in Ligue 1 this season; from the heart of the midfield to the peak of their attack that is.

Weaknesses:

Nice’s biggest problem rests with the inaptitude of their defence. If the hope is that the increased traction that comes with signing big name individuals like Ben Arfa will somehow inspire Nice’s defenders to elevate their game to their highest ever levels, then Les Aiglons should try something else. Nice’s defence is not physically weak, or shorter than the majority of opposition attackers, it simply lacks the concentration and spatial awareness necessary to succeed at the top level. It will require more than Maxime Le Marchand to improve. In goal, the giddy Mouez Hassen’s excellent reflexes are overshadowed by his jitteriness in one-on-one situations and his indecisiveness when dealing with opposition set pieces. It is high time that Puel takes note of Hassen’s deficiencies, sends him off on loan to a weaker outfit and makes Simon Pouplin the undisputed number one. The departures of Jordan Amavi and Gregoire Puel will also have to be accounted for, if not through the transfer market then by promoting untried youth prospects to the first team. Either way, it is a tricky situation for Claude Puel.

Key Man: **Hatem Ben Arfa**

Ben Arfa has always been a needle in a haystack type of player, one who has the potential to achieve greatness but has instead had a career marred by controversy and dominated by demons stemming from his personality. After a false start in January with Nice owing to a FIFA ruling, Ben Arfa kept his promise to wait until the summer to join up with Les Aiglons, rejecting financially lucrative offers in order to keep his word and bounce back with a humble side in a major European league. His silky dribbling and powerful running have always served him well in terms of humiliating helpless opponents. What has however been more impressive during pre-season was his ability to immediately strike up a rapport with his fellow attackers. If the wavelengths of Ben Arfa, Germain and Plea can remain in tune with each other as the season rumbles on, then the Allianz Riviera will undoubtedly witness moments of goalmouth magic in the near future.

Verdict:

The general consensus is that OGC Nice should extract more joy out of the next twelve months than they have from the previous forty-eight, but only thanks to goal-getting frenzies from the attack force, which should counteract the errors made by a hapless defence. **9th**

Olympique de Marseille: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Yohann Pele	GK	French	32	2015/2016	FC Sochaux
Steve Mandanda	GK	French	30	2008/2009	Havre AC
Benjamin Mendy	LB	French	21	2013/2014	Havre AC
Nicolas N'Koulou	CB	Cameroonian	25	2011/2012	AS Monaco FC
Doria	CB	Brazilian	20	2014/2015	Botafogo
Baptiste Aloi	CB	French	21	2012/2013	-
Karim Rekik	CB	Dutch	20	2015/2016	Manchester City
Gael Andonian	CB	French	20	2015/2016	-
Stephane Sparagna	CB	French	20	2014/2015	-
Brice Dja Djédjé	RB	Ivorian	24	2013/2014	Evian TG FC
Javier Manquillo*	RB	Spanish	21	2015/2016	Atletico Madrid
Lassana Diarra	DM	French	30	2015/2016	Lokomotiv Moscow
Mario Lemina	DM	French	21	2013/2014	FC Lorient
Bill Tuiloma	DM	New Zealander	20	2013/2014	Birkenhead United
Andre-Frank Zambo	DM	Cameroonian	19	2015/2016	Stade de Reims
Alaixys Romao	DM	Togolese	31	2012/2013	FC Lorient
Abou Diaby	CM	French	29	2015/2016	Arsenal FC
Florian Thauvin	AM/RW	French	22	2013/2014	LOSC Lille
Abdelaziz Barrada	AM	Moroccan	26	2014/2015	Al Jazira
Maxime Lopez	AM	French	17	2014/2015	-
Romain Alessandrini	LW	French	26	2014/2015	Stade Rennais
Georges-Kevin N'Koudou	LW	French	20	2015/2016	FC Nantes
Bouna Sarr	RW	Guinean	23	2015/2016	FC Metz
Lucas Ocampos	RW/ST	Argentinian	21	2015/2016	AS Monaco
Michy Batshuayi	ST	Belgian	21	2014/2015	Standard Liege
Billel Omrani	ST	French	22	2013/2014	-
Jeremie Porsan-Clemente	ST	French	17	2015/2016	-
Marcelo Bielsa	Manager	Argentinian	60	2014/2015	Atletico Bilbao
Vincent Labrune	President	French	44	2011/2012	-

*Denotes a player currently on loan at Olympique de Marseille

Olympique de Marseille: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	4th	69	Andre Pierre Gignac (21)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	6th	60	Andre Pierre Gignac (16)
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)

Olympique de Marseille: Likely XI



Olympique de Marseille: Squad Analysis

Marcelo Bielsa revolutionized Marseille from top to bottom last season, transforming the previously ill-fated performances of the Baup era into high intensity, passionate presentations of attacking talent and flair. Bielsa swiftly became worshipped in these parts of the South of France, with his awkward mix of touchline passion, insistency on sitting on iceboxes and a refusal to utter a word of French developing the Argentinian tactician into a loveable Ligue 1 character. For the first half of the season, Bielsa was able to convert attractive football into a match winning formula, as OM topped the Ligue 1 table at Christmas time. However, owing to a multitude of factors, but notably the relentless pressing required for Bielsa's tactical formulations to succeed, Marseille crashed come the turn of the calendar year, eventually having to settle for 4th place and the grueling away day journeys that Europa League football will invariably demand of Bielsa's men in the coming months.

Strengths:

Bielsa's contract situation with Marseille is still not entirely clear, but it appears as if the Argentinian has agreed to remain at the club for the entirety of the 2015/2016 campaign, on the condition that Marseille's recruitment faction agreed to actively pursue the player's that Bielsa truly desires to add to his current squad. This was not the case last summer; see the case of Doria as a prime example. As a result, OM have added some delightful prospects and formed a squad large enough to cope with the rigorous balancing act that is required when one participates in Europe's second tier competition. Javier Manquillo comes in at right-back, with Bouna Sarr and Georges Kevin-Nkoudou joining from Metz and Nantes respectively to add competition in the offensive sector of the field. Bielsa has the added strength of having a greater grasp of French this season, which should allow him to interact more personally with his players than constantly through the medium of a translator. Generally speaking, the coaching staff and playing squad are much more familiar with each other, which can only help to boost team morale and increase cohesion.

Weaknesses:

Some might argue that while Michy Batshuayi deserves the chance to make a case as the club's star striker following some impressive performances as Andre Pierre Gignac's understudy last season, but the French international's departure to Mexico leaves OM short in this department. Aside from Batshuayi, only Lucas Ocampos is capable of adequately fulfilling the role of a lone attacker in Bielsa's experimental 3-3-3-1. There is a sense of intrigue surrounding Marseille's decision to sign Lassana Diarra and Abou Diaby on free transfers, with neither player fulfilling the boundless energy and powerful running criteria usually requested by Bielsa in his high-pressing football philosophy. Having said that, this French pair has plenty of wisdom to impart on a young squad and is also looking to be set on the right path again by a charismatic coach after losing their respective ways in football. As for Bielsa, he must be more tactically versatile and accept that to operate with a 3-3-3-1 for the entirety of a season is far too physically demanding and will simply lead to a downturn in form, which was Marseille's story in 2014/2015.

Key Player: [Florian Thauvin](#)

The often sullen-looking French attacking midfielder has a chance at redemption this season after a terribly frustrating 2014/2015 during which he often appeared dejected, lazy and uninspiring. Florian Thauvin must see the departure of lynchpin attacking midfielder Dimitri Payet as a call to arms to step up and put his obvious talent to use by becoming Marseille's lead assist-maker. With greater desire, less arrogance and the right guidance from Bielsa, Thauvin can successfully undergo a course correction that puts him back on track for a place in the France squad.

Verdict:

This summer arguably oversaw the end of an era for OM, with the old guard of Andre Pierre Gignac and Andre Ayew bowing out. Now it is time for new heroes to make a name for themselves, but also for Bielsa to prove that he can put his footballing ideals into practice in a successful way; especially considering the free rein on transfer policy that he has enjoyed this summer. **4th**

Olympique Lyonnais: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Anthony Lopes	GK	Portuguese	24	2011/2012	-
Mathieu Gorgelin	GK	French	24	2011/2012	-
Henri Bedimo	LB	Cameroonian	31	2013/2014	Montpellier HSC
Jeremy Morel	LB	French	31	2015/2016	Marseille
Romaric N'Gouma	CB	French	20	2013/2014	-
Bakary Kone	CB	Burkinabe	27	2011/2012	EA Guingamp
Milan Bisevac	CB	Serbian	31	2012/2013	PSG
Lindsay Rose	CB	French	23	2014/2015	Valenciennes
Samuel Umtiti	CB	French	21	2011/2012	-
Mehdi Zeffrane	RB	French	22	2012/2013	-
Rafael	RB	Brazilian		2015/2016	Manchester United
Christophe Jallet	RB	French	31	2014/2015	PSG
Gueida Fofana	DM	French	24	2011/2012	Havre AC
Arnold Mvuemba	DM	French	30	2012/2013	FC Lorient
Maxime Gonalons	DM	French	26	2009/2010	-
Corentin Tolisso	CM	French	21	2013/2014	-
Jordan Ferri	CM	French	23	2012/2013	-
Steed Malbranque	CM	French	35	2012/2013	AS Saint Etienne
Clement Grenier	CM	French	24	2008/2009	-
Nabil Fekir	AM	Algerian	21	2013/2014	-
Zakarie Labidi	AM	French	20	2013/2014	-
Rachid Ghezzal	LW	Algerian	23	2012/2013	-
Alexandre Lacazette	ST	French	24	2009/2010	-
Maxwel Cornet	ST	French	18	2014/2015	FC Metz
Clinton N'Jie	ST	French	21	2013/2014	-
Yassine Benzia	ST	French	20	2012/2013	-
Claudio Beauvue	ST	French	27	2015/2016	EA Guingamp
Hubert Fournier	Manager	French	47	2014/2015	Stade de Reims
Jean Michel Aulas	President	French	66	1987/1988	-

Olympique Lyonnais: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	2nd	75	Alexandre Lacazette (27)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	5th	61	Alexandre Lacazette (15)
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)

Olympique Lyonnais: Likely XI



Olympique Lyonnais: Squad Analysis

Lyon pulled off an incredible 2014/2015, with an emphatic Alexandre Lacazette netting 27 times in the league, as Hubert Fournier led OL to a second placed finish in what was his first season at the helm. Les Gones' failure to get past the qualification stages of the Europa League at the beginning of the previous campaign acted as a blessing in disguise as Fournier's men who could focus almost exclusively on hankering after a place in the Champions League, something that they successfully achieved. While there are major doubts surrounding this inexperienced side's ability to contend with the best that Europe has to offer, in Corentin Tolisso, Nabil Fekir and Clinton N'Jie, Fournier has three potential world-class superstars at his disposal.

Strengths:

Lyon's high-octane football captured the hearts and minds of Ligue 1 followers and pundits alike last season and, ignoring the possibility of any high-profile departures between now and the end of the month, they are expected to carry that form into this campaign. While the amount of own-grown talent in OL's current squad is astonishing, this summer represented an opportunity for Aulas to bring in some more experienced heads. The additions of Jeremy Morel and Claudio Beauvue add desperately needed depth to the side. The attacking triumvirate of Lacazette, N'Jie and Fekir is frankly frightening. Their pace and trickery is now almost equally matched by intelligent decision-making and fantastic shooting ability, even if N'Jie is still quite unpredictable on the ball (not necessarily always in a positive way). While OL's midfield will lack a creative player at the start of this season, with Clement Grenier out injured, Maxime Gonalons and Corentin Tolisso were brilliant last term. With an excellent understanding of the game but an even better understanding of each other, the Frenchmen are able to intercept and sniff out any potential danger that the opposition is attempting to carve out through the middle of the park.

Weaknesses:

Young goalkeeper Anthony Lopes, who, at the age of 24, is already one of the best goalkeepers in France, will now need to develop greater rapport with his defenders and be more forthcoming with the extent to which he actively communicates with them, because disorganization at the back was the OL's main reason for conceding goals last season. While Samuel Umtiti had a fantastic season at the heart of Lyon's defence, it was often a different story for his centre-back partner, whether that was Lindsay Rose or Bakary Kone. The latter pair are susceptible to making poor judgment calls concerning whether or not to advance to meet their opponents and break the defensive line. Misjudgments in these circumstances invariably leave holes in the back four which opponents are easily able to exploit. However, it appears as if OL have recognized these weaknesses and are looking to address them through the power afforded to them by transfer market. The long-term injury to Gueida Fofana and on-off availability of Clement Grenier leaves Lyon a little thin in the central midfield area and any other injuries could cause serious selection headaches for Fournier- the team is inexperienced enough as it is.

Key Player: [Maxime Gonalons](#)

A captain, a leader, but maybe this is the season where Maxime Gonalons makes another step up and begins to be seen as a future club legend? The French international plays the vital defensive midfield role, charged with protecting his back four at all costs, regardless of whether that means that he receives very few forward touches of the ball over the course of 90 minutes. His level-headedness and leadership skills will be all the more crucial during this campaign, as this youthful outfit is put into the unfamiliar territory of being outplayed by some of Europe's biggest clubs in the Champions League this season. The latter scenario is certainly likely to happen at some point during the campaign, but the question is how OL best counter that. If Gonalons can marshal his troops effectively and ensure that heads do not drop, it could be the difference between a respectable Champions League showing and an embarrassment.

Verdict:

AS Monaco should bypass OL in the league table this season, simply because they have spent their transfer window reshaping and addressing key areas of weakness, whereas Lyon have merely spent it bulking up their existing setup. With or without Lacazette, Lyon are set for a top four finish and Fournier might even be keen to prove that the style of play that he is developing at Lyon is not dependent on one "star striker" after all. **3rd**

PSG: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Nicolas Douchez	GK	French	35	2011/2012	Stade Rennais
Mike Maignan	GK	French	20	2013/2014	-
Salvatore Sirigu	GK	Italian	28	2011/2012	Palermo
Kevin Trapp	GK	Germany	25	2015/2016	Eintracht Frankfurt
Maxwell	LB	Brazilian	33	2011/2012	FC Barcelona
Lucas Digne	LB	French	22	2013/2014	LOSC Lille
Thiago Silva	CB	Brazilian	30	2012/2013	AC Milan
David Luiz	CB	Brazilian	28	2014/2015	Chelsea FC
Marquinhos	CB	Brazilian	21	2013/2014	AS Roma
Presnel Kimpembe	CB	French	19	2014/2015	-
Gregory van der Wiel	RB	Dutch	27	2012/2013	Ajax
Serge Aurier	RB	Ivorian	22	2014/2015	Toulouse FC
Thiago Motta	DM	Italian	32	2011/2012	Inter Milan
Benjamin Stambouli	DM	French	24	2015/2016	Tottenham Hotspur
Blaise Matuidi	CM	French	28	2011/2012	St Etienne
Marco Verratti	CM	Italian	22	2012/2013	Pescara
Adrien Rabiot	CM	French	20	2012/2013	-
Javier Pastore	AM/LW	Argentinian	26	2011/2012	Palermo
Angel di Maria	AM	Argentinian	27	2015/2016	Manchester United
Lucas	RW	Brazilian	22	2012/2013	Sao Paulo
Jean Christophe-Bahebeck	RW	French	22	2011/2012	-
Ezequiel Lavezzi	ST	Argentinian	30	2012/2013	Napoli
Edinson Cavani	ST	Uruguayan	28	2013/2014	Napoli
Zlatan Ibrahimovic	ST	Swedish	33	2012/2013	AC Milan
Hervin Ongenda	ST/RW	French	20	2013/2014	-
Jean Kevin Augustin	ST	French	18	2014/2015	-
Laurent Blanc	Manager	French	49	2013/2014	France
Nasser Al Khelaifi	President	Qatari	41	2010/2011	-

PSG: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	1st	83	Zlatan Ibrahimovic (19)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	1st	89	Zlatan Ibrahimovic (26)
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)

PSG: Likely XI



PSG: Squad Analysis

Les Parisiens cleaned up nationally in irresistible style last season, doing the domestic quadruple and proving once again that they are on a completely different level to the rest of the Ligue 1 sides vying for top positions. Laurent Blanc deserves an enormous amount of credit for contending with a dressing room full of delicate characters whilst achieving maximum success at home and implementing excellent tactics in crucial fixtures, notably during the two-legged affair that saw Les Parisiens eliminate Chelsea from the Champions' League. With what was their third league title in a row, some might suggest that Ligue 1 is boring, because there appears to be only one team that can feasibly win it. However, the manner in which PSG achieved their success was not straightforward, suffering shocking losses to Guingamp and SC Bastia in particular and not making it mathematically impossible for closest rivals Lyon to win the title until the final pair of league matches. Domestic dominance is no longer an expectation, but a requirement. What Al Khelaifi is really dreaming of however is winning the Champions League and Blanc is expected to bring it home, sooner rather than later.

Strengths:

PSG's mouth-watering squad makes most European sides envy the talent that they have assembled over the last few seasons. Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Edinson Cavani have successfully found a way of operating together in a system that keeps both men happy and, most importantly, scoring. The real surprise last season was the renaissance that the previously much-maligned Argentinian playmaker Javier Pastore enjoyed. Given the licence to roam freely behind the abovementioned attacking duo, Pastore was able to carve out moments of magic with a series of defence-splitting passes that eliminated opponents in his wake. The already much spoken about Marco 'the next Andrea Pirlo' Verratti and Blaise "Duracell-bunny" Matuidi provide the perfect link between defence and attack. If this was not enough, PSG also have both the man that is widely considered to be the best centre back in the world and the man considered as the future best centre back among their ranks: Thiago Silva and Marquinhos: players whose talents need no explaining. Angel di Maria has of course just joined to beef up the attacking midfield.

Weaknesses:

What was so impressive about PSG's 2014/2015 was the way in which they internally eliminated previous weaknesses. The introduction of Serge Aurier as the side's first-choice right-back will ensure that that flank is better protected, with Gregory van der Wiel letting his defensive duties run away from him at times last season. Apart from the odd lapse in concentration, usually from David Luiz, PSG are, generally speaking, without any obvious weaknesses. One Achilles heel is perhaps certain individuals' lack of respect and care towards certain fixtures against weaker opposition in Ligue 1, an unsavoury trait that resulted in PSG slipping up against small top flight teams last season. In reverse, PSG must also ensure that they do not let the occasion get the better of them, as was seemingly the case a little during their capitulation to Barcelona in the Champions League Quarter Finals last season.

Key Player: [Kevin Trapp](#)

Certainly not the most obvious choice, but the German goalkeeper has a chance to establish himself as a world-renowned goalkeeper by putting his abilities to the test on Europe's biggest stage. While Salvatore Sirigu is a consistent enough goalkeeper, he lacks the "wow factor" that top goalkeepers are able to intimidate their opponents with. If Trapp can prove himself to be an unbeatable force in Ligue 1, then the likelihood of PSG achieving invincibility over the course of 38 matches greatly increases. Laurent Blanc will also hope that Trapp is a better communicator than Sirigu, which was often a point of weakness, notably in the Champions League last season. Trapp can prove that PSG have not yet reached a ceiling, domestically or otherwise.

Verdict:

If Zlatan Ibrahimovic is ever going to win the Champions League, it will surely have to be in 2015/2016, his last season at PSG. Les Parisiens have the individual quality to achieve it, now they must believe it. **1st**

SC Bastia: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Jean Louis Leca	GK	French	29	2013/2014	Valenciennes FC
Thomas Vincensini	GK	French	21	2013/2014	-
Julian Palmieri	LB	French	27	2012/2013	Istres
Florian Marange	LB	French	29	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Mathieu Peybernes	CB	French	24	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Francois Modesto	CB	French	36	2013/2014	Olympiakos
Sebastien Squillaci	CB	French	34	2013/2014	Arsenal FC
Alexander Djiku	CB	French	20	2015/2016	-
Yassine Jebbour*	RB	Moroccan	23	2015/2016	Montpellier HSC
Gilles Cioni	RB	French	31	2010/2011	-
Yannick Cahuzac	DM	French	30	2005/2006	-
Lyes Houri	DM	French	19	2014/2015	Valenciennes FC
Abdoulaye Keita	DM	Malian	21	2014/2015	-
Seko Fofana*	CM	French	20	2015/2016	Manchester City
Saido Diallo	AM	Guinean	24	2015/2016	Rennes
Adama Ba	AM	Mauritanian	21	2013/2014	Niort
Gael Danic	LW	French	33	2014/2015	Olympique Lyonnais
Floyd Ayite	LW	French	26	2014/2015	Stade de Reims
Christopher Maboulou	RW	French	25	2014/2015	Chateauroux
Francois Kamano	RW	Guinean	19	2014/2015	-
Brandao	ST	Brazilian	35	2014/2015	AS Saint Étienne
Ghislain Printant	Manager	French	54	2014/2015	Marvejols
Pierre-Marie Geronimi	President	French	-	2009/2010	-

*Denotes a player who is currently on loan at SC Bastia

SC Bastia: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	12th	47	Floyd Ayite (6)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	10th	49	Gianni Bruno (8)
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)

SC Bastia: Likely XI



SC Bastia: Squad Analysis:

2014/2015 represented a truly difficult season for SC Bastia who were left to pick up the pieces very early on after a cataclysmic start to Claude Makelele's managerial career resulted in him becoming the first Ligue 1 manager casualty of last season. The almost mythological character that is Ghislain Printant stepped up to fill the former Chelsea man's role and did so excellently, especially considering that this was also his first major venture into club management. The Corsicans will do extremely well in 2015/2016 if they can replicate a cup run anything like their adventures in the Coupe de la Ligue last season, which saw them fall only at the last hurdle to PSG in the Final.

Strengths:

As has so often been the case in previous campaigns, the incredible atmosphere that SC Bastia's obsessive fan base bring to home matches will play a vital role in intimidating visiting opposition to give SCB an advantage that allows them to take points away from arguably better sides. The canny signing of Seko Fofana will provide Bastia's midfield with some much-needed brawn and bite, but is unlikely to adequately compensate for the lack of a creative spark caused by the recent departure of Ryad Boudebouz to Montpellier. Printant has however proved to be an able tactician and a skilled motivator, characteristics that were underrated by the majority of SCB's opposition last term.

Weaknesses:

SC Bastia desperately need to bring in an experienced, competent goalkeeper, because Jean Louis Leca simply does not meet the standards required of a Ligue 1 number one. The defence is stale and immobile, forcing SC Bastia to play with a deep defensive line, which more-readily invites opponents to launch assaults on the back four. While Bastia do not have the necessary resources at their disposal to combat these defensive deficiencies, they must sign another striker. Brandao is unpredictable and waning in ability. If SCB cannot find a reliable goal-getter, then they will really struggle to stay afloat this season. French football financial watchdog the DNCG's decision to provisionally relegate the Corsicans from Ligue 1 before reversing their judgment gave SCB a one-month handicap from doing any transfer window dealings; they desperately need to make up for lost time.

Key Man: [Francois Kamano](#)

During times of crisis, younger players whose development would otherwise be more phased out are asked to grow up a little quicker than they might expect. This is likely to be the case for SC Bastia's exciting teenager Francois Kamano in 2015/2016. The 19 year old is expected to start down the right-hand side for Printant this season, where he will be able to showcase his boundless desire to take opponents on in one-on-one situations complimented by his blistering pace and corresponding trickery. With a strong shot on him too, Kamano's decision-making is the major area of weakness that Bastia's coaching staff will look to address. Bastia are missing a creative heartbeat from their squad since the departure of Ryad Boudebouz, but what if the answer was Kamano?

Verdict:

SC Bastia's home form should save them from the cusp of relegation, but, if the club continues in such an uninspiring fashion, it is only a matter of seasons before they suffer the worst sort of Ligue 1 fate.

17th

SM Caen: Squad List:

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Remy Vercoutre	GK	French	35	2014/2015	Olympique Lyonnais
Paul Reulet	GK	French	21	2012/2013	-
Emmanuel Imorou	LB	French	26	2014/2015	Clermont Foot
Alexandre Raineau	LB	French	29	2008/2009	FC Libourne
Syam Ben Youssef	CB	Tunisian	26	2015/2016	Astra Giurgiu
Florian Le Joncour	CB	French	20	2015/2016	Concarneau
Damien da Silva	CB	French	27	2014/2015	Clermont Foot
Alaeddine Yahia	CB	Tunisian	33	2014/2015	RC Lens
Dennis Appiah	RB	French	23	2013/2014	AS Monaco FC
Chaker Alhadhur	RB	French	23	2015/2016	FC Nantes
Nicolas Seube	DM	French	35	2001/2002	Toulouse FC
Jordan Adeoti	DM	Beninese	26	2014/2015	Stade Lavallois
Jonathan Beaulieu	CM	French	22	2013/2014	-
Jonathan Delaplace	CM	French	29	2015/2016	LOSC Lille
Jordan Leborgne	CM	French	19	2015/2016	-
Julien Feret	AM	French	33	2014/2015	Stade Rennais
Thomas Lemar	AM	French	19	2013/2014	-
Jordan N'Kololo	AM	Congolese	22	2015/2016	Clermont Foot
Jeff Louis	AM	Haitian	22	2015/2016	Standard Liege
Lenny Nangis	LW/RW	French	21	2011/2012	-
Vincent Bessat	LW	French	29	2015/2016	FC Nantes
Herve Bazile	LW/RW	Haitian	25	2014/2015	Poire-sur-Vie
Florian Raspentino	RW	French	26	2014/2015	Marseille
Andy Delort	ST	French	23	2015/2016	Wigan Athletic
Mathieu Duhamel	ST	French	31	2012/2013	FC Metz
Patrice Garande	Manager	French	54	2012/2013	AS Cherbourg
Jean-Francois Fortin	President	French	68	2002/2003	-

SM Caen: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	13th	46	Herve Bazile (7)
2013/2014	Ligue 2	3rd	64	Mathieu Duhamel (24)
2012/2013	Ligue 2	4th	63	Mathieu Duhamel (13)
2011/2012	Ligue 1	18th	38	Benjamin Nivet (7)
2010/2011	Ligue 1	15th	46	Romain Hamouma (9)

SM Caen: Likely XI



SM Caen: Squad Analysis

Everyone expected 2014/2015 to be a testing season for the northern-based side, but SM Caen proved critics who foresaw them struggling to adapt to Ligue 1 life wrong, producing an industrious season that saw them finish comfortably enough in 13th place. 2015/2016 will be ineludibly more challenging for Caen, as the unpredictability factor that they were able to use against Ligue 1 opposition last season has worn off and they have also lost significant talent in the form of Ngolo Kanté and Thomas Lemar to frankly bigger clubs.

Strengths:

The amount of attacking talent at Patrice Garande's disposal for the forthcoming campaign should ease Caen's fears over a potentially dogged relegation knife fight. Vincent Bessat and Jeff Louis are excellent additions to an already experienced attacking midfield line, who have the tenacity and ability to continually provide target man Andy Delort with the quality of service required for him to rapidly make a name for himself in France's top flight. Damien Da Silva was a standout performer last term at centre back and goalkeeper Remy Vercoutre provides fantastic leadership and poise from between the sticks. The signing of exceedingly understated central midfielder Jonathan Delaplace from Lille should provide SMC with the sort of stability that Ngolo Kante provided them with last term. Julien Feret remains a Ligue 1 favourite and he will hope to play that keystone role in behind the main striker again this season, despite his relatively old age in footballing terms.

Weaknesses:

As was the case last season, Caen will have to rely on their attacking force to come up trumps in order to counteract their shortcomings in defence. Emmanuel Imorou and new signing Chaker Alhadhur are particularly susceptible to recklessness from a defensive point of view down the flanks, often being flatfooted by an opponent or stepping out of position at inopportune moments. Admittedly, this full-back pairing is often able to mask their defensive limitations by providing strong attacking wing-back play in the form of accurate crosses. Andy Delort is a good bet for Garande's men upfront, but if the Frenchman suffers an injury then Caen will likely be without cover, with veteran forward Mathieu Duhamel set to leave the club before the window shuts.

Key Player: [Remy Vercoutre](#)

The 35-year-old goalkeeper has amassed well over one hundred Ligue 1 appearances and will need to assume the roles of a leader and organizer once again this season. The current squad still lacks experience relative to the Ligue 1 outfits that Caen will be competing with and Remy Vercoutre must help eliminate any doubts that his teammates have concerning their own abilities vis-à-vis their opponents. He also proved over the course of the previous campaign that he maintains frightfully good reflexes and that his game has, over time, matured for the better rather than for the worse.

Verdict:

This Caen side can take confidence from the fact that they have one year's worth of Ligue 1 experience under their belts. With some clever summer additions to the attack force but a wavering defence, mid-table mediocrity is perhaps the best that Garande's men can hope to achieve. That is not said lightly or with any disrespect, this is a team that tries to play football the right way, setting up to attack rather than to defend. If every other Ligue 1 side were as positive as Caen then the overall attractiveness of the French top flight would undoubtedly increase. For now, we will enjoy what Caen and others like them have to offer as they seek to further consolidate their Ligue 1 standing. **12th**

Stade de Reims: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Kossi Agassa	GK	Togolese	37	2009/2010	Hercules
Johnny Placide	GK	Haitian	27	2012/2013	Havre AC
Franck Signorino	LB	French	33	2012/2013	Stade Lavallois
Atila Turan	LB	French	23	2013/2014	Sporting Lisbon
Mohamed Fofana	CB	Malian	30	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Mickael Tacalfred	CB	French	34	2008/2009	Dijon
Gregory Bourillon	CB/DM	French	31	2014/2015	FC Lorient
Anthony Weber	CB	French	28	2010/2011	Paris FC
Antoine Conte	CB	French	21	2014/2015	PSG
Aissa Mandi	RB/CB	Algerian	23	2011/2012	-
Hamari Traore	RB	Malian	23	2015/2016	Lierse SK
Omenuke Mfulu	DM	Congolese	21	2015/2016	-
Prince Oniangue	CM	Congolese	26	2013/2014	Tours FC
Omenuke Mfulu	CM	French	21	2015/2016	-
Alexis Peugeot	CM	French	24	2012/2013	Strasbourg
Antoine Devaux	CM	French	30	2012/2013	Toulouse FC
Mads Albaek	CM	Danish	25	2013/2014	FC Midtjylland
Diego	LW	Brazilian	27	2012/2013	Tours FC
Odair Fortes	RW	Cape Verdean	28	2008/2009	UJA Alfortville
Frederic Bulot	RW	Gabonese	24	2015/2016	Standard Liege
Eliran Atar	ST/LW	Israeli	28	2013/2014	Maccabi Tel Aviv
Nicolas de Preville	ST	French	24	2012/2013	Istres
Gaetan Courtet	ST	French	26	2010/2011	FC Lorient
Gaetan Charbonnier	ST	French	26	2013/2014	Montpellier HSC
Grejohn Kuyei	ST	French	19	2014/2015	-
Olivier Guegan	Manager	French	42	2014/2015	US Creteil
Jean Pierre Caillot	President	French	54	2003/2004	-

Stade de Reims: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	15th	44	Benjamin Moukandjo (8)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	11th	48	Prince Oniangue (10)
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)

Stade de Reims: Likely XI



Stade de Reims: Squad Analysis

There were some extremely nervy moments for Stade de Reims last season, to the point where president Jean Pierre Caillot lost his nerve with manager Jean Luc Vasseur and sacked him in early April. If you were to criticize Caillot for not firing the man responsible for overseeing a frankly miserable Reims side when no amount of formation fiddling was able to bring about a change in results, then you would be only half-right to. Caillot attempted to sack Vasseur several times in 2014, but incredibly each time members of the playing staff would plead French football's James Blunt lookalike's case to remain in charge with success. Reims have replaced Vasseur from within with a much feared, pitbull-like character in the form of Olivier Guegan. It appeared that Guegan's appointment would only be on an interim basis until 2014/2015 came to a close, but his obvious chumminess with president Caillot was apparently enough to secure the position on a full-time basis. As you might be able to tell, we have serious doubts about Reims' new manager's ability, let alone that of the squad at his disposal.

Strengths:

There is some, albeit minimal promise for Reims, primarily in the attacking sectors of the pitch. Nicolas de Preville was at times excellent in leading the line last season, but has primarily been used by Guegan during pre-season in an unnatural left-wing position. Admittedly, this is to accommodate David N'Gog's role as the now undisputed first choice lone striker. While his personality leaves a little to be desired for, having gone missing halfway through the campaign without letting Reims know about his whereabouts for a whole week, Ngog proved his worth to SDR as their most natural goal-scoring talent, producing timely moments of quality which made a decisive difference regarding their Ligue 1 status. The signing of Frederic Bulot from Standard Liege hands Guegan an extra weapon going forward and a winger who possesses a bag of tricks in his locker who will rapidly be seeking to nail down a place in the starting XI. The apparent retention of Aissa Mandi and supposed conversion of the Algerian international into club captain and a central defender should also stand the back four in better stead, ahead of Reims' most difficult Ligue 1 campaign since promotion in 2012.

Weaknesses:

Prince Oniangue aside, the midfield is dreadfully meek and statistically showed to be one of the worst at retaining the ball and completing passes in the whole division last season. At the back, the redeployment of Aissa Mandi at the heart of the defence is tactically intelligent, but the individuals surrounding him will make his life difficult. Hamari Traore is a complete unknown, Mickael Tacalfred's performances last season suggested that he had passed his sell-by date and Anthony Weber, perhaps the defender with the best ball placement skills in the squad, was out injured for most of last season and it remains to be seen whether he can recapture his pre-layoff form.

Key Player: Prince Oniangue

The imposing midfielder was a little disappointing last term, clearly suffering from the evaporation of the partnership that he had built so magnificently with Polish midfielder Grzegorz Krychowiak, who is now of Sevilla fame. He is a rare breed of forward-thinking midfielder who has the capacity to sit very effectively just behind the striker, with a rifling shot on him which he often unleashes from just outside the box. Disappointingly for Oniangue, he was unable to showcase these abilities in 2014/2015 because Vasseur insisted on positioning him where Krychowiak was previously deployed, in a deep-lying midfield role that meant that Oniangue's best talents were wasted last season. Guegan has however sought to rectify this injustice to Oniangue's capacities as a more attack-minded midfielder and appears willing to play him there again in 2015/2016.

Verdict:

From a tactical perspective, Olivier Guegan clearly understands this group of players better than anyone else, having worked under many previous Reims managers in the past as a coach. There are however so many ingredients that make a successful Ligue 1 manager and we are not convinced that Guegan or Reims have what it takes this season to beat the drop. **18th**

Stade Rennais FC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Benoit Costil	GK	French	28	2011/2012	Sedan
Olivier Sorin	GK	French	34	2014/2015	AJ Auxerre
Abdoulaye Diallo	GK	Senegalese	23	2014/2015	Le Havre
Edvinas Gertomas	GK	Lithuanian	19	2015/2016	Atlantas
Cheick M'Bengue	LB	Senegalese	27	2013/2014	Toulouse FC
Ludovic Baal	LB	French	29	2015/2016	RC Lens
Ermir Lenjani	LB	Albanian	25	2014/2015	St Gallen
Mexer	CB	Mozambican	26	2014/2015	CD Nacional
Fallou Diagne	CB	Senegalese	25	2014/2015	SC Freiburg
Cedric Hountondji	CB	French	21	2013/2014	-
Gjoko Zajkov	CB	Macedonian	20	2014/2015	Rabotnicki
Pedro Mendes	CB	Portuguese	24	2015/2016	Parma
Sylvain Armand	CB	French	35	2013/2014	PSG
Romain Danze	RB/DM	French	29	2006/2007	-
Dimitri Cavare	RB	French	20	2014/2015	RC Lens
Steven Moreira	RB	French	20	2013/2014	-
Yacouba Sylla	DM	Malian	24	2015/2016	Aston Villa
Anders Konradsen	CM	Danish	25	2012/2013	Stromsgodset IF
Sanjin Prcic	CM	Bosnian	21	2014/2015	FC Sochaux
Gelson Fernandes	CM	Swiss	28	2014/2015	SC Fribourg
Abdoulaye Doucoure	CM	French	22	2012/2013	-
Christian Bruls	AM	Belgian	26	2014/2015	KAA Gent
Adrien Hunou	AM	French	22	2013/2014	-
Axel Ngando	AM	French	22	2012/2013	-
Pedro Henrique	LW	Brazilian	25	2014/2015	FC Zurich
Paul-Georges Ntep	LW	French	23	2013/2014	AJ Auxerre
Benjamin Andre	RW	French	25	2014/2015	AC Ajaccio
Kamil Grosicki	RW	Polish	27	2013/2014	Sivasspor
Philipp Hosiner	ST	Austrian	26	2014/2015	Austria Vienna
Wesley Said	ST/RW	French	20	2013/2014	-
Ola Toivonen	ST	Swedish	29	2013/2014	PSV
Giovanni Sio	ST	Ivorian	26	2015/2016	FC Basel
Philippe Montanier	Manager	French	50	2013/2014	Real Sociedad
Rene Ruello	President	French	66	2014/2015	-

Stade Rennais FC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2015/2016	Ligue 1	9th	50	Paul Georges Ntep (9)
2014/2015	Ligue 1	12th	46	Nelson Oliveira (8)
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)

Stade Rennais FC: Likely XI



Stade Rennais FC: Squad Analysis

Rennes offered minor signs of improvement in 2014/2015 that will admittedly do little to reassure the Brittany club's faithful of the supposed long-term prosperity that Philippe Montanier's project is continually touted to bring. However, with a lavish, new-fangled stadium and a squad that oozes with a mixture of Ligue 1 experience and potentially delightful talent, there are some reasons to be positive about what Rennes can achieve during the forthcoming campaign. Add to that the fact that Montanier has not attempted a third successive summer squad overhaul to the same extent as the previous two, and Rennes fans will hopefully see a more settled, self-confident side in 2015/2016.

Strengths:

When Montanier first took to the helm, Rennes tried to impose a patient build-up style of play, but the technical capacities of the squad were not adequate for this style to be executed effectively. Instead, Montanier quickly resorted to exploiting the pace down the flanks to produce counter-attacking displays. Since this key tactical switch, Rennes have focused on buying physical, speedy players who might be a little technically rugged but have enough of a footballing instinct to such an extent that Rennes were assured of a midtable finish last season. There are some wow-factor individuals in this Rennes setup, namely French winger Paul Georges Ntep and Abdoulaye Doucoure. The pair in question shares an excellent understanding and Doucoure was statistically one of the highest providers of goal-scoring opportunities for Ntep last term. Portuguese defender Pedro Mendes gives Rennes's back three a more European edge and he is arguably more comfortable on the ball than Mexer and Sylvain Armand.

Weaknesses:

For the first time under the Montanier era, there is no obvious point of weakness in this Rennes squad, across all positions. Perhaps the fact that this squad is simply so large and therefore that there will be many unhappy faces each week when certain players are not included in the matchday squad will cause the emanation of a negative squad atmosphere. Due to the sheer amount of individuals currently included in the club's first team, Montanier is generally unable to give the youth academy's most promising products a chance on the biggest stage. As a result, SRFC are in danger of losing their greatest prospects, such as Ousmane Dembele and Segou Coulibaly, before they even play for the club at the highest level. Rennes are also admittedly taking a gamble on the signing of Yacouba Sylla, who was fantastic at Clermont but failed to establish himself in the Premier League with Aston Villa. Having said that, overly harsh critics have unfairly sullied the Malian international's name and he has told Get French Football News that he plans to take the opportunity afforded to him by Rennes with both hands as he fights to become their indispensable midfield anchor.

Key Player: **Benoit Costil**

Rennes rarely blew Ligue 1 opposition out of the water last season, often relying on the smallest goal margins to take away all three points. As a consequence of this unenviable characteristic, there is one man in particular who has to maintain his sharp levels of focus right up until the final whistle. That man is Rennes' French goalkeeper Benoit Costil. A proven shot-stopper with excellent reflexes, Costil has been Mr Reliable amid a sea of changes for Rennes and is the quietly hard-working constant in this side that has ensured that the club was never really in danger of relegation as radical changes were made to the squad's makeup. How much longer is Costil willing to wait until his graft is rewarded in the form of trophies and glory, especially considering how close he is to a place in the France national team?

Verdict:

Philippe Montanier's decision to join Rennes in 2013 was seen as a fantastic coup for the Brittany side at the time, as the Frenchman had just taken Real Sociedad to the Champions League qualification stages against all the odds. Yet two years on and we have seen no such managerial genius. Based on the last 24 months as evidence, the Montanier-Rennes marriage simply does not seem as if it will produce anything other than mid-table security for Rene Ruello's club. **13th**

Toulouse FC: Squad List

Name	Position	Nationality	Age	At Club Since	Previous Club
Marc Vidal	GK	French	24	2009/2010	-
Ali Ahmada	GK	French	23	2010/2011	-
Mauro Goicoechea	GK	Uruguayan	27	2015/2016	FC Arouca
William Matheus	LB	Brazilian	25	2014/2015	SE Palmerias
Francois Moubandje	LB	Swiss	25	2013/2014	Servette
Jean Armel Kana Biyik	CB	Cameroonian	26	2014/2015	Stade Rennais
Maxime Spano	CB	French	20	2014/2015	-
Uros Spajic	CB	Serbian	22	2013/2014	Red Star Belgrade
Steeve Yago	CB	Burkinabe	22	2012/2013	-
Dusan Veskovic	CB	Serbian	29	2013/2014	Young Boys
Jean Daniel Akpa Akpro	RB	Ivorian	22	2011/2012	-
Marcel Tisserand*	RB	French	22	2015/2016	AS Monaco
Pavle Ninkov	RB	Serbian	30	2011/2012	Red Star Belgrade
Pantxi Sirieix	DM	French	34	2004/2005	Auxerre
Alexis Blin	DM	French	18	2015/2016	-
Yann Bodiger	DM	French	20	2015/2016	-
Tongo Doumbia	DM	Malian	25	2014/2015	Wolves
Abel Aguilar	CM	Colombian	30	2013/2014	Hercules
Etienne Didot	CM	French	32	2008/2009	Stade Rennais
Mihai Roman	RW	Serbian	30	2013/2014	Rapid Bucharest
Oscar Trejo	RW/AM	Spanish	27	2013/2014	Sporting Gijon
Adrien Regattin	RW/AM	Moroccan	23	2011/2012	-
Sana Zaniou	RW/ST	Burkinabe	20	2012/2013	-
Wissam Ben Yedder	ST	French	24	2010/2011	UJA Alfortville
Martin Braithwaite	ST	Danish	24	2013/2014	Esbjerg fB
Youssef Ben Ali	ST	Moroccan	20	2015/2016	-
Aleksandar Pesic	ST	Serbian	23	2014/2015	FK Jagodina
Dominique Arribage	Manager	French	44	2014/2015	-
Oliver Sedran	President	French	46	2001/2002	-

*Denotes a player currently on loan at Toulouse FC

Toulouse FC: Form Guide

Season	Division	Position	Points	Top Goalscorer
2014/2015	Ligue 1	17th	42	Wissam Ben Yedder (14)
2013/2014	Ligue 1	9th	49	Wissam Ben Yedder (16)
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)**

*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

Olivier Sadran is certainly one of Ligue 1's more impatient club presidents. Until last season, Toulouse's top flight situation repeated itself year after year, in a scenario where TFC's best players would be sold for a profit and Alain Casanova would have to find a way of reshaping the squad in order to achieve the same midtable finish that was desired by the board, regardless of the self-inflicted depletion of talent that they issued for the sake of money. Casanova did stunningly well to reach these unrealistic expectations season after season, that is, until the previous campaign. 2014/2015 was one stretch too far for Casanova during a campaign where Toulouse seriously flirted with relegation until Dominique Arribage took the reins in the final weeks of last season. With Casanova out of the picture, Arribage has a chance to complete a tactical overhaul and break away from the experimental shackles of Casanova's previously problematic 3-4-1-2 formation.

Strengths:

Marcel Tisserand rejoins Toulouse on loan this season in a move that allows Arribage to deploy Jean Daniel Akpa Akpro in a more advanced, right midfield position. The latter individual has a strikingly similar style of play to his compatriot Serge Aurier and will be relishing the opportunity to expand the more attacking side of his game during the imminent campaign. Adrien Regattin was in and out of the fold last season, but represents one of the few players that remain at the club with any ability at all to be bold and inventive in the final third, with his incisive running and obviously strong peripheral vision. If Wissam Ben Yedder stays at the club this summer and can run up to full form again after a trying last six months, then his excellent marksmanship can almost singlehandedly win Toulouse points on its own.

Weaknesses:

Toulouse's defence was the obvious weak point under Casanova and early signs suggest that Arribage has not fared any better in improving the positional awareness of Toulouse's current fleet of defenders. Uros Spajic is a lively and unwieldy character and during his Ligue 1 stint has so far hindered Toulouse's cause more than he has helped it. Jean Armel Kana Biyik has yet to prove that he can walk the walk, even if his fiery personality has yet to ruin his career at Toulouse, as it did for him at Rennes. The beacon of energy that is Tongo Doumbia should sure up the midfield a little in his first full season with TFC, with his partner Etienne Didot often having the unfortunate tendency to be a little outrun at times last term.

Key Player: [Mauro Goicoechea](#)

While we would be the first to admit that our knowledge of Toulouse's brand new Uruguayan goalkeeper is limited, the reason why he has been selected as TFC's "key player" extends his reported current abilities. Toulouse fans have painfully watched the usually calamitous goalkeeper Ali Ahamada try and ultimately fail to produce adequate performances becoming of an established Ligue 1 goalkeeper. Mauro Goicoechea offers TFC a more experienced, levelheaded option between the sticks. If Goicoechea can be more serene than Ahamada, then this should have a knock-on effect on the mental state of the back four in front of him and reduce the number of individual mistakes made by Toulouse's backline in 2015/2016. Goicoechea himself has a point to prove, having failed to become an established number one at his first two clubs in Europe and bailing on little known Portuguese side Arouca after just one season.

Verdict:

In a similar vain to Stade de Reims, Toulouse have decided to entrust the club's future in an individual who already has extensive knowledge of the club and its players. Arribage appears to be less left field with his tactical decision-making than Casanova was and will be excited to properly put his trademark on a Toulouse team that can barely perform worse than they did last season. They should be fine, unless Ben Yedder departs and they do not attempt to find replacement. **15th**